From Green Attitudes to Grey Purchases: Sustainable Fashion Choices Among Indian Gen Z

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Abstract

Role of the Textile and apparel market in India economy. The sustainable fashion is the current important issue in terms of environment and economical factors. Generation Zs are becoming more conscious of sustainability in India. Though this sustainability is becoming popular among them, it does not always translate to the change in their purchasing behavior. The present study attempts to understand the perception of sustainable fashion among the young consumers in India especially with reference to the influence of social media. It further examines the importance of traditional Indian textile materials like Khadi, handloom and their impact on the perception and purchase behavior of Gen Zs. It particularly focuses on the concerns regarding sustainability. The trust in brand communication, price sensitivity, and greenwashing are the other factors that is focused in this study. These factors are analyzed to understand the underlying reason for the mismatch between claimed and purchase behavior in the fashion sector. For the present study, a survey is conducted with 207 participants in the age group of 18-27. The study is carried out in five cities namely Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Kochi and Madhya Pradesh. The data was collected using questionnaire. The study applied a statistical model called Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

Prior to testing of the hypothesized, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out to determine the reliability of questions in measuring the ideas under consideration. The study revealed that the reason for the inability of Gen Z in India to transform intentions into purchase action is due to the trust for sustainability claims, the importance of price and suspicion of greenwashing. This proves that the complex nature of changing the consumer behaviour. The study will provide valuable insights for fashion brands, authorities, and traditional textiles to build trust. Ways to boost consumers to make sustainable choices in fashion, and for responsible consumption. This is in line with sustainable development goals (SDG 12) of promoting consumption and production.

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Introduction

Environmental challenges arising from the consumption of fashion prompts the question about how the industries which hitherto has been focused on the trends, affordability and fast buys might direct their attention towards the production in sustainable manner. Even though most of the consumers do voice their concern over the environmental issues but the attitudes and beliefs of the consumers do not necessarily translate to actions towards sustainable purchases. To understand the attitude-behaviour gap is essential to understand the role of both production and consumers towards the advancement of sustainable consumption. This gap is of particular challenge to India, as the textile and apparel market contributes substantially to the economy as well as number of workers.. India's fashion market blends rapidly rising fast-fashion consumption with traditional textile markets such as Khadi and handloom, which offer a variety of products incorporating the appeal of traditional textile production. The adoption of traditional textiles, however, is dependent on their price, accessibility, design, and relevance to changing fashion trends.

This study considers Generation Z as an important group to focus on given the dual influence of social media, which exposes them to sustainability messages as well as trends, and the tendency of social media to reinforce impulsive, trend-driven purchasing decisions. While this exposure may contribute to rising environmental awareness, this can fail to be reflected in actual purchasing decisions.

The study aims to investigate the attitude–behaviour gap in sustainable fashion purchasing decisions and examine the factors influencing the discrepancy between consumers' environmentally favourable attitudes towards fashion consumption and their reported purchasing behaviour. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour explains the link between consumers' attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioural control on intention to purchase specific products or services. While a favourable attitude can be a factor in purchase intention, this does not necessarily reflect an actual purchase given other considerations such as affordability, design, convenience, and changing trends.

The study considers the influence of price, product appeal, trust, and greenwashing skepticism in sustainable clothing purchasing decisions as well as the potential contribution of social media influence and the appeal of traditional textiles to purchasing intention. The study examines sustainable-fashion awareness, social media influence, and attitudes towards Khadi and handloom in Indian Gen Z consumers and the contribution of price sensitivity, accessibility, trust, and greenwashing skepticism to the attitude–behaviour gap. By identifying the influence of consumer attitudes on purchase intentions and the impact of marketplace barriers on purchasing behaviour, the study aims to clarify the disconnect between sustainability-oriented preferences and actual purchasing decisions and promote responsible fashion consumption practices.

2. Literature Review: From Green Attitudes to Grey Purchases

2.1 Sustainable Fashion Awareness and Consumer Attitudes

Sustainable fashion has emerged as a growing area of study in sustainable consumption due to the extent to which environmental concerns are entangled with fashion production and consumption. Turning attitudes into reported purchasing behaviour, however, requires consumers to modify their purchasing decision-making processes to include considerations of sustainability. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour outlines how a consumer's attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control together predict purchase intention, which, alongside the consumer's perception of control over the purchase, predict actual behaviour. While this model indicates that a favourable

attitude can lead to a favourable intention, this does not necessarily predict actual purchase due to the influence of other factors. In fashion consumption, the competing pull of affordability, design, convenience, and changing trends must be taken into account when studying purchase decisions.

2.2 Social Media: Awareness, Attitudes, and Actual Purchasing Behaviour

Social media has emerged as a critical tool in fashion consumption, as it facilitates access to brand-related information, awareness of trends, and engagement with brand representatives. Its impact, however, does not necessarily translate into actual behaviour due to the presence of other influencing factors.

Uprety et al. (2025) investigate the relationships between social media, awareness, attitude, and sustainable fashion purchase intention in young Indian consumers. Their questionnaire-based survey with 332 social media users demonstrates the influence of social media on consumer awareness and attitude using structural equation modelling. Awareness partially mediated the relationship between social media and sustainable fashion purchase intention while attitude did not mediate it. The study highlights the complexities in interpreting the contribution of social media to purchase intention. The fact that social media does not necessarily influence purchase intention via attitude indicates that it can influence other, more complex mechanisms. The study's limitation lies in the fact that it is a cross-sectional survey with self-reported responses, restricting evidence on the causal contribution of social media to purchase behaviour.

El-Shihy and Awaad (2025) investigate how brand-generated and user-generated content on TikTok and Instagram affect sustainable fashion purchase intention among Gen Z consumers. The study shows clearly how social media can act as a link between consumer attitude and purchase intention. Social media helps to connect the way consumers feel about a product, with their desire to buy it. Its limitation is the fact that intention-focused research cannot assess whether social media engagement leads to actual purchase. At best, social media can encourage responsible purchasing decisions and reinforce trend-following consumer behaviour. Similar to the previous article, it focuses on purchase intention, restricting its contribution to understanding actual purchase behaviour. The literature highlights the importance of investigating the influence of social media on awareness and attitude in Indian Gen Z consumers while separately considering its contribution to reported purchasing behaviour.

2.3 Khadi and Handloom as Alternatives to Fast Fashion

The role of traditional Indian textiles in sustainable fashion adds a layer of cultural appeal and value to the discussion of sustainable fashion consumption. They, however, represent a niche within the fast-fashion-dominated market, and their adoption is dependent on their appeal to younger consumers.

Datta and Sarkar (2022) examine the influence of store atmosphere, perceived authenticity, and attitudes on consumer buying behaviour towards Khadi fashion wear. Their study uses exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modelling based on the responses of 549 consumers. The store atmosphere influenced perceived authenticity and consumer purchase intention and attitudes, which in turn influenced purchase intention, which in turn influenced buying behaviour. The study highlights the importance of the retail environment in influencing consumer purchasing decisions but its limitations lie in its focus on those consumers who have already expressed an interest in Khadi fashion wear. They are unable to reflect the reasons for the disinterest of consumers who have not purchased Khadi products. Additionally, the study does not account for the extent to which the cultural appeal of

Khadi and handloom, alongside their price, perceived authenticity, design, and availability, influence their adoption as an alternative to fast fashion.

2.4 The Intention–Behaviour Gap: Price, Accessibility, Trust, and Greenwashing Skepticism

The attitude–behaviour gap represents the key concern of the literature on sustainable fashion consumption in influencing purchase decisions. Rausch and Kopplin (2021) investigate sustainable clothing consumption by extending the Theory of Reasoned Action with the addition of environmental knowledge, environmental concern, greenwashing concerns, and perceived economic and aesthetic risks. Their study with 464 participants demonstrates that attitude towards sustainable clothing purchase had the strongest influence on purchase intention, while greenwashing concerns reduced the influence of attitude on purchase intention. Perceived aesthetic risk reduced the intention–behaviour relationship, while economic risk did not moderate the relationship. The study demonstrates the complexity of the moderation mechanisms involved in sustainable clothing consumption decisions. The limitation of the study, though, is that it assumes that all proposed moderators influence the purchase intention–behaviour relationship, while the actual influence can depend on contextual factors.

Overcoming barriers for sustainable fashion: Bridging attitude-behaviour gap in retail examines the influence of five barriers, namely high prices, lack of visibility, limited availability, lack of awareness about the impact of fast fashion, and lack of trust in sustainability claims. Its theoretical framework rests on the Theory of Planned Behaviour and behavioural-reasoning theory to examine the barriers to sustainable fashion consumption. The limitation of the study lies in the fact that identifying moderators is not enough to determine their contribution to purchase behaviour. High prices represent a threat to purchase affordability when considering a given clothing product, while the limited visibility of sustainable fashion represents a threat to purchase accessibility — a completely separate mechanism. Similarly, lack of trust in sustainability claims and greenwashing skepticism represent separate constructs despite being related to concerns over the credibility of sustainability claims.

While the literature highlights the importance of consumers' attitudes and communication in shaping their sustainable clothing purchasing decisions, it also demonstrates the importance of examining the mechanisms through which such decisions can be achieved. In particular, the studies highlight the need to consider the role of price sensitivity, accessibility, trust, and greenwashing skepticism in purchase decisions and the potential moderation differences between them.

2.5 Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature includes substantial evidence supporting the investigation into sustainable fashion awareness, consumer attitudes, digital communication, and purchasing behaviour. Three main limitations, however, apply to the current research. First, many studies examine purchase intention rather than actual purchasing behaviour, limiting evidence on how consumers' sustainability attitudes are converted into purchase decisions. Second, research into media and traditional textiles looks, at various influences. However research often does not look at how social media and traditional textiles work together to shape purchase intention. This gap means we do not fully understand how social media and traditional textiles together affect a buyer's decision. Third, the role of price sensitivity, accessibility, trust, and greenwashing skepticism as moderators deserves further consideration.

The current study aims to examine sustainable fashion awareness, social media influence, and attitudes towards Khadi and handloom alongside reported purchasing behaviour in Indian Gen Z

consumers. It further explores whether price sensitivity, accessibility, trust, and greenwashing skepticism moderate purchase intention and behaviour. By investigating these constructs in a unified framework, the study aims to determine the factors that influence sustainable clothing consumption while focusing on reported purchasing behaviour to clarify the discrepancy between consumers' sustainability attitudes and purchasing decisions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the factors influencing sustainable fashion awareness, attitudes, purchase intentions, and reported purchasing behaviour among Indian Gen Z consumers. Data collection takes place between 5 August and 5 September [insert year] using a questionnaire-based design. The design allows for the identification of the relationship between multiple latent constructs within a population. The study examines the influence of sustainable fashion awareness, social media, and attitudes towards traditional Indian fabrics, including Khadi and handloom, alongside the moderating roles of price sensitivity, accessibility, trust, and greenwashing skepticism. A numerical approach made sense because the research question is, about looking at variables at the same time. The cross-sectional design allows for the assessment of respondents' reported behaviour within the time of the survey, while its limitations concern the lack of evidence on causal contribution. The study follows the principles of questionnaire-based social science research. It also uses structural equation modelling, which is known as SEM. This approach helps to analyze relationships, between variables in an systematic way.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

The study looks at ethical issues related to taking part getting permission keeping things private and making sure responses are safe. Details about the ethics approval from a university or organization must be added before sending the work. This includes the name of the group that approved it the approval number and the date it was approved if there is one. The final paper needs to say that the approval was gotten before collecting any data. Only if that was written down. People who take part must give their permission before they fill out the questionnaire. They can choose to take part or not. They are told why the study is being done, what they need to do and that their answers will stay private. Personal information is not, in the data set that is used for analysis unless it has to be collected and has the permission. The study has people taking part. Does not use any animals.

3.3 Participants and Sampling

The study had 207 people from Generation Z who were between 18 and 27 years old in areas in India. People from Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Kochi and Madhya Pradesh were included to bring a range of cultures and buying situations. This group of people was chosen because younger people from Generation Z were important for looking at fashion communication, environmental awareness and how they buy things now. Their use of media and seeing fashion trends made them a good group for looking at how their attitudes about sustainability connect to what they buy.

This group of people was useful, for examining the ideas in the study. However it may not represent all Indian Generation Z people.

3.4 Research Instrument and Materials

The data was collected with a questionnaire created from methods of studying sustainablebuying. The tool was designed to capture the ideas in the plan.These covered how aware people are of fashion how much social media influences them their thoughts on buying Khadi and handloom items what they actually bought, how money matters, how easy it is to get items, trust and being careful about greenwashing.Scales that were used before were altered to match the topic of buying for Indian Generation Z people. The changes were made to keep the ideas but suit the questions to the people and their culture.People responded with scales that let them indicate how much the questionnaire statements were agreed with. This format allowed people to show how they felt, what they thought, what they wanted to do and what they did.

4. Findings

4.1 Respondent Profile

Age

Category	*n*	*% of valid responses*
21–23 years	*151*	*72.9%*
24–26 years	*28*	*13.5%*
18–20 years	*18*	*8.7%*
27–28 years	*10*	*4.8%*

Gender

Category	*n*	*% of valid responses*
Female	*115*	*55.6%*
Male	*92*	*44.4%*

Education and Occupation

Education	*n*	*%*
Postgraduate	*139*	*67.1%*
Undergraduate	*66*	*31.9%*
PhD	*2*	*1.0%*
Occupation	*n*	*%*
Student	*181*	*87.4%*
Working professional	*25*	*12.1%*
Self-employed	*1*	*0.5%*

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Monthly Income/Allowance

Category	*n*	*%*
No personal income	*106*	*51.2%*
Below ₹10,000	*58*	*28.0%*
₹10,001–₹25,000	*29*	*14.0%*
₹25,001–₹50,000	*14*	*6.8%*

State and City Tier

State	*n*	*%*
Tamil Nadu	*91*	*44.0%*
Kerala	*76*	*36.7%*
West Bengal	*9*	*4.3%*
Chhattisgarh	*7*	*3.4%*
Maharashtra	*5*	*2.4%*
Andhra Pradesh	*4*	*1.9%*
Bihar	*4*	*1.9%*
Karnataka	*4*	*1.9%*
Telangana	*2*	*1.0%*
Jharkhand	*2*	*1.0%*
Uttar Pradesh	*2*	*1.0%*
Assam	*1*	*0.5%*
City tier	*n*	*%*
Tier 1	*84*	*40.6%*
Tier 2	*70*	*33.8%*
Tier 3	*53*	*25.6%*

Respondents aged 21–23 years accounted for 72.9% of the sample, while students represented 87.4%. Postgraduates made up 67.1%, and 51.2% reported having no personal income. Tamil Nadu and Kerala together accounted for 80.7% of respondents. These characteristics may shape perceptions of price, access, and fashion consumption. In particular, the high proportion of students and respondents without personal income makes affordability a relevant consideration, although the descriptive profile alone does not establish that income causes particular purchasing choices.

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4.2 Awareness and Attitudes Towards Sustainable Fashion

Awareness

Awareness category	*n*	*%*
Somewhat familiar (combined spelling variants)	*111*	*53.6%*
Very familiar	*44*	*21.3%*
Not very familiar	*25*	*12.1%*
Heard of it but limited knowledge	*24*	*11.6%*
Not familiar at all	*3*	*1.4%*

After combining spelling variants of "somewhat familiar," the descriptive awareness indicator was M = 2.95, SD = 0.71 (N = 207). More than half of respondents (53.6%) described themselves as somewhat familiar, while 21.3% reported being very familiar. This indicates moderate self-reported awareness, rather than comprehensive knowledge of sustainable fashion. Because the measure is based on a single ordered response and is not a validated scale, it should be interpreted descriptively.

Attitude

Attitude category	*n*	*%*
Preferable, but other factors also matter	*80*	*38.6%*
Should be preferred whenever possible	*52*	*25.1%*
Considered only when affordable	*45*	*21.7%*
Generally not a consideration	*19*	*9.2%*
Considered, but not a major concern	*11*	*5.3%*

The most common response was that sustainable fashion is preferable but other factors also matter (38.6%). A further 25.1% believed it should be preferred whenever possible. Together, these responses represented 63.8% of the sample, suggesting broadly favourable but conditional attitudes. Affordability and other practical considerations remained relevant. This pattern is consistent with an attitude–behaviour gap: consumers may value sustainability without making it the decisive criterion in every clothing purchase. The present data are descriptive and do not, by themselves, establish a causal relationship between awareness and attitudes.

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4.3 Social Media Exposure, Trends and Influencer Influence

Primary information source	*n*	*%*
Social media	*138*	*66.7%*
Do not actively seek this information	*31*	*15.0%*
Brand websites/advertisements	*14*	*6.8%*
News articles/blogs	*13*	*6.3%*
Friends/family	*11*	*5.3%*

Social-media trends and overbuying

Response	*n*	*%*
Sometimes	*102*	*49.3%*
Rarely	*52*	*25.1%*
Every time I shop	*33*	*15.9%*
Never	*20*	*9.7%*

Influencer-promoted sustainable fashion

Response	*n*	*%*
Neutral	*111*	*53.6%*
Likely	*43*	*20.8%*
Unlikely	*20*	*9.7%*
Very unlikely	*17*	*8.2%*
Very likely	*16*	*7.7%*

Social media was the leading information source, selected by 66.7% of respondents. Meanwhile, 65.2% reported that social-media trends sometimes or every time encouraged them to buy more clothes regardless of sustainability. Responses to influencer-promoted sustainable products were more mixed: 53.6% were neutral, while 28.5% were likely or very likely to consider such products. The findings indicate that social media is an important exposure channel, but exposure should not be equated with persuasion or sustainable purchasing. Content type, credibility, social pressure, and product suitability may matter alongside platform use.

The chi-square analysis found a statistically significant association between primary information source and purchase-shift category, $\chi^2(1, N = 207) = 9.61$, $p = .002$. In the tested two-category comparison, 83 respondents in the social-media group reported a moderate/high purchase shift,

compared with 25 respondents among those using other sources; 55 social-media respondents and 44 respondents in the other-source group reported a low purchase shift. This indicates an association in this sample, not proof that social media caused a change in purchasing. The result should be interpreted in light of the particular grouping used in the test.

4.4 Barriers to Purchasing Sustainable Fashion

Perceived barrier	*N*	*Mean (1–5)*	*SD*	*Most common rating*
Higher price than fast-fashion alternatives	*207*	*2.98*	*1.22*	*3*
Limited availability	*207*	*2.86*	*0.95*	*3*
Difficulty finding suitable brands/products	*207*	*2.92*	*1.01*	*3*
Lack of trust in sustainability claims	*207*	*2.83*	*1.07*	*2*
Concern about greenwashing	*207*	*3.09*	*1.12*	*3*

Concern about greenwashing received the highest mean rating (M = 3.09), followed by price (M = 2.98), difficulty finding suitable products (M = 2.92), limited availability (M = 2.86), and lack of trust in sustainability claims (M = 2.83). The differences are descriptive and should not be overstated. Nevertheless, the pattern suggests that credibility and the ability to identify suitable products deserve attention alongside cost and access. Brands may need to substantiate environmental claims clearly and make product information easy to verify. Since each barrier was measured separately, these items should not be treated as a validated composite scale.

4.5 Khadi, Handloom and Traditional Textiles

Main reason for preference

Reason	*n*	*%*
Cultural heritage and traditional value	*86*	*41.5%*
Environmental sustainability	*41*	*19.8%*
Quality and durability	*36*	*17.4%*

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Unique design and personal style	***33***	***15.9%***
Affordability and accessibility	***11***	***5.3%***

Choice if price and availability were equal

Response	***n***	***%***
Either, depending on design and style	***84***	***40.6%***
Probably Khadi/handloom	***58***	***28.0%***
Definitely Khadi/handloom	***54***	***26.1%***
Probably fast fashion	***11***	***5.3%***

Cultural heritage and traditional value were the most frequently selected reasons for preferring Khadi and handloom, chosen by 41.5% of respondents. When price and availability were assumed to be equal, 54.1% selected probably or definitely Khadi/handloom, while 40.6% said their choice would depend on design and style. Only 5.3% selected probably fast fashion. These results indicate cultural appeal and potential interest in traditional textiles, but also show that design remains central to consumer choice. Hypothetical preference does not necessarily translate into actual purchasing; contemporary styling, quality, convenience, affordability, and reliable product information may influence whether consumers adopt these products regularly.

4.6 Environmental and Social Beliefs, Willingness to Pay and Reported Behaviour

Statement	***N***	***Mean (1–5)***	***SD***
Positive about buying from fast-fashion brands that prioritise sustainability	***207***	***3.03***	***1.04***
Traditional sustainable fashion helps protect the environment	***207***	***3.29***	***0.98***
Traditional sustainable fashion benefits society	***207***	***3.49***	***0.95***

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Avoid fast fashion when a suitable traditional sustainable alternative is available	***207***	***2.87***	***1.03***
Willingness to pay more for traditional sustainable fashion	***207***	***2.76***	***0.95***
Started purchasing traditional sustainable fashion instead of fast fashion	***207***	***2.54***	***1.00***

The highest mean was for the belief that traditional sustainable fashion benefits society (M = 3.49, SD = 0.95), followed by the belief that it helps protect the environment (M = 3.29, SD = 0.98). In contrast, willingness to pay more averaged 2.76, and reported purchase shift averaged 2.54. The difference between stronger social/environmental beliefs and lower reported willingness or action is consistent with an attitude–behaviour gap. Positive beliefs alone may not be enough to prompt a change in clothing purchases. These are single-item, self-reported measures and should be interpreted as descriptive indicators rather than validated latent constructs.

4.7 Inferential Analysis and Integrated Interpretation

Spearman rank correlations

Pair of variables	*N*	*Spearman ρ*	*p-value*
Awareness and reported purchase shift	***207***	***0.134***	***0.055***
Influencer consideration and reported purchase shift	***207***	***−0.060***	***0.393***
Price barrier and reported purchase shift	***207***	***0.104***	***0.137***

Availability barrier and reported purchase shift	***207***	***0.048***	***0.493***
Difficulty finding products and reported purchase shift	***207***	***0.189***	***0.006***
Lack of trust and reported purchase shift	***207***	***0.318***	***<0.001***
Greenwashing concern and reported purchase shift	***207***	***0.221***	***0.001***
Willingness to pay more and reported purchase shift	***207***	***0.417***	***<0.001***

Awareness was positively but weakly associated with purchase shift, although the relationship did not meet the conventional 5% significance threshold (ρ = 0.134, p = 0.055). Influencer consideration, price barrier, and availability barrier were not significantly associated with purchase shift. Significant positive associations were observed for difficulty finding products (ρ = 0.189, p = 0.006), lack of trust (ρ = 0.318, p < 0.001), greenwashing concern (ρ = 0.221, p = 0.001), and willingness to pay more (ρ = 0.417, p < 0.001). These results are associations, not causal effects. In particular, the positive correlations involving perceived barriers should not be interpreted to mean that barriers encourage sustainable purchasing; response coding, confounding, and the way respondents interpret the items may affect the direction of these relationships.

Chi-square test of independence

Primary information source	***Low purchase shift***	***Moderate/high purchase shift***
Other sources	***44***	***25***
Social media	***55***	***83***

The Pearson chi-square test showed a statistically significant association between primary information source and purchase-shift category, $\chi^2(1, N = 207) = 9.61$, $p = 0.002$. The minimum expected cell count was 33.0, supporting the use of the Pearson approximation. The observed pattern showed a larger number of moderate/high purchase-shift responses in the social-media group than in the other-source group. This does not establish that social media exposure caused purchasing changes, and the conclusion applies to the categories used in this specific test.

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Exploratory ordinal logistic regression

Predictor	*Coefficient*	*SE*	*p-value*	*Odds ratio (e^β)*
Price barrier	*−0.156*	*0.139*	*0.262*	*0.86*
Availability barrier	*0.040*	*0.175*	*0.817*	*1.04*
Product-search difficulty	*0.133*	*0.155*	*0.390*	*1.14*
Lack of trust	*0.356*	*0.140*	*0.011*	*1.43*
Greenwashing concern	*0.119*	*0.141*	*0.400*	*1.13*
Willingness to pay more	*0.801*	*0.164*	*<0.001*	*2.23*

In the exploratory proportional-odds ordinal logistic regression (N = 207), willingness to pay more and lack of trust were statistically significant predictors of the reported purchase-shift category after adjustment for the other listed variables. The odds ratio for willingness to pay more was 2.23, indicating higher odds of reporting a higher purchase-shift category for a one-unit increase in this response, holding the other predictors constant. Lack of trust had an odds ratio of 1.43. Price, availability, product-search difficulty, and greenwashing concern were not statistically significant in this adjusted model. The positive coefficient for lack of trust is counterintuitive and should be interpreted cautiously; it may reflect response coding, confounding, or item interpretation. The model is exploratory, the proportional-odds assumption was not independently tested, and the estimates do not establish causality.

4.8 Discussion in Relation to the Study Objectives

Objective 1: Assess awareness and attitudes towards sustainable fashion

The findings show moderate self-reported awareness and broadly favourable attitudes, but preferences are often conditional. Although 63.8% said sustainable fashion is preferable or should be preferred whenever possible, the mean reported purchase-shift score was comparatively low at 2.54. The results therefore suggest that awareness and positive evaluations do not automatically lead to changes in purchasing. This is compatible with the Theory of Planned Behaviour as a broad framework for considering attitudes and behaviour, but the present study did not estimate the full model: purchase intention and perceived behavioural control were not directly tested as mediators. Consequently, the observed gap cannot be attributed to a specific TPB pathway. Self-reporting and the use of single-item indicators also limit the strength of conclusions.

Objective 2: Examine social media's role in sustainable fashion attitudes and behaviour

Social media was the primary information source for 66.7% of respondents and fashion trends were frequently reported to encourage additional clothing purchases. Influencer promotion, however, did not produce a uniformly positive response: more than half were neutral about considering sustainable

products promoted by influencers. The chi-square result showed an association between primary information source and purchase-shift category, while the correlation between influencer consideration and purchase shift was not statistically significant. These results are not necessarily contradictory because the analyses assess different aspects of digital influence. They suggest that platform exposure, influencer credibility, content, social conformity, and actual purchase decisions should be distinguished rather than treated as one process.

Objective 3: Evaluate Khadi and handloom as alternatives to fast fashion

Traditional textiles have cultural appeal: 41.5% identified cultural heritage as their main reason for preference, and 54.1% would probably or definitely choose Khadi/handloom if price and availability were equal. Nevertheless, 40.6% said their choice would depend on design and style. This suggests that cultural value can support interest but may not be sufficient to drive routine adoption. Product design, quality, comfort, convenience, affordability, and credible information may be important in making traditional textile**s** practical alternatives. The hypothetical choice item should not be treated as evidence of actual substitution.

Cross-cutting implication: Trust, value and the attitude–behaviour gap

The descriptive results indicate that respondents rated the social benefit of traditional sustainable fashion more highly than their willingness to pay more or their reported purchase shift. Willingness to pay more was the strongest positive correlate of purchase shift in both the bivariate correlation and adjusted regression, while lack of trust was also significant in the adjusted model. However, the positive association involving lack of trust is not straightforward and warrants further investigation rather than a simple claim that distrust encourages sustainable consumption. For businesses, the practical implication is to combine credible and verifiable sustainability claims with accessible prices, suitable product ranges, and contemporary designs. For policymakers and sustainability advocates, awareness initiatives may be more effective when paired with information that enables consumers to evaluate claims and find viable alternatives.

4.9 Limitations and Future Research

The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The sample is concentrated among students and respondents from Tamil Nadu and Kerala, so it should not be treated as nationally representative. The study is cross-sectional and relies on self-reported responses, which may be affected by recall and social-desirability bias. Several concepts were measured using single ordinal items rather than validated multi-item scales. The regression analysis is exploratory, and its proportional-odds assumption was not independently tested. The analyses also do not establish causality or verify purchases through transaction data.

Future research should use a verified and adequately powered sample with broader geographical representation and validated multi-item measures. It should examine purchase intention and perceived behavioural control explicitly, test possible interactions involving price sensitivity, accessibility, trust, and greenwashing concerns, and compare stated preferences with verified purchasing behaviour. Further work could also assess whether sustainability certification, transparent product provenance, pricing approaches, and contemporary Khadi/handloom designs influence consumer choice. These steps would provide a stronger basis for understanding when favourable green attitudes translate into sustained changes in fashion consumption.

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5. Conclusion

This study, Green Attitude to Grey Purchases, examined relationships between sustainable-fashion awareness, consumer attitudes, social media influence, and purchasing behaviour among young Indian consumers. It also explored the potential of traditional Indian textiles, particularly Khadi and handloom, as alternatives to fast fashion, while investigating the roles of willingness-to-pay, price and availability barriers, trust, and greenwashing skepticism. The findings offered an exploratory understanding of why favourable environmental attitudes did not translate into sustainable purchasing decisions.

The results revealed a positive association between awareness and sustainable-fashion attitudes, suggesting that familiarity with sustainability was relevant to how consumers evaluated environmentally responsible clothing. However, attitudes, environmental beliefs, and hypothetical preferences for Khadi and handloom were not significantly associated with self-reported purchase shift. This distinction identified the central issue of this study: support for sustainable fashion did not automatically translate into purchasing behaviour. Although social media was the primary information source for 65% of respondents, neither this classification nor influencer consideration demonstrated a significant association with purchase shift. By contrast, social trends encouraging overbuying were positively associated with reported behavioural change, illustrating the complex relationship between digital influence and consumption. Willingness to pay more was the strongest positive correlate and remained significant in the adjusted regression. Cultural heritage shaped stated preferences for traditional textiles, although hypothetical preference did not establish actual adoption.

Theoretically, the findings reinforced the importance of distinguishing environmental awareness and favourable attitudes from outcomes in sustainable-consumption research. The unexpected positive association between lack of trust and purchase shift illustrated that trust-related relationships needed to be more carefully examined before theoretical conclusions could be established.

For organisations, fashion brands, and policymakers, the findings pointed to the necessity of advancing beyond awareness campaigns. Sustainability communication should be transparent, specific, and verifiable, while sustainable products should combine credible environmental attributes with appealing design, contemporary styling, and cultural relevance. The stated interest in Khadi and handloom presented an opportunity for businesses to connect traditional textile heritage with changing consumer preferences. However, organisations should verify this interest through actual sales and repeat-purchase data rather than relying solely on hypothetical choices. In the post-pandemic consumer environment, where digital platforms were prominent informational channels, marketers should also evaluate whether online engagement translated into purchasing outcomes rather than interpreting visibility or influencer exposure as indicators of behavioural change.

Several aspects limited these conclusions. The analysis used 80 records from the original response worksheet, varied sample sizes across tests, and the sample was geographically uneven and not nationally representative. The cross-sectional design, ordinal self-reported measures, and absence of independently verified transactions restricted generalisability and causality. Future research should use larger, more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, validated measurement scales, and observed purchasing data

Overall, this study contributed to sustainable-fashion research by identifying the distance between favourable attitudes and reported purchasing change as an important empirical question rather than an assumed relationship. By encouraging closer examination of credibility, willingness-to-pay, digital

influence, and traditional textile preferences, it provided a basis for more rigorous research and evidence-based decisions that could help translate sustainability aspirations into meaningful changes in fashion consumption.

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