

Sustainability Fatigue in Fashion: Causes, Consequences, and Industry Challenges”

Author: Bhumika waykos

Co-author : 1.Siddhi Adhav 2. Ritika Tehalyani 3. Aakanksha Payghan B.voc Fashion Technology Student.

**Guided by : Dr. Deepali Joshi.
Fergusson College, Pune.**

ABSTRACT

Every second, the fashion world sends about one garbage truck of textiles waste to landfill or to be burned. Across the world, this adds up fast and the industry ranks among the biggest source of pollution. They go for cheaper fast fashion because it costs less and it is simple to grab. This shows a pattern that feels strange. Even while people talk about the planet, cheap clothes that get worn for a short time still sell more and more.

As of 2026, the fashion world shows signs of “sustainability fatigue “. Efforts to shift toward cleaner choices are losing speed. Part of the issue is the rapid rise of ultra- fast fashion . Another factor is the high price of the items made with more sustainable methods. At the same time buyers have less trust now they blame greenwashing for that. These factors help explain the value action gap. People say they care about ethical fashion. Yet they do not turn that view into buying choices. Also the sector runs into big problems some are high costs of greener materials. Other are limited recycling systems for used clothes , on top of that the supply chains are harder to manage. They make it hard to stop using the usual pattern of take, make, and throw away. This study checks why sustainability fatigue shows up. It also looks at the effects and what the fashion world may face next. It does not point to a lack of concern in people. It suggests the issue sits in the fashion system itself. The system still rewards fast output, low prices, and easy buying. It also pushes for higher profits. Those choices come first, before any steady care for the environment.

Keywords: Sustainability Fatigue, Ultra-Fast Fashion, Greenwashing, Value-Action Gap, Consumer Apathy, Linear Economy.

INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry for years talked about going green, it put recycled tags on store displays and made big claims about being ethical. By 2026 that early push seems to stall it looks like sustainability fatigue is growing , everyone feels drained now shoppers are worn out from the chase brands are also tired of racing to stay ahead. this is not really about people losing interest in the planet it is more like the current system sets things up so “going green” feels so hard and too costly it can feel like you are climbing the uphill the whole time. People pull in two directions, on one side there is fast fashion which feels hard to quit , on the other side there is trust gap. It grows when brands make green claims that do not hold up. Prices keep climbing , a lot of people feel stuck, they look at the money in their bank account first. Then they buy a cheap 300 rupee T-shirt , They still do it even when it does not fit their stated values. In the end they skip choices that are more sustainable. Some people call this the “value-action gap.” This paper looks at why it happens and what comes after. It tries to explain why sustainability can start to feel out of reach. Today many people live in a world that moves as quickly as the algorithm. In that kind of world, sustainability can feel like a risk. But the industry should not keep treating it like one. During a fast shift, the word “sustainability” showed up everywhere in clothing. Almost every label claimed it would use recycled plastic and waste less water. or treat workers more fairly , for a short time it looked like the business might be moving in a better direction. but by 2026 the thrill has started to fade people expected a green push yet now many call it sustainability fatigue. Sustainability fatigue is really just a burnout people are worn out by constant advice about what to buy companies also feels worn down by the prices of trying to be green . Even so lots of used clothing keeps piling up in landfill and waste does not slow down . sustainability is not dying because of folks lost interest . It is struggling because the setup makes it hard and costly to keep going.

There are three main reasons for this decline.

"Ultra-Fast Fashion"—Apps that drop thousands of low priced looks weekly have made it harder for slower ethical brands to keep up.

massive trust gap – A lot of brands say that they are green at the same time they keep making more clothes than before, after a while shoppers stop trusting those tags.

the price problem – lately prices keeps climbing a lot of shoppers feel stuck they think they must pick between the money in their bank account and what they feel is right.

This paper studies why the so called green fashion efforts are fading. It also covers why this shift may mean go everyday clothing choices. It talks about the stress that makes people chase one new style after another. It also looks at what occurs when recycling plants do not deliver on the promises they make. the point is not limited to the company. The paper looks at the wider industry and why it has trouble holding onto eco goals.

Background

Fashion moves quickly, People see new looks often because trend shifts fast and clothing is made in large amount. ultra fast fashion also plays a role. Because of that, many items cost less and are easier to buy. At the same time, the downsides are more clearer now. more waste piles up from textile, pollution rises, resources gets used in excess. stores also sell that leads to Overproduction. Because of these issues, sustainability is now a big topic. some brands use recycled material materials order push for ethical sourcing many talk about circular fashion they also change how they make clothes with more careful production methods.

On its own, the Constant talk about sustainability can backfire ,some people feel tired of it Green washing claims add to the doubt. When the price of the better options feels so high many buyers also does not know what choices are truly sustainable. The whole mix can create what people called sustainability fatigue. consumer and other stakeholder May end up willing less to act. This is also a value versus Action gap, many shopper, say they care about sustainable fashion but they still buy low price items that wear out fast. So the buying habits do not match the stated value. In the fashion industry, the barrier is still there Costs are often higher recycling systems may be limited on top of That brands feel pressure to keep up with competitors.because of these forces making real change is hard ,figuring out these problems and causes matter. It helps sustainability in Fashion, more workable, it also supports trust and make progress feel possible.

Methodology

I use descriptive method to look into sustainability fatigue in fashion sector, I focused on what drives it what it leads to and what problem it creates for customers and fashion brands. to do this, I gathered secondary materials The sources includes research papers, Journal Articles, Industry reports ,News pieces and other dependable online sources. these materials Cover topics like sustainable fashion ,ultra fast fashion , greenwashing ,consumer behaviour and textile waste.

We look through the data to find repeated patterns behind sustainability fatigue. several things showed up again and again like higher prices, too many sustainability claims, weak trust from shoppers, and the mismatch between what people say they want and what they actually buy. The study also tracks what these issues do to consumers and to the fashion industry it then lists why these efforts could became more workable and more useful in real life .

Objectives of the Research

Sustainability fatigue in fashion needs clear explanation. First, the idea should be outlined in simple terms.

Next, the key causes must be named.

These include greenwashing, too much information, and the mismatch between what people say and what they do.

Then, the role of fast fashion should be looked at.

Overconsumption also needs attention, since it adds to the strain on sustainability. After that, the effect of sustainability messages on shoppers should be checked.

This means looking at awareness, trust, and actual choices. You also need to review real fashion industry examples.

Focus should be on sustainability claims and the confusion they can create. Finally, practical steps should be suggested for brands.

The goal is to cut down sustainability fatigue with clearer messages and more responsible actions.

Literature Review

Fashion sustainability “fatigue” links to how shoppers act and what they feel about it. Researchers also point to a gap between what people say and what they do. Other factors show up too, like greenwashing and the habit of buying too much. There are also practical blockers that make greener choices harder.

Work on sustainability fatigue is still growing. Even so, past studies already offer useful clues. They help explain why some

consumers and people in the industry start to feel worn out. They may become more doubtful over time. They may also lose interest in sustainability.

1. **Busalim, Fox, and Lynn (2022)** carried out a systematic review on how consumers behave in relation to sustainable fashion. They looked at 88 studies. Their results show that work on sustainable fashion has grown a lot. Even so, a clear gap remains. Many people say they care about sustainability, but their shopping choices do not always match that view.

The review also points to missing types of studies. The authors mention fewer qualitative projects, fewer long term studies, fewer experiments, and fewer studies that compare cultures. This gap matters for sustainability fatigue. When people keep hearing the same sustainability message, it does not always lead to buying in ways that reduce harm.

2. **Dangelico, Alvino and Fraccascia (2022)** I looked at what shapes Italian shoppers' plans to buy eco friendly clothes. The results pointed to two key drivers. People who care more about the environment showed stronger buy plans. Shoppers who saw extra worth in sustainable items were also more likely to buy. They also reported a higher willingness to pay more.

Still, the picture was not the same for everything. The role of past experience and personal background changed with the kind of eco material being studied. Because of that, raising awareness alone might not move sales. Buyers also need to feel that these clothes are worth the higher cost.

3. **Vesterinen and Syrjälä (2022)** I checked 58 studies about ways to cut down on clothing waste. The authors say going green is not only about buying eco-friendly items. They argue that fewer impulse buys and fewer throwaways matter a lot. Keeping clothes in use for longer also helps slow the whole fashion churn.

This point is useful for people who feel tired by sustainability messages. The work implies that outreach should stress everyday actions. Instead of urging shoppers to keep buying new "green" clothes, it should highlight using what they already have.

4. **Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico (2024)** I checked 217 studies about sustainable buying habits in fashion. Across the papers, several problems showed up again and again. People often said they did not know enough. Prices were also a common issue. Some items were not easy to find. Social pressure mattered too. Many people also found it hard to change routines they had already built. The review pointed out other gaps as well. Some consumers did not understand how to care for clothes. Others were unsure about how long garments can last. A few did not realize what happens to the environment when clothes are washed too often.

Taken together, these barriers help explain why knowing about sustainability does not always lead to real daily choices.

5. **Suneja and Aastha (2025)** We reviewed 126 journal papers from 2006 to 2024 about buying habits in sustainable fashion. The authors noted that a clear gap keeps showing up between what people say they will do and what they actually do. They also looked across other studies at the theories used, the setting of each study, the traits of the shoppers, and how people make choices. Overall, the review suggests that simply having awareness or an intention does not ensure real sustainable buying. (IDEAS/RePEC)

6. **A 2026 study on sustainable apparel consumption in India** We spoke with 603 people in six major Indian cities. The goal was to see where awareness about sustainability stops and buying behavior starts. The results showed that people who care about the environment tend to plan to buy sustainable items. It also helped when they held favorable views and when they felt social pressure or support from others. In other words, attitudes and norms mattered. But there were also clear hurdles. Some participants did not know much about environmental issues. Others believed that sustainable products are not stylish or fashionable enough. Those views reduced their willingness to purchase.

This matters for the current study. It suggests that the sustainability gap is also present in India's fashion space.

Across the studies, sustainable fashion seems to depend on many things at once. People's views matter, but so do costs, how buyers judge value, what they know, and what their circle says. Buying routines also play a role, along with trust in brands.

More than once, the papers point out the same mismatch. Many shoppers say they care about sustainability, yet their choices do not always match that belief. Still, there is not much work that looks at this issue in a direct way under the label of "sustainability fatigue."

This study is meant to link the earlier points. It looks at whether constant sustainability claims, greenwashing, higher prices, confusion among buyers, and wider problems in the industry can add up and lead to sustainability fatigue in fashion.

Case study

Case Study 1: SHEIN and “green” statements Company: SHEIN

Industry: ultra-fast fashion Year: 2024

Sources: SHEIN Group, Italian Competition Authority, Reuters SHEIN is known for low prices and quick fashion changes. The shop adds many new items. The company also points to sustainability work. It mentions recycled materials, textile recycling, and the SHEIN Exchange resale program. In 2024, the Italian Competition Authority checked some of SHEIN’s environmental claims. The goal was to see if parts of the message were unclear or could be viewed as misleading.

The key point here is the link between what SHEIN said and the steps it claimed to take for sustainability. This situation shows a clash between green claims and the real life of a very fast fashion business. When the details are not easy to check, customers can end up unsure. That uncertainty may add to “sustainability fatigue” and make people trust the brand less.

Case Study 2: H&M and Green Claims Company: H&M Group

Author: Gül Kaner Year: 2021

Source: Palgrave Macmillan and Springer

Gül Kaner examines the way H&M presents sustainability. The work notes that it can be tough for shoppers to understand what these claims mean. H&M lists actions related to recycled textiles, lower emissions, and circular clothing. The paper also highlights a main problem. Words such as “sustainable,” “recycled,” and “responsibly sourced” do not always land with the same meaning for each person. That can create doubt for customers.

Relevance: This case points to a key risk. When sustainability terms are used a lot, or in repeated ways, people may feel unsure. Over time, that can turn into fatigue and stronger scepticism.

Analysis of the Case Studies

Both examples show the same issue. A lot of shoppers have trouble with sustainability claims. They cannot always tell what is real and what is just marketing. SHEIN has taken heat for how it describes eco impacts in its fast fashion model. H&M also gets called out for how it handles sustainability messages. Some people say the explanations are not easy to follow. If the claims are confusing, shoppers may question them. They might also grow worn out by the whole topic.

A big issue is that it can be tough to read the claims and then check them. Terms like “sustainable,” “recycled,” and “responsible” often sound nice at first. But they do not always tell the whole story about what a product does for the environment. This links to what some call sustainability fatigue. It shows up when people keep running into similar promises. Even after repeated ads or labels, they may not be able to confirm what they mean. They also may not trust the claims enough to use them in a purchase. Still, these examples do not show that one company, by itself, creates that fatigue.

Overall Analysis

The results point to sustainability fatigue having more than one cause. It does not look like one issue drives it all. Instead, the pattern fits what shoppers do, what brands say about sustainability, and how the fashion system is organized. Even if people care, they might still choose fast fashion. That choice can happen when prices feel cheaper, stores and apps make buying simple, new trends show up fast, and there are plenty of options to grab right away.

Some brand claims can backfire. When the wording is too general, people get suspicious.

If it sounds like greenwashing, trust slips fast. There is also the issue of how much sustainability talk shows up. Shoppers may feel they cannot tell what is true. On top of that, when goods are made and purchased at huge volume, one choice by a single person matters less.

Tackling sustainability fatigue is not just about telling people more. Fashion companies need to say things in a clearer way, with evidence that holds up. They should also put effort into real changes, like cutting overproduction, trimming waste, making items last longer, and doing more to close the loop.

Conclusion

BBC research says “sustainability fatigue” shows up in the way people shop. It also affects what brands say to customers. The report adds that the fashion business itself plays a role too. It points to a few clear causes. Some buyers think one thing but do another. Some brands use “green” claims that do not hold up. People may feel worn out when there is too much information to sort through. Fast

fashion also pushes shoppers toward quick, cheap choices.

The research on SHEIN and H&M points to something less simple than “good brand” versus “bad brand.” It shows that the same type of brand can show both better steps and clear sustainability issues. In these cases, the authors stress that communication matters, that honesty and openness matter too, and that any promise should also include outcomes people can verify.

The paper says that more knowledge alone will not solve it. Shoppers still need facts they can trust. They also need choices that fit normal buying routines. Fashion companies have to move past feel-good sustainability lines. They should cut down on too much making. They should also reduce waste and limit how much material they use. If sustainability fatigue is going to truly ease, the industry needs to do more than say the right things. It should share clearer details and follow safer practices. It also needs a consistent shift to a system where clothes stay in use for longer.

References

Boechat, A. C., Minelli, L., & Morais, R. (2026). Navigating greenwashing: The communication strategies of H&M Group and Inditex. *Journal of Asia Business Studies*, 14, 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JABS-09-2025-0593>

European Commission. (2023). Green claims. European Commission.

European Commission. (2021). Screening of websites for “greenwashing”. European Commission.

H&M Group. (2025). Annual and sustainability report 2024. H&M Group.

Kaner, G. (2021). Greenwashing: How difficult it is to be transparent to the consumer. H&M case study. University of Portsmouth.

SHEIN Group. (2025). SHEIN’s 2024 sustainability and social impact report. SHEIN Group.

SHEIN Group. (2024). 2023 sustainability and social impact report. SHEIN Group.

United Nations Environment Programme. (2025). Unsustainable fashion and textiles: Focus of International Day of Zero Waste 2025. UNEP.

Unraveling green marketing and greenwashing: A systematic review in the context of the fashion and textiles industry. (2024). *Sustainability*, 16(7), 2738.

Greenwashing in fast fashion: A critical analysis of SHEIN’s evoluSHEIN campaign. (2025). *Makna: Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi, Bahasa, dan Budaya*, 17(2).

Copyright & License:

© Authors retain the copyright of this article. This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), permitting unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.