



Sustainability in fashion: A Designer and Brand's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The fashion industry has witnessed rising consumption driven by falling clothing prices, leading to "cheap chic" apparel and associated ethical and environmental challenges. In response, designers and brands are increasingly adopting sustainable practices, including eco-friendly raw materials, natural dyes, equitable labor standards and renewable energy use.

This study employs a qualitative methodology based on secondary data to synthesize research on sustainable fashion movements, fibers and brand initiatives.

Results highlight the evolution of green fashion, the use of innovative natural fibers and adaptation of sustainability strategies by global brands as well as emerging Indian designers. This study provides insights for industry adoption of sustainable practices. The paper underscores the importance of integrating sustainability into fashion management and production to balance consumer demand with environmental responsibility.

Keywords: Sustainability, Designer, Brand, Fashion Industry

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the *PolSci Institute* (2025), "the Brundtland Report introduced the concept of sustainable development, which made the first attempt to link environmental stability with the issue of economic development, is where the idea of sustainable development or sustainability first emerged." "According to the Brundtland Report, "Sustainable Development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Poonam & Periyamvada, 2018). Sustainability is about moving forward in a way that protects both our future and our present, ensuring that people's essential needs can be met without exhausting the planet's resources or damaging its ecosystems. The term "sustainable" originates from the Latin *sustinere*, meaning "to hold up, support, or endure," reflecting its early sense of maintain or bearing something over time. The concept of sustainability was first developed in 1972 at a United Nations Conference (Shen et al., 2013). Conceptually, it encompasses three concerns:

1. The connection between people and environment
2. The connections linking environmental conservation, societal progress and economic growth
3. The necessity of a global visual sense and common principles

“The need for sustainable development was universally approved in September 2015 by attendees of the United Nations General Assembly; as an outcome, 17 Sustainable Development Goals were projected, prioritising the role of education as the critical strategy to stimulate sustainability.” (UN News, 2015)

1.1 Introduction to Sustainable Fashion

In fashion, sustainability means producing and selling clothing in ways that respect both people and the planet. It involves fair working conditions, the use of eco-friendly and recycled materials, designing products that last longer and labelling them with certificates that show their environmental responsibility. Garment production involves fibre production, spinning, weaving, wet processing and finishing. A suitable environment for workers may not be guaranteed; overtime is imposed at the cost of health, posing challenges for the workers to live decently. In accordance with the enhance in utilization and transformations in demand outlines, the concept of fast fashion that responds to rapidly changing needs and tastes is all the rage. However, several threats have emerged in terms of declining world reserves and increasing industrial waste. The slow fashion movement embraces the idea of sustainable fashion, a concept that has steadily evolved over recent decades. It is often described using related terms such as eco-fashion, green fashion or ethical fashion, all of which highlight its commitment to environment and social responsibility. Many eco-friendly practices along with recycling are part of green production. “From tracing the evolution of the sustainability movement and from the three general schemes of sustainability promoted by the United Nations conference in 1972, Sustainable Fashion can be defined as clothing that incorporates fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labor conditions; that do not harm the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton, and designed for longer lifetime use; that is produced in an ethical production system, perhaps even locally; that which causes little or no environmental impact and makes use of eco-labeled or recycled materials”. (Martinez, 2017)

The fashion industry, without a doubt, is widely recognised as one of the world’s largest polluters, despite the absence of a universally agreed definition of "Sustainable Fashion." It consumes more water than any sector except agriculture, relies on thousands of chemicals to transform raw materials into textiles, and depends heavily on non- organic cotton, which alone accounts for roughly a quarter of global pesticide use. “It causes irreversible damage to people and the environment, and still two-thirds of a garment's carbon footprint will occur after it is purchased" (Sharma, 2017). The focus has shifted from how clothes are made to how they are cared for after purchase. In fact, washing a garment around 30 times can create more pollution than was generated in its production- or even in making a brand- new piece. Considerate Design is one way that fashion designers are responding to ethical and environmental concerns. The growing gap between customer’s sentiment about Sustainable fashion and their actual buying behaviors is caused by the abundance of fashion products available to them. Increasing public knowledge about the eco-friendly aspects of fashion is critical to reducing fashion surplus and its harmful effect on the atmosphere, limiting purchases and extending the life of apparel. Although many consumers express interest in sustainable fashion and care about protecting the environment, fast fashion- driven by lower prices- contributes to dominate the market. Manufacturers often face pressure to cut costs and reduce prices to remain competitive. In contrast, sustainable fashion seeks to minimize harm to both the environment and workers by using biodegradable, organic and recycled materials. It also emphasizes durability, designing garments intended for longer use and often marked with eco-labels to signal their responsibility. It also includes the principles of fair trade, without exploiting workers in sweatshops factories with awful working conditions (Joergens, 2006). Consumers generally buy much more clothing than they need, and the clothing they buy often supports the exploitation of workers and resources while increasing the negative impact on the environment by generating waste (Mandarić, Hunjet & Kozina, 2021).

2. Objectives

- To examine the fashion movements that promote Sustainable/ Green Fashion.
- To analyze how prominent fashion brands incorporate sustainability through various methods.
- To explore the approaches adopted by renowned fashion designers to integrate sustainability into their practices.

3. Research Questions

I. Fashion Movements

What key movements and milestones have shaped the evolution of sustainable or green fashion from the late 20th century to the present?

II. Brands

How have global fashion brands integrated sustainability into their production, supply chains and marketing strategies between 2000 and 2025?

III. Designers

In what ways have prominent fashion designers adopted and promoted sustainability through their creative practices and business models?

4. Methodology

This study adopts a Qualitative approach, relying on secondary s such as journals, industry reports and sustainability case studies. Data was selected based on relevance to sustainable fashion practices between 2000-2025.

5. Delimitation

While this method provides a broad synthesis, it is limited by absence of primary fieldwork or consumer surveys.

6. Results

6.1 Green Fashion Movements

In 1988, Belgian designer Martin Margiela, later recognised as a pioneer of the first Deconstructionist Movement, debuted his first collection, which featured a leather butcher's apron reimaged as an evening gown. The following year, Franco Moschino made a bold statement by sending models down the runway in T-shirts bearing the slogan "Stop Using Our Oceans as a WC!" The new environmental trend in fashion was highlighted in the March 1990 issue of Vogue. (Jones, 2019).

The earliest article addressing this subject appeared the same year: "The Green Movement in the Fashion World", by Woody Hochswender. The same year, members of The Fashion Group International (FGI), a prominent global non-profit, presented at the United Nations on the environmental consequences of the fashion industry. Later, in 2001, designer Stella McCartney introduced her brand, distinguished by its commitment to animal-friendly policies. The inaugural Ethical Fashion Show showcased sustainable, handcrafted design in Paris the same year (2004), three years after the first organic-denim designer label, After their first organic-denim label, Loomstate, was introduced. In 2006, the British Fashion Council established Estethica- a space where forward thinking designers could showcase their creativity while staying true to eco-friendly values. It became a stage for fashion that was not only cutting-edge but also conscious of its impact on the planet. Since then, green is known as the new black for the cool and stylish. We have this idea that we will make people label-aware Where it was made, who made it, how it was made," – Told Bono the Vogue magazine, according to launching the label Edun (fashion.net/edun). Since 2009, Copenhagen has hosted the Fashion Summit every year- a global gathering where designers, leaders and innovators cometgether to push fashion toward a more sustainable future. It is not just a fashion week; it is a movement that keeps the industry accountable and inspired.

6.2 Fibers and fabrics for green clothing:

Natural fibre is a material that may be formed into filaments, thread, or even rope and is emerging out of vegetation and wildlife. "Natural fibers are renewable resources, thus providing a better solution of sustainable supply like it has low-cost, low density, least processing expenditure, no health hazards, and mechanical and physical properties." (Asim et al., 2015) Not all fibres possess the necessary physical, aesthetic, and functional qualities to qualify as natural fibre. So, blending serve the purpose. To enhance the characteristics and make it suitable for a variety of end uses, blending is done. High-quality items that can't be produced with just one type

of fibre can be produced by fibre blending. Pineapple is cultivating around 87.2 thousand hectares of land and 600 thousand of the leaf can be extracted and utilized (Banik, Nag & Debnath 2011). After the fruit has been harvested, the waste leaf of a pineapple is harvested for its fibres, which amount to 2.5–3.5% of the leaf's total weight. Another agricultural fibre that is obtained from a waste plant utilising water retting is bhindi fibre. Compared to other natural fibres, it has a higher degree of elongation. India is the world's top producer of coir fibre, which is obtained by scraping the fruit's skin. The properties of natural fibers are tested for their strength, elongation according to Booth (1968) by using the formulae

$$\text{Tensile Strength (g/tex)} = \text{Breaking load/ Bundle weight (mg)} * 100$$

Esprit Company launched their first collection made of organic cotton with natural dyes called “Ecollection”. But after a peak, it declines. It was due to consumer interest in only the appearance product, not the eco benefit as a result green revolution vanishes. "By comparing to the cost of producing a garment of Non-Green Textile Industry and the Green Textile Industry, it is expected that production costs are less for Green Textiles." (Shaap, 2021)

6.3 BRANDS PRACTICING SUSTAINABILITY

1. Zara

“During 2022, Zara suppressed their goal of 50% of its items to be from the Join Lifeline, which uses less environmentally harmful production methods and raw materials. SBTi- an international initiative that promotes establishing climate objectives in accordance with scientific consensus and the objectives of the Paris Agreement-has approved an update of Zara’s SBT objectives to reduce emissions associated with Zara’s activity by more than 53% in 2030 compared to 2018.” (Zara, n.d.)

2. NIKE

Nike has been working on sustainability initiatives, including using sustainable product materials and reducing waste. They have set ambitious goals to reduce their carbon footprint and address social issues in their supply chain.

3. Levi’s

Levi’s is reimagining denim with the planet in mind- crafting jeans and jacket that not only look good but are made in ways that respect the environment. Their commitment is to keep fashion iconic while making it eco-friendly. The business creates long-lasting goods, and its best-known item, the 501 Jeans, has been around for more than 150 years. With the Water<Less innovation, Levi is reshaping how denim is made and shrinking its carbon footprint by a quarter. It’s a step towards jeans that care as much about the planet as they do about styles. Levi’s is regarded as the face of denim and has stores in more than 100 countries. With the production of recyclable denim, ethically sourced cotton, and many water-saving innovations, Levi’s has always been prepared for any sustainable growth or similar change.

4. Adidas

Adidas is stepping out its commitment to sustainability by using more recycled materials in its products. “To lessen its environmental impact, the business employs recycled polyester in 60% of all its products by 2025.” (Adidas 2025) Adidas is also dedicated to producing its products with minimal water. Additionally, the business supports fair employment practices and employs 20% renewable energy.

5. EcoKaari

EcoKaari, a startup from Pune, India is transforming discarded chips packets into beautiful, handcrafted creations. EcoKaari brand uses, upcycle plastics transformed into a beautiful tote bag, hand clutch, or home décor item. By productively recycling a product without degrading it or by handling a basic item and converting it into a higher-quality good, EcoKaari attempts to upcycle it. “They collect unused plastic from an organisation and endorse donating domestic plastic, which can be grocery plastic bags, chips packets (which have to be trimmed horizontally only), gift wrappers, transparent plastic sheets, foams, and even Amazon and Flipkart

bags” (ulaunch.in). The unwanted pieces of this waste plastic are donated after being separated by thickness and size. They are then given a thorough cleaning, sanitised, and sun-dried. After being separated into various colours, they are manually cut into large strips for spinning. The plastic is then transported to a charkha, where it is spun into a weft for weaving, which is subsequently woven into a fabric on a handloom. As part of the designing process, these materials are stitched following the desired designs, colours, and sizes before being manually inspected to confirm their suitability.





Figure 6.3.1: Upcycled cassette tape wallet [Photograph].



Figure 6.3.2: Ecolaari. (n.d.). Upcycled duffel bag made from Maggi packaging [Photograph]. Ecolaari.

Source: <https://ecokaari.org>

Source: <https://ecokaari.org>

Even their packaging is environmentally friendly because it is made from recycled cotton fabric that was once used as an inner lining for items. Additionally, they help their craftspeople and promote learning and participation among those from less wealthy backgrounds.



Figure 6.3.3: Ecolaari. (n.d.). How it's made: Upcycling plastic bags into fabric [Infographic]. Ecolaari

Source: [Ecolaari Upcycling store — EcoKaari™ - Humanising Fashion](https://ecokaari.org)

6.4 FASHION DESIGNERS PRACTICING SUSTAINABILITY

1. Stella McCartney

Stella practices sustainability by making cruelty-free garments, i.e. no fur or leather. “She uses re-engineered cashmere and ethically sourced wool, organic cotton, and recycled textiles, and she also does sustainable packaging. Since 2012, we have only used paper (Paper production can contribute to deforestation) that is either FSC-certified or made from at least 50% recycled content in our packaging. We are committed to ensuring that

the paper we use does not support the degradation or destruction of forest ecosystems, and that all the wood and paper we use comes from sustainably certified sources.” (Stella McCartney, as cited in The Good Trade, 2022)

Stella McCartney is best known for Ready-To-Wear Fashion, swimwear, bags, and sunglasses for all genders and ages.

Since introducing her debut collection in the early 1990s, Stella McCartney has revolutionized the Fashion Industry. The UK-based luxury designer is renowned for producing contemporary clothing that radiates natural confidence and is a forerunner of alternative materials and eco-friendly procedures.

The Stella McCartney brand also contributes to charities like Million Trees Miami, Memorial Sloan Kettering, and Bio planet.

2. Eileen Fisher

They use Organic, recycled fibers, fabrics, and natural dyes to make sustainable garments.

It is best for petite women.

EILEEN FISHER is dedicated to destroying the linear production model. The linear fashion model refers to an economic model that relies on increasingly extracting natural resources, making clothes at lower costs, and disposing of them after a few uses. Most high-end clothing companies favor. The designer, born and raised in Illinois, uses circular brushstrokes to recycle and breathe new life into discarded clothing and materials.

EILEEN FISHER uses recycled fabrics, organic fibers, and natural dyes. The EILEEN FISHER brand is a certified B Corp with several sustainable initiatives like secondhand shops called Renew and Waste No More formerly known as Green Eileen. Additionally, the team promotes craftspeople, works with environmental conservation organizations, and empowers women via the Eileen Fisher Leadership Institute. EFLI promoted leadership in young women through self-empowerment, connection with others and activism in their communities. The Institute brought young people together to explore their passions; learn from pioneers of industry, the arts and beyond; and discover their unique leadership style.

3. Kirti Tula

IN 2021, Kirti Tula, for her brand “Doodlage, used slogans to raise awareness about thrift fashion, swapping, reusing, borrowing and repairing.” (*3 Inspiring Indian Designers Making Fashion That is Good for the Environment, and Your Soul - Elle India, n.d.*)

When Kirti Tula of Doodlage discovered the precise amount of solid fabric wasted, she began to work toward developing a circular fashion label. Every year, Bangladesh, India, and China alone produce 80 billion square metres of fabric waste, and she claims much more can be done with this cloth.

This motivated Kirti Tula to focus solely on using fabric waste produced by large-scale manufacturing facilities. This is delivered as scraps from the post-stitching process, end-of-line fabrics, post-cutting waste, and defective fabrics. “We fix these fabrics, create texture fabrics, embroider and panel fabrics to create our pieces,” says Kirti, who reveals that this helped them save 6,000 meters of fabric last year, with no new fabric created and no extra scrap added by them.” (*3 Inspiring Indian Designers Making Fashion That is Good for the Environment, and Your Soul - Elle India, n.d.*)

“We saved 4.6 million litres of water, 18,000 kgs of carbon dioxide emissions, and added no pesticides or chemicals to our operations, only by reusing, claims Kirti”. That is what sustainability means to me: actively looking for methods to lessen the influence on the environment. “Doodlage is a reflection of my personal belief of buying less and repairing more.” (Elle.in)

4. Grassroot by Anita Dongre

“Veteran designer Anita Dongre, one of the most vocal advocates of conscious fashion, uses her label Grassroot to revive crafts and empower artisans. To her, sustainable fashion means conducting the business of fashion by looking towards the future, practising and building environmentally conscious processes and respecting the people involved.” (*3 Inspiring Indian Designers Making Fashion That is Good for the Environment, and Your Soul - Elle India, n.d.*)

In addition to being animal-free and environmentally friendly, Grassroot’s offices were built with sustainability in mind. “Our office makes the most of the breeze and natural light, which lowers the electricity used. We compost all of the waste in a composting hole that has been established. Even the company’s water is recycled,

according to Anita. Additionally, she is collaborating with suppliers of eco-friendly fabrics and making a concerted effort to incorporate them in all four of her brands: Grassroot, Anita Dongre, Global Desi, and AND. The entire fashion business must adopt more sustainable efforts and raise awareness because we are already seeing the results of decades of neglect, according to Anita. “I want to keep working towards making every practice sustainable,” she pledges. (*3 Inspiring Indian Designers Making Fashion That is Good for the Environment, and Your Soul - Elle India*, n.d.)

5. Ruchika Sachdeva

Designer Ruchika Sachdeva of Bodice, who won the International Wool mark Prize 2018 for women’s wear, started sustainably during an internship at Vivienne Westwood’s London studio. Ruchika says she witnessed in Westwood’s workshop “how dedicated a designer may be in addressing the social and environmental implications of fashion.” The designer was also confident that she wanted to produce meaningful clothing that continuously questioned the effects of textiles and production on society and the environment when she returned to India.

According to estimates, billions of tonnes of clothing are disposed of annually in landfills. For this reason, Ruchika has always been concerned with creating timeless and versatile apparel. Utilising recycled wool for Kantha yarn, natural dyes, and even buttons made from sustainable materials like coconut shells, seashells, and wood are just a few of the designer’s inventive techniques.

“I believe that it is my duty as a designer to produce clothes that improve people’s lives on a social, economic, cultural, and ecological level. We collaborate with guardians of ecological preservation and cultural legacy whenever feasible, whether they are Himalayan weavers of wool or expert dyers who have in-depth knowledge of central India’s natural dye-producing plants, roots, and bushes, adds the woman.

Another topic that interests the designer, who does not use fur or any other form of animal skin in her creations, is animal welfare. The manufacture of leather entails one of the most chemically intensive processes, which has a negative impact on rivers and the water table, in addition to being a concern for animal welfare. (Lellis, Fávoro-Polonio, Pamphile & Polonio, 2019)." In the new Bodice Studio Resort '19 collection, I am utilising gorgeous vegan suede in powder pink that I recently discovered.” (*3 Inspiring Indian Designers Making Fashion That is Good for the Environment, and Your Soul - Elle India*, n.d.) She promised to keep looking for leather substitutes that persuade people to reconsider their perceptions of opulent materials.

7. Discussion

Evolution of Movements: The timeline shows sustainability has shifted from symbolic runway statements (Moschino, Vogue) to institutionalized platforms (Copenhagen Summit). This indicated growing industry accountability.

Fibers and Fabrics: Adoption of agricultural waste fibers demonstrates innovation in resource efficiency. However, consumer interest often prioritizes aesthetics over eco-benefits (e.g., Esprit’s decline), highlighting a gap between sustainable supply and demand.

Brands: Global brands like Zara, Nike, Levi’s and Adidas are integrating sustainability into mainstream production. Their initiatives show that large corporations can balance profitability with responsibility, though changing remain in scaling these practices.

Designers: Individual designers (Mc Cartney, Fisher, Tula, Dongre, Sachdeva) illustrate diverse approaches from cruelty – free luxury to grassroots upcycling. Their practices highlight the role of creativity and ethics in shaping consumer awareness.

Industry Implications: These findings suggest that sustainability is no longer niche but a growing expectation. Adoption of eco-friendly fibers, circular models and fair trade principles provides actionable insights for industry leaders.

Consumer Gap: Despite awareness, fast fashion dominates due to low prices. Bridging this gap requires stronger marketing, education and policy support to align consumer behavior with sustainable intent.

8. Conclusion

The papers that were presented cover a wide range of subjects, including sustainability, sustainable fashion, green fashion movements, eco-friendly textiles, methods for producing sustainable fashion, and firms and designers from around the world who are putting sustainability into practice. The idea of sustainability or sustainable development is chiefly concerned with the wellbeing of humans and their interactions with the natural world in a context wherever nature-humanity inequities pose a threat to peace in the political, economic, and societies. Some studies have proved that wealthy Millennials demand that their favorite fashion companies take meaningful steps to improve the health of the ecosystem and are even inclined to spent money more for sustainable goods. Customers need to have knowledge of where fashion products are manufactured and what type of supplies are utilised, and they also want more honesty right through the complete supply chain. Only larger enterprises that have already accepted sustainability practices are included in the luxury industry's adoption of sustainability reports.

The textile industry is using approaches for instance less-impactful textiles practices, mono-physicalness, enterprise durability, zero-waste techniques, upcycling, restoration and preservation practices, closed-loop design systems, less-impactful production techniques etc. in the life cycle of a garment to attain sustainable fashion.

More Fashion Designers and brands must act toward environmental and ethical considerations. Fashion companies might raise worthwhile sources, boost their ties with customers and decrease their use of organic sources by commissioning green promotion schemes. To do this, fashion designers and brands essentially reorganize their supply chains, from raw material suppliers to retailers, discover innovative methods to encounter the demands of ecologically concerned consumers and deliver sustainable goods to raise customer's awareness of sustainability-related concerns. To attract and keep customers, fashion companies must be committed to constructing business models that are constructed on ethical, sustainable, and circular fashion. Marketing efforts must target consumers to influence their behavior and promote greater environmentally friendly apparel use. If wealth and funding are indeed a gigantic concern for some customers, purely not buying anything is involvement in support to sustainable fashion. Technology that can treat this wastewater and turn it into reusable water must be developed. The textile industry will benefit from being able to reuse the recycled water for the dyeing process multiple times, and the salt employed for dyeing can also be offered on the open marketplace.

Further Scope

Further research could explore consumer behavior gaps between sustainable intent and actual purchase.

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