

Redefining Fashion Sustainability: The Rise of Upcycling and Restoration in India's Clothing Industry

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ABSTRACT:

Fast fashion has created an environmental issue by increasing waste, pollution, and resource depletion. In response, upcycling and clothing restoration provide environmentally friendly solutions by prolonging garment lifespans via creativity and workmanship. This study investigates the role of restoration studios in repurposing damaged fabrics into valuable, unique pieces through ethical production and sustainable materials. By combining tradition and innovation, these practices challenge disposable culture and promote responsible consumption. The study looks into altering consumer attitudes, industry trends, and the environmental impact of circular fashion in India. As the desire for sustainability develops, upcycling preserves traditional textile techniques while adapting to new aesthetics. Despite its potential, challenges to wider adoption include accessibility, pricing issues, and consumer misconceptions. Addressing these problems with increased store presence, education, and affordability might hasten acceptance. Collaboration between designers, brands, and legislators is critical for creating a sustainable fashion environment. Upcycling and restoration are more than just trends; they are revolutionary movements that are reshaping the future of fashion.

KEYWORDS:

Upcycling, Clothing Restoration, Circular Fashion, Sustainable Consumer Behavior, Textile Waste Management, Fast Fashion Impact, Ethical Fashion, Traditional Craftsmanship, Retail Accessibility, Market Dynamics.

INTRODUCTION:

Fast fashion has precipitated an environmental disaster, becoming the fashion industry the second- largest consumer of water and accountable for 10% of global carbon emissions-exceeding the combined emissions of all international flights and maritime shipping (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Annually, 92 million tons of textile waste are deposited in landfills, and 20% of worldwide wastewater is attributed to textile dyeing (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021). In India, textile manufacturing utilizes 1.6 billion liters of water per day, and unregulated waste disposal has exacerbated river pollution and resource depletion (Sharma, 2013).

With increasing awareness, sustainable solutions like upcycling and garment restoration are gaining traction. Restoration studios provide a remedy to the wasteful cycle of quick fashion by rejuvenating deteriorated textiles using sustainable methods. This research examines the emergence of upcycling in India, evaluating its ecological effects, evolving consumer preferences, and the capacity of circular fashion to transform the sector.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The fashion business confronts an environmental issue, since fast fashion contributes to significant waste and resource depletion. In India, where textile waste is increasing, upcycling and restoration provide sustainable solutions by integrating traditional craftsmanship with contemporary innovation.

Renu et al. (2024) investigated textile waste management among tailors in Hisar, Haryana, finding that 56.6% produce 5-10 kg of textile waste monthly, while 63.3% engage in home-based upcycling (iahrw.org). Lokare (2024) recorded the ingenuity of elderly ladies in Maharashtra who transform discarded sarees into “Godhadi” quilts and “Junaari” sarees, exemplifying entrenched sustainable practices (ijfmr.com). Pareek and Ojha (2023) further examine the incorporation of indigenous textile skills into upcycling, highlighting the role of traditional weaving techniques in Jaipur in promoting sustainable fashion production (granthaalayahpublication.org).

Nath and Dutta (2023) demonstrate the conversion of vintage sarees into fashionable home decor items, including layered and stitched doormats, in accordance with circular fashion principles (researchgate.net). Patil and Gurao (2023) .

OBJECTIVES

- **To analyze the environmental impact of fast fashion in India** and explore how upcycling and clothing restoration can mitigate textile waste and resource depletion.
- **To examine consumer behavior and market trends** driving the shift toward sustainable fashion, highlighting the role of upcycling in promoting conscious consumption.
- **To assess the effectiveness of upcycling and restoration studios** in preserving traditional craftsmanship while fostering innovation in India's fashion industry.

RESEARCH GAPS

Limited Perception & Consumer Awareness Problems:

Numerous Indian shoppers equate upcycled clothing with second-hand or inferior-quality items instead of distinctive, high-value design. A 2023 Statista poll revealed that merely 38% of Indian consumers recognized upcycling as a sustainable solution, in contrast to 60% in Western countries. The absence of branding and narrative behind recycled products restricts their widespread attractiveness.

Supply Chain Fragments and Infrastructure Deficits:

The lack of a systematic textile waste collection and processing framework leads to more than 50% of wasted textiles being deposited in landfills (Fashion for Good, 2023). Numerous upcycling enterprises encounter difficulties in procuring high-quality fabric waste owing to ineffective sorting systems and dependence on informal recycling sectors, hence complicating large-scale production.

Problems with Pricing and Low Willingness to Pay:

Upcycled fashion frequently commands higher prices due to labor-intensive restoration techniques, rendering it less accessible to cost-conscious Indian consumers. A 2022 McKinsey analysis indicates that 72% of Indian consumers want economical fashion, whilst only 26% are inclined to pay a premium for sustainable options. The disparity in consumer buying patterns hinders the profitable scaling of upcycling companies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research approach using a structured questionnaire to examine consumer perceptions, awareness, and behavior toward upcycling and sustainable fashion in India. The primary aim is to

evaluate market trends, purchasing patterns, and the challenges faced in mainstreaming upcycled fashion.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Primary Data

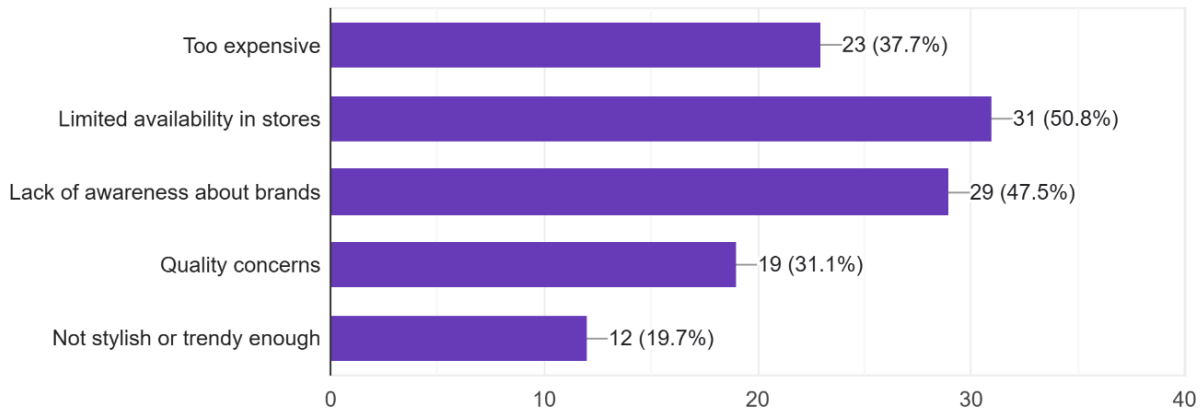
A structured questionnaire was created and distributed online to get responses from friends, family and other consumers. The poll included both closed-ended and multiple-choice questions, assuring a diverse range of demographic information, consumer preferences, and behavioural trends. Respondents were questioned about their acquaintance with upcycling, shopping frequency, sustainability concerns, and factors influencing their willingness to wear recycled clothing.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

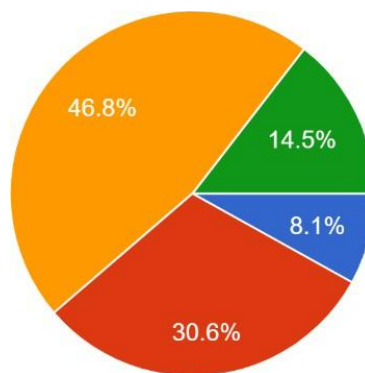
The study used non-probability convenience sampling to collect responses from active fashion consumers in India. The sample consisted mostly of people from metropolitan and semi-urban areas, ensuring that viewpoints were diverse across age groups, income ranges, and education levels.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

The results reveal that restricted shop availability is the primary obstacle to embracing upcycled or sustainable clothes, with 50.8% of participants identifying this as a challenge. This indicates that sustainable fashion firms have not yet attained significant retail presence, especially in conventional brick-and-mortar retailers. Furthermore, 47.5% of participants indicated a deficiency in awareness of sustainable brands, underscoring a significant shortfall in marketing and consumer education. Affordability is a concern, with 37.7% of respondents viewing upcycled fashion as excessively costly, highlighting the necessity for competitive pricing methods or a stronger focus on the long-term worth of sustainable items. Additionally, 31.1% of participants voiced worries regarding quality, indicating uncertainty about the longevity and craftsmanship of repurposed apparel. Significantly, merely 19.7% of consumers perceive sustainable fashion as lacking in style or trendiness, indicating that design innovation has advanced and is less of a hindrance. These observations highlight the necessity for improved retail accessibility, targeted marketing efforts, consumer education, and quality assurance protocols to foster greater acceptance of recycled clothes in India.



Moreover, although awareness of upcycled fashion is rising, real implementation remains comparatively minimal. Only 8.1% of consumers regularly acquire upcycled clothing, signifying that committed purchasers constitute a rare market. Furthermore, 30.6% have participated in upcycled fashion, albeit infrequently, indicating that there is some curiosity, yet it has not manifested in regular purchase activity. Encouragingly, 46.8% of respondents have never purchased upcycled apparel but express interest, indicating a substantial opportunity for development if brands prioritize accessibility, price, and consumer trust. Nevertheless, 14.5% of participants demonstrated little interest in repurposed clothes, indicating a segment of the market that remains averse to sustainable options. These observations underscore the necessity for strategic actions, including enhanced retail availability, focused awareness campaigns, and competitive pricing models, to transform prospective interest into enduring consumer acceptance.



DATA ANALYSIS

1. Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation between Sustainability Importance & Environmental Concern: 0.2216. People who value sustainability in clothing tend to show environmental concern, but the link is not strong.

2. Chi-Square Test

- Chi-Square value for Gender vs. Willingness to Pay Premium: 5.963
- Degrees of Freedom (df): 6
- p-value: 0.4274
- Standard Significance Level: $p < 0.05$ (statistically significant)
- Interpretation: Since $p > 0.05$, there is no significant association between gender and willingness to pay a premium for sustainable clothing.
- Implication: Gender does not play a major role in consumers' willingness to pay extra for upcycled fashion.

3. ANOVA Test

Sustainability Importance vs. Consumer Segments

- F-Value: 4.4455
- p-value: 0.0033
- Standard Significance Level: $p < 0.05$
- Interpretation: Since $p < 0.05$, there is a significant difference in sustainability importance among different consumer segments.
- Implication: Certain demographic or economic groups prioritize sustainability more than others.

Environmental Concern vs. Consumer Segments

- F-Value: 4.3486
- p-value: 0.0038
- Interpretation: Since $p < 0.05$, there is a significant difference in environmental concern among different groups.
- Implication: Some consumers are significantly more concerned about environmental issues,

possibly based on education or income levels.

FINDINGS

Correlation Analysis:

There is a weak (0.22) link between sustainability importance and environmental care. Consumers that care about sustainable apparel are more likely to be eco-conscious.

Chi-squared Test:

There is no significant association between gender and willingness to pay for repurposed fashion ($p=0.427$).

Implications: Gender-neutral marketing methods may be successful.

ANOVA Results:

There is a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in sustainability importance and environmental concern among different customer categories.

Implication: Certain demographics (most likely those with greater incomes and higher levels of education) place a higher value on sustainability.

CONCLUSION

Upcycling and restoration within India's fashion industry are essential for reducing the environmental consequences of fast fashion by prolonging garment lifespans and safeguarding traditional workmanship. These sustainable approaches adhere to circular fashion principles, minimizing textile waste while encouraging ethical manufacturing and conscientious consumption. Nonetheless, despite increasing awareness, obstacles such as restricted accessibility, financial issues, and misunderstandings regarding quality impede broad usage. Addressing this gap necessitates strategic initiatives, such as enhancing retail accessibility, educating consumers, and implementing competitive pricing to foster popular acceptance.

Collaboration among designers, businesses, governments, and consumers is crucial for the success of sustainable fashion. Enhancing textile waste management, encouraging upcycling innovation, and advocating ethical business practices may bolster the credibility and scalability of sustainability in the fashion industry. Upcycling and restoration signify a transformational movement that integrates environmental stewardship with creative expression. Integrating sustainability into design, manufacturing, and consumer practices enables the sector to progress towards a more accountable and robust future.

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