

# Sustainable Apparel Preferences among Women: A Comparative Analysis of Urban and Rural Environments

Jadhav Pravin. S. <sup>1\*</sup>, Giri Yogeshwari .L <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sanjay Ghodawat University, Kolhapur, Maharashtra, India

DKTE'S Textile & Engineering Institute, Ichalkaranji, Maharashtra, India

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Commerce and Management, Sanjay Ghodawat University, Kolhapur, Maharashtra, India

\*Corresponding Author Email: [psjadhav@dkte.ac.in](mailto:psjadhav@dkte.ac.in)

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 20 Oct 2024	<p>Sustainable fashion is gaining momentum in India, yet its adoption varies across urban and rural women because of variations in awareness, economic capacity, and accessibility. This review examines key factors influencing sustainable apparel choices among women, highlighting urban consumers' higher engagement due to better information access, financial resources, and social influences. Conversely, rural consumers face barriers such as affordability constraints, limited product availability, and lower awareness levels. The study underscores the need for targeted educational campaigns, improved supply chains, and financial incentives to bridge the gap. By addressing these disparities, sustainable fashion can become more accessible and widely adopted across diverse consumer groups. The findings offer valued perceptions for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and researchers seeking to advance sustainability in the apparel sector through strategic interventions. Among urban and rural women due to differences in awareness, economic capacity, and accessibility. This review examines key factors influencing sustainable fashion choices among women, highlighting urban consumers' higher engagement due to better information access, financial resources, and social influences. Conversely, rural consumers face barriers such as affordability constraints, limited product availability, and lower awareness levels. The study underscores the need for targeted educational campaigns, improved supply chains, and financial incentives to bridge the gap. By addressing these disparities, sustainable fashion can become more accessible and widely adopted across diverse consumer groups.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Apparel Preferences, Economic Considerations, Environmental Awareness, Sustainable Fashion, Urban and Rural Comparison.</p>
Revised: 29 Nov 2024	
Accepted: 10 Dec 2024	

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable fashion has developed as a transformative movement in the clothing industry, driven by growing eco-friendly concerns, ethical labor practices, and the push for resource efficiency. With rising consumer awareness and the shift towards eco-friendly materials, the apparel industry is witnessing a gradual transformation. However, the extent of sustainable fashion adoption significantly differs between urban and rural populations due to socio-economic disparities, access to information, and affordability constraints. driven by increasing environmental concerns, ethical labor practices, and the push for resource efficiency. With rising consumer awareness and the shift towards eco-friendly materials, the fashion industry is witnessing a gradual transformation. However, the extent of sustainable fashion adoption significantly differs between urban and rural populations due to socio-economic disparities, access to information, and affordability constraints.

Urban women have greater exposure to sustainable fashion due to digital media, educational campaigns, and an increasing presence of ethical fashion brands. Many urban consumers are motivated by environmental consciousness, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and the influence of social networks. They have access to various sustainable fashion choices through retail stores, designer boutiques, and online platforms, making it easier for them to integrate sustainable practices into their clothing choices. Educational campaigns, and an increasing

presence of ethical fashion brands. Many urban consumers are motivated by environmental consciousness, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and the influence of social networks. They have access to various sustainable fashion choices through retail stores, designer boutiques, and online platforms, making it easier for them to integrate sustainable practices into their clothing choices.

Conversely, rural women face multiple barriers in adopting sustainable fashion. Limited awareness, affordability issues, and restricted access to sustainable clothing options hinder their engagement with eco-friendly apparel. Traditional clothing preferences and socio-cultural norms further influence their purchasing behaviors. Additionally, economic constraints often force rural consumers to prioritize cost-effectiveness over sustainability, making it challenging to adopt environmentally friendly fashion alternatives. Limited awareness, affordability issues, and restricted access to sustainable clothing options hinder their engagement with eco-friendly apparel. Traditional clothing preferences and socio-cultural norms further influence their purchasing behaviors. Additionally, economic constraints often force rural consumers to prioritize cost-effectiveness over sustainability, making it challenging to adopt environmentally friendly fashion alternatives.

Recognizing these distinctions is critical for evolving inclusive strategies that endorse sustainable fashion adoption across diverse consumer groups. Addressing disparities in access, awareness, and affordability through policy interventions, improved supply chains, and targeted awareness campaigns can significantly enhance sustainable fashion engagement among rural populations. By exploring these variations, this study seeks to offer valuable insights into how sustainable fashion can be more efficiently united into the Indian apparel industry, that promote sustainable fashion adoption across diverse consumer groups. Addressing disparities in access, awareness, and affordability through policy interventions, improved supply chains, and targeted awareness campaigns can significantly enhance sustainable fashion engagement among rural populations. By exploring these variations, this study seeks to offer valuable understandings into how sustainable fashion can be more efficiently integrated into the Indian apparel industry.

## **Literature Review**

The research examines sustainable apparel consumption in India, contrasting urban and rural perspectives. It finds that urban consumers are more aware and proactive about sustainable fashion, whereas rural consumers face challenges such as limited access and lower awareness. The study suggests that tailored educational initiatives and marketing strategies could enhance sustainable fashion engagement in rural areas. It highlights significant regional disparities in sustainable consumption practices, providing valuable insights for policymakers and businesses aiming to promote sustainability. [1]

Sustainable fashion adoption in India shows notable differences between urban and rural consumers, particularly among middle-aged women. Urban women are more proactive in adopting sustainable fashion due to greater exposure, access to information, and resources. In contrast, rural women face barriers such as limited access and lower awareness, leading to lower adoption rates. These findings highlight the need for targeted initiatives and tailored strategies to improve sustainable fashion practices in rural areas. The analysis provides valuable insights into how demographic and regional differences influence sustainable fashion behaviors, contributing to a deeper understanding of the factors shaping adoption across various regions. [2, 3]

Sustainable fashion consumption among middle-aged women in urban and rural India reveals significant variations in engagement levels and demographic differences. Urban women show higher adoption of sustainable fashion due to better access to information, resources, and greater awareness. In contrast, rural women face challenges such as limited availability of sustainable options and lower awareness. These findings highlight the need for targeted educational programs and improved resource distribution in rural areas to promote sustainable fashion practices. The analysis offers a detailed understanding of how demographic factors influence sustainable fashion behaviors across different settings. [4, 5]

The research explores the drivers behind sustainable fashion consumption among middle-aged women in India, highlighting factors such as environmental concerns, social awareness, and the availability of sustainable options. Urban women are more driven by environmental and ethical considerations, while rural women face challenges like

limited access and lower awareness. The study suggests that enhancing product availability and raising awareness could boost sustainable fashion adoption in rural areas. Additionally, insights into the evolving dynamics of apparel purchasing behavior emphasize the need for brands to adapt their marketing strategies in response to shifting consumer preferences and external factors. This highlights the fluid relationship between consumers and the marketplace and paves the way for further investigation into how brands can better connect with contemporary shoppers, offering valuable insights into emerging trends in the textile sector. [6, 7]

Socio-demographic factors play a significant role in shaping sustainable fashion preferences in India, particularly income, education, and the contrast between urban and rural residence. Higher income and education levels are strongly linked to a greater preference for sustainable fashion, especially in urban areas, where women have better access to sustainable products and more awareness. In contrast, rural consumers face challenges such as limited availability and lower levels of information, which hinder their adoption of sustainable fashion. A comparative analysis highlights that rural women encounter additional barriers due to these factors. Addressing these obstacles by improving access to sustainable products and implementing targeted educational initiatives could encourage greater adoption of sustainable fashion in rural areas. These findings offer valuable insights into the regional and socio-demographic disparities that influence sustainable fashion practices across India, emphasizing the need for tailored approaches to support sustainability in diverse contexts. [8, 9]

A comparison of urban and rural preferences for sustainable fashion in India reveals that urban consumers demonstrate a stronger preference and greater engagement with sustainable fashion due to better access and higher awareness. In contrast, rural consumers face barriers such as limited product availability and lower levels of information, affecting their adoption of sustainable fashion. The research emphasizes the need for strategies to increase sustainable fashion options and educational initiatives in rural areas to bridge the gap. These findings provide valuable insights into regional disparities influencing sustainable fashion choices and suggest targeted approaches to enhance adoption in less accessible areas. [10, 11]

Attitudes and behaviors towards sustainable fashion in urban and rural India reveal significant regional differences. Urban consumers generally display more positive attitudes and higher engagement with sustainable fashion, benefiting from better access to information, resources, and products. In contrast, rural consumers encounter limitations such as reduced availability and lower levels of awareness, which hinder their sustainable fashion practices. The studies underscore the need for targeted strategies to improve access and raise awareness in rural areas, emphasizing the importance of initiatives designed to enhance sustainable fashion adoption in less accessible regions. These findings offer valuable insights into how regional disparities influence consumer behavior and sustainable fashion practices across India. [12, 13]

Environmental consciousness and socio-economic factors significantly influence sustainable fashion choices among middle-aged women in India. Higher levels of environmental awareness are closely linked to a stronger preference for sustainable fashion, with urban women generally exhibiting greater environmental consciousness and higher engagement with sustainable fashion practices. In contrast, rural women often have lower environmental awareness due to limited exposure and resources. Socio-economic factors such as income, education, and occupation also play a crucial role, with urban women showing higher engagement due to better socio-economic conditions. Rural women, on the other hand, face challenges such as lower income and limited access to sustainable options. The study emphasizes the need for increased environmental education and improved access to sustainable products in rural areas. Additionally, it highlights the importance of customized policies and educational programs to address socio-economic disparities and encourage sustainable fashion practices across diverse socio-economic groups. [14, 15]

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The reviewed studies consistently highlight the disparity between urban and rural women in sustainable fashion adoption. Key factors contributing to these differences include:

### **Environmental Awareness:**

Urban women tend to have greater environmental awareness regarding sustainable fashion due to their exposure to digital media, educational initiatives, and widespread media representation of eco-friendly practices. Social media platforms, online articles, and sustainability campaigns frequently highlight the importance of ethical clothing choices, influencing urban consumers to consider environmental impact when making purchasing decisions. Additionally, many urban women have access to brands that actively promote sustainability, further reinforcing their awareness and engagement with eco-friendly apparel options.

In contrast, rural women often have limited exposure to sustainability-related information, which affects their awareness and engagement with eco-friendly fashion. Restricted internet access, fewer educational initiatives, and a lack of representation in mainstream media contribute to lower familiarity with sustainable clothing choices. Additionally, traditional shopping habits in rural areas prioritize affordability and durability over environmental concerns, making sustainability a less influential factor in purchasing decisions. As a result, while urban consumers are increasingly adopting eco-conscious fashion, rural women may require targeted awareness programs to bridge the information gap.

### **Economic Considerations:**

Economic factors play a significant role in shaping women's apparel choices, particularly when it comes to sustainable fashion. Urban women, with higher disposable incomes, are more likely to invest in eco-friendly clothing despite its premium pricing. They have access to a wide range of sustainable brands, both online and in physical stores, allowing them to explore and choose environmentally responsible options. Additionally, urban consumers may view sustainable fashion as a lifestyle choice or a status symbol, further motivating them to pay a higher price for ethically produced garments.

In contrast, rural women often face budget constraints that limit their ability to prioritize sustainability in their clothing purchases. Practicality and affordability take precedence, as they seek durable, cost-effective apparel that fits their financial conditions. With limited access to sustainable brands and fewer retail options promoting eco-friendly fashion, rural consumers may not see sustainability as a viable or immediate concern. Instead, their purchasing decisions are influenced by economic necessity, making it crucial for brands to introduce affordable and accessible sustainable alternatives to encourage broader adoption.

### **Social Influences:**

Social influences show a vital role in determining women's fashion choices, particularly in urban areas where peer networks and fashion-conscious communities drive the adoption of sustainable fashion. Urban women are frequently exposed to sustainability trends through social media influencers, celebrities, and educational institutions that promote eco-friendly clothing. The growing emphasis on ethical consumerism within urban social circles further encourages women to make environmentally responsible fashion choices. Additionally, urban workplaces and social events often reinforce the appeal of sustainable fashion, making it a desirable and aspirational trend.

In contrast, rural communities prioritize traditional clothing norms, with fewer external influences promoting sustainability in fashion. The emphasis on cultural attire and long-standing purchasing habits means that trends like eco-friendly fashion do not gain as much traction. Additionally, limited exposure to digital media and fashion influencers reduces the impact of sustainability messaging. Since social acceptance in rural areas is often linked to adherence to conventional dress styles, there is less motivation for women to experiment with new, sustainability-focused fashion choices. To bridge this gap, targeted awareness efforts and locally relevant sustainable fashion options are needed.

### **Product Accessibility:**

Product accessibility plays a noteworthy role in determining the adoption of sustainable fashion, with urban consumers enjoying a wider range of choices. In cities, branded stores, exclusive boutiques, and dedicated sustainable fashion outlets provide consumers with various eco-friendly clothing options. Additionally, e-commerce platforms make sustainable fashion easily accessible, allowing urban women to explore and purchase products from a wide

range of brands. The convenience of online shopping, coupled with efficient delivery services, further enhances the availability of sustainable fashion in urban markets.

In contrast, rural areas face significant barriers to accessing sustainable fashion due to inadequate supply chains, a lack of dedicated retail outlets, and logistical challenges. Many rural consumers rely on local markets and general clothing stores, which typically prioritize affordability over sustainability. Limited internet penetration and unreliable delivery services further restrict their access to online sustainable fashion brands. As a result, rural women have fewer opportunities to engage with eco-friendly fashion choices, making it essential for brands and policymakers to improve distribution channels and create affordable, sustainable options tailored to rural markets.

### Policy and Industry Interventions:

Findings suggest that targeted policy measures, such as government subsidies, awareness programs, and financial incentives, could enhance sustainable fashion adoption among rural women. Collaboration between sustainable fashion brands and local retailers could bridge the accessibility gap, while educational initiatives can help increase awareness levels.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Targeted Educational Campaigns:** Targeted educational campaigns can play a key role in increasing awareness of sustainable fashion among rural customers. Implementing workshops and community initiatives in local markets, schools, and self-help groups can help educate women about the environmental and economic benefits of sustainable clothing. Additionally, leveraging digital platforms such as social media, mobile applications, and regional language content can bridge the information gap by making sustainability concepts more accessible. Collaborating with local influencers, NGOs, and government programs can further enhance the reach and effectiveness of these initiatives, ensuring that rural women are equipped with the knowledge and motivation to make eco-friendly fashion choices.

**Subsidized Sustainable Fashion Initiatives:** Subsidized sustainable fashion initiatives can make eco-friendly clothing more accessible to rural consumers by addressing financial barriers. Offering discounts on sustainable apparel, government-backed subsidies, and instalment payment options can help make environmentally responsible fashion a viable choice for budget-conscious shoppers. Collaborations between policymakers, sustainable fashion brands, and local cooperatives can further enhance affordability by reducing production and distribution costs. Additionally, introducing schemes such as buy-back programs, exchange offers, and microfinance support can encourage rural women to adopt sustainable clothing while ensuring long-term affordability and accessibility.

**Improved Supply Chains:** Improving supply chains is essential to expanding the availability of sustainable fashion in rural areas. Collaborating with local artisans and small businesses can help create a decentralized production model, making eco-friendly clothing more accessible and affordable. Strengthening distribution networks through partnerships with online platforms and regional marketplaces can bridge the gap between rural consumers and sustainable brands. Additionally, investing in logistics infrastructure, such as efficient transportation and digital payment systems, can streamline the supply process and ensure timely delivery of sustainable products. By integrating local production with broader retail networks, sustainable fashion can become a more viable option for rural consumers.

**Incentives for Sustainable Choices** Incentivizing sustainable choices is a crucial strategy for promoting responsible consumer behavior in the apparel industry. Reward programs, such as discounts or loyalty points for purchasing sustainable clothing, can encourage repeat purchases and long-term engagement. Buy-back initiatives, where brands offer store credits or discounts in exchange for returning used garments for recycling or resale, help reduce textile waste and promote circular fashion. Additionally, eco-friendly certifications and labeling can enhance consumer trust by providing transparency about sustainable materials and ethical production processes. By integrating these incentives, brands can create a more conscious consumer base while contributing to environmental sustainability.

**Enhanced Brand Communication:** Enhanced brand communication is key to making sustainable fashion more relatable and accessible to rural consumers. Using vernacular languages in advertisements, product descriptions, and



marketing materials ensures that sustainability messages resonate with local communities. Rural radio stations and television campaigns can serve as powerful tools to spread awareness, as they reach a wide audience, including those with limited internet access. Collaborating with local influencers, community leaders, and self-help groups can further strengthen outreach by fostering trust and encouraging engagement. By adopting culturally relevant storytelling and relatable messaging, brands can effectively promote sustainable fashion and drive consumer interest in rural areas.

### **LIMITATIONS**

This study has several limitations, including the broad categorization of urban and rural populations, which overlooks internal diversity in economic conditions, education, and cultural influences. The study also generalizes sustainable fashion preferences without accounting for regional variations in traditional clothing, climate, and local economies. Additionally, while it highlights consumer interest, it does not fully examine whether awareness translates into actual purchasing behavior. The impact of policy interventions, digital barriers, and long-term adoption patterns remains underexplored, and feasibility concerns regarding supply chain improvements are not addressed.

### **FUTURE SCOPE**

Future research on sustainable fashion can explore region-specific factors influencing adoption, considering cultural, economic, and climatic variations. A deeper analysis of government policies, digital platforms, and e-commerce accessibility in rural areas could provide insights into improving sustainable fashion outreach. Longitudinal studies can examine whether awareness translates into sustained behavioral change. Additionally, collaborations between brands, policymakers, and local artisans could be explored to create affordable, eco-friendly clothing options for rural consumers. The role of social influencers, media campaigns, and financial incentives in promoting sustainable fashion adoption also presents opportunities for further investigation. Lastly, integrating sustainability education into mainstream curricula can foster eco-conscious shopping habits from an early age.

### **CONCLUSION**

The comparative study of sustainable fashion preferences among urban and rural women highlights the significant disparities in awareness, economic capacity, social influences, and product accessibility that shape their adoption of eco-friendly apparel. Urban women, benefiting from greater exposure to digital media, educational initiatives, and higher disposable incomes, demonstrate a stronger inclination toward sustainable fashion choices. In contrast, rural women face challenges such as limited awareness, affordability constraints, and limited access to sustainable products, making it difficult for them to engage with sustainability-driven fashion.

To bridge this gap, targeted interventions are necessary. Educational campaigns tailored to rural communities can enhance awareness and encourage sustainable choices, while financial incentives such as subsidies and instalment payment options can make sustainable fashion more affordable. Strengthening supply chains by integrating local artisans and expanding distribution networks will improve accessibility in rural areas. Additionally, effective brand communication strategies using vernacular languages and traditional media platforms can ensure that sustainability messages resonate with rural consumers. By addressing these disparities through policy support, industry collaboration, and consumer education, sustainable fashion can become a more inclusive movement, contributing to environmental conservation while catering to diverse socio-economic segments.

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