

## The New Narrative of Green Women Influencers

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### Abstract

Sustainability and circular fashion carry a lot of potential to bring about positive change in society at large so that planet earth can recover from the demands placed upon it for resources. In achieving the goal of circularity in the fashion industry, many committed women influencers are leveraging social media as a platform to influence people and educate them on how we can minimise the human footprints on the environment while adopting sustainable ways of producing and retailing fashion.

**Keywords:** *sustainability, circular fashion, social media, women influencers.*

### Introduction :

Amidst the environmental crisis, human society is searching for alternative ways to satisfy human needs while minimising the exploitation of natural resources. With growing awareness of the environmental crisis, the greater focus on life and the environment is pushing us towards achieving ecological integrity. At this juncture the aim to achieve a carbon-neutral fashion industry is vital. This aim is achievable only if we change our habits in terms of our fashion consumption. To change this habit of chasing fast fashion trends many influencers on different social media platforms are creating content which are directly or indirectly creating awareness on sustainable fashion. In this regard, it won't be wrong to say that women influencers are taking the leap of hope towards circular fashion. Therefore in the present paper, an attempt has been made to discuss the issue of sustainable fashion and how women influencers are positively engaged in bringing change to our fashion consumption with different sustainable-fashion ideas.

### Objective:

1. The main objective of this study is to analyse various ways in which sustainable fashion influencers can be termed green influencers.
2. This paper aims at analysing the usefulness of sustainable fashion goals.

3. The focus of this study is to discuss different ways to adapt sustainable fashion choices that can eventually minimise the impact on the environment.
4. The focus will also be on understanding how different women influencers are working on different paradigms of circular fashion.
5. Lastly, it would be apt to say that the present paper is going to highlight the essential link between sustainable fashion and a sustainable environment.

### Methodology:

An analytical method has been adopted for this study. Apart from the analytical method, A qualitative approach to research is followed to understand the use of the term sustainable fashion. Along with this a quantitative approach is also been used while collecting data on different sustainable influencers from Instagram.

### Discussion:

#### Sustainable fashion:

Our environment is deteriorating every single day. Nowadays we use terms like global warming, air, water and soil pollution frequently. Concern related to water scarcity is now a daily reality. These terms related to environmental problems have become a part of our daily language making us more aware of our planet and its alarming situation. We have become more conscious about our role in protecting and preserving nature and limited natural resources. We have started opting for alternative ways in our lives to help combat the damage already made. Through alternatives like using biodegradable bags instead of plastic bags, reducing food waste, saving water, using green energy, etc. we are trying to invest in the greater role of protecting the planet. In this backdrop, we still haven't taken our clothes as seriously. We haven't asked enough if our clothes and environment are in any way related. Are we polluting the environment every time we buy new clothing? Do we care about what happens to our old clothes once we throw them into the dustbin? Now the answer would be a bit scary because the consciousness of this aspect of environmental pollution is slowly affecting people. In the blog post-*Sustainable Fashion Transformation: Recycling and Reuse*, published by the Admin, Sgt Group, the extent of the pollution done by the apparel industry is clearly described:

*August 1 has marked 2018 Earth Overshoot Day when humanity has consumed the entire year's worth of the planet's natural resources. From now on we will be exploiting the earth's savings borrowed from the next year, depleting an equivalent of 1.7 annual earth's capacity to replenish the natural resources and sequester carbon. On a global average, one person buys 5kg of clothes per year, with up to 16kg bought in Europe and the USA. The clothing and textile industry annually emits a total of 1.7*

billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, a significant factor triggering global climate change. This is large because 63% percent of textile fibres are derived from petrochemicals, while other 37% is dominated by cotton (24%) that demands extensive amounts of water and intensive use of pesticides. Textile production requires nearly 79 billion cubic meters of water for growing raw materials and wet processing, causing large-scale pollution with toxic chemicals that severely damage the water basins, biodiversity, and soil. The industry generates 2.1 billion tonnes of waste in the form of disposed clothing and off-cuts each year, yet only 20% of it is collected for reuse or recycling. (SgT)

The above quoted lines are enough to highlight the environmental pollution generated by the fashion industry. If we focus on this whole process at a micro level we find that it takes 2700 liters of water to make one cotton t-shirt which is equivalent to the amount of water a person drinks in two years. (National Geographic) . Here we need to know another fact which is very relevant - “ of the 100 billion garments produced each year , 92 million tons end up in landfills” ( Iginini) . If half of these tossed out clothes are of synthetic fiber we can never imagine them decomposing. Along with this the journey of clothes from where the raw materials are purchased and the factory where it is manufactured contribute a lot to the pollution of the environment. Thus, data on pollution done by the fashion industry may scare anyone. But can we stop wearing clothes? Absolutely not. Now what can we do? Here, the most viable answer would be ‘Sustainable fashion’. Understanding Sustainable fashion and more awareness on its implications can change the present scenario to a large extent. By referring to sustainable fashion we are talking about those clothes which are made of eco-friendly fibers and not from synthetic fibers like polyester, nylon, and so on. For sustainable clothes, fibers are extracted from natural resources like wood pulp, banana, jute, hemp and even pineapples. These clothes can decompose in a shorter span of time. Brands like Levi’s, Espirit, AND have shifted towards sustainability in terms of their products. Companies like Eco Vero have started making clothes from wood pulp which is eco-friendly and thus will have less strain on the environment (Assoune). But there are many floating ideas regarding Sustainable fashion and our common understanding of the term. Such an effort to understand the impact of sustainable fashion was done by KPMG, China. In the forward of the Fashion Summit supported by KPMG China and sponsored by HSBC we are given an idea of how and to what extent the idea of sustainable fashion works through a survey. The forward began with the following lines:

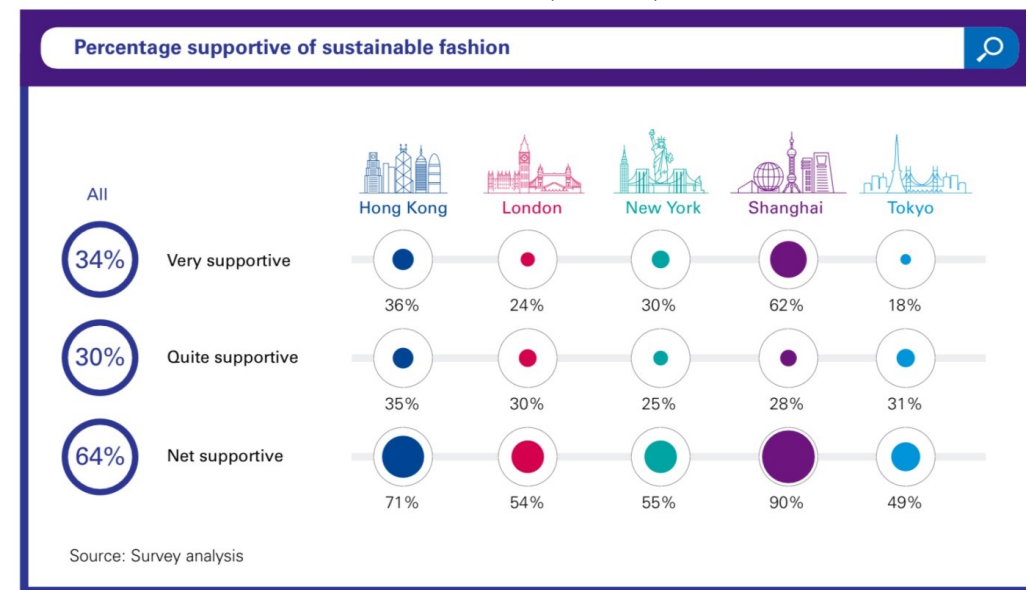
*“Are global consumers ready to embrace sustainable fashion? The key goal of this survey – which was commissioned by Fashion Summit, sponsored by HSBC and supported by KPMG China – was to explore the current understanding of*

sustainable fashion and what could help encourage responsible buying behaviour.

*The survey, which was carried out in Hong Kong, London, New York, Shanghai and Tokyo, with at least 1,000 people polled in each city, collected views on people’s definition of ‘sustainable fashion’, their support for it, their willingness to pay for it, and their ideas on possible measures the fashion industry should adopt to promote sustainability.”(kwok 2 )*

After the survey done by the summit the result is presented through the following table

Table No. : 2 (Kwok 5)



**Social media influencers:**

Now a days business model for business firms have changed their paradigm. From big to small business houses are investing in social media influencers to promote their products. It is only because social media platforms are providing space for different types of content for its users that business houses can’t ignore their importance and impact. These floating contents on the Internet have enough potential to attract new consumers and thus its influence is hitting high with influencers creating valuable content. In this regard, Seda Yildirim points out that there are three types of influencers. Yildirim has recognised these three types and positioned them in a table which is mentioned below :

<i>“Types</i>	<i>Who are they?</i>	<i>The power</i>
<i>The celebs.</i>	<i>Celebrities.</i>	<i>Celebrities are main players in influencer marketing. As having the highest number of followers they have the biggest share in the market.</i>
<i>The Execs</i>	<i>Experts and Professionals</i>	<i>Experts and professionals are important social media professionals influencers with having higher number of followers</i>
<i>The everyday.</i>	<i>Social media users</i>	<i>Social media users can be used for social influencers as they have followers with 500-10000”</i>

(Yildirim, 13)

All the above mentioned types of influencers are equally responsible for only one purpose and that is influencing. The whole process of influencing claims a much larger share on different social media platforms. In such a scenario when we talk about sustainable fashion and its implications on the environment we cannot neglect the impact of these influencers on the conscience of the general public. In fact, Social media influencers are playing a crucial role in setting the trend, and changing marketing strategies. In the research done by Julia Lidgren and Mikaela Major, respondents have rightly argued that “*social media influencers could encourage sustainable fashion consumption by sharing content-regarding how, where and what to purchase. .... Respondents claimed that influencers are in the position to drive sustainable fashion consumption by spreading awareness and providing practical examples on how to behave*” (Lidgren 22)

Now if we narrow down our area of concentration on women Influencers and sustainable fashion then the reading will be on how and in which way are they influencing to bring a positive change in the world of fashion with their take on circularity of fashion and its need to protect the environment. For the current study we will be focusing on 10 women Influencers to track down their journey on sustainability and fashion. These women Influencers (Instagram) are randomly selected for the present study depending on all the three categories

mentioned above. A list of these sustainable women fashion influencers active on Instagram are given below:

1. Aparna @stylishsuitcase : her Instagram bio says she is interested in slow fashion, here she writes her sustainable travel tales. She is a practitioner of plant based diet. She is here to explore ideas towards creating a circular economy.  
Followers : 23.6k
2. Sandra @windsorburylane: Sandra says she follows a “style and a life where slow, seasonal and conscious living are at the root.”  
Followers : 3914
3. Neha Sharma @stylewali is a stylist who supports local and ethnic wear.  
Followers: 155k
4. Jenna @ironicminimalisther insta bio says that she is the slow fashion stylist. Followers: 5743
5. Adity Mayer @aditimayer she is an explorer of style, sustainability and social justice.  
Followers: 68.9 k
6. Sanjana Rishi @sanjrishi explains herself as an attorney at large. Her Insta handle says she is “Advocating sustainability in fashion, the Indian way”  
Followers: 112k
7. Jennifer Nini @ecowarriorprinces she explains herself as a warrior. A follower of sustainability and slow fashion.  
Followers: 50.1k
8. Leah @unmaterialgirl she introduces herself as a former fast fashion addict turned slow fashion activist  
Followers: 17.8 k
9. Alyssa @msbeltempo is encouraging creativity instead of consumption while giving goals on sustainable styling.  
Followers: 55.3k
10. Tanishka Mishra @tanishkamishra is helping us “ build a conscious wardrobe, style sustainably and become a mindful consumer”  
Followers: 1676

These influencers like many others have definitely influenced the buying habits of their followers. As influencers create a community around themselves , which often move around the same preferences of life they may provide us with a lot of inputs on how the community grows. The question on how people come together and join a purpose can create knowledge on the prospects of developing sustainable fashion habits through influencers. In this regard we may definitely point out that the purchase intent in social media is effected by many factors. Ellinor Bertilsson and Laura Van Alphen has rightly pointed out in their master

thesis *FROM FAST TO SLOW: CAN INFLUENCERS MAKE US SHOP MORE SUSTAINABLY* “Additionally, there are a lot more factors that affect purchase intent when it comes to social media influencers. Trust, number of followers, and similar values are a few other factors that also impact purchase intent” ( Bertilsson and Van Alphen 42). As of now we need to shift our attention from purchase intent to the women influencers to reflect on those aspects which ultimately make them green influencers. In the above mentioned list of influencers, a brief note on their Instagram bio has been added to provide a glimpse of their interest and work. But to know the different layers of sustainable fashion we are in need of concentrating on their body of work which is visible on their social media pages. While carrying on with the intention of understanding slow fashion through the lens of women influencers there might be a question lingering at the forefront of this study, which is – why women Influencers? Now the answer to this question lies in another question: Who are the targeted consumers of fast fashion? There are many surveys done to deal with this issue and to answer the above question. In most of the surveys it is seen that women are the targeted consumers for many fast fashion brands as women spend more on clothes than man. Therefore in an article “Would more women in fashion power positions mean more female consumers ?” in *Forbes*, Pamela N Danziger has rightly pointed out, “*Women make up half of the population, spend three times more on clothing than men, and at least in the women’s fashion segment, account for virtually 100% of customers*”(Danziger). If this is the truth then there can’t be any more valid reason for taking up female influencers who can reasonably influence females with their own experience of shopping. When influencers can relate with the behavioural differences in women in terms of shopping then it becomes easy to think about ways and methods of influencing them in shifting their attention from fast fashion to slow fashion. Here it will be wrong to say that women influencers can only influence women as they are equally capable of influencing everyone irrespective of gender differences. Here the reference to women as targeted consumers is taken up so that the points of sustainability and slow fashion issues can be discussed for a larger group of people.

In a country where *khadi* became a symbol of freedom, fashion and clothing were always near to nature. India as a country has always seen its people draped in hand spun clothes from natural fabrics which is bio degradable in nature. In India, cotton, *khadi*, *silk*, *eri*, and *Muga* are used as fabric for our clothes from time immemorial but with modernization, and industrialization mass production of machine-made synthetic and polyester clothes began, while changing our buying habits along with our surroundings. These clothes with a lesser life span in terms of fashion end up in landfills, polluting the earth forever, as they take thousands of years to decompose. Now this has become a world phenomenon and a deadly disease for the Mother Earth. The fast fashion industry want us to keep buying more but we need a fashion industry which is slow and keeps our buying habit in check. Here the agenda is to buy less and use more. In this scenario influencers can really be important in suggesting some

green measures. These green measures are enumerated below:

#### **Ways of Green influencing:**

##### **Handloom enthusiasm:**

To deal with all the aspects of pollution created by fast fashion the above listed influencers usually create different contents. In most of these contents one or the other aspects of sustainable fashion gets highlighted. Different influencers work differently and thus they create contents differently.

Some influencers try to work on sustainability while promoting indigenous and handwoven clothes. These influencers highlight their journey of sustainable and slow fashion through their concern for weavers and hand spun clothes which are made mostly with natural, breathable and biodegradable thread. For example, Neha Sharma @the\_stylewali is an influencer of this category. She promotes ethnic wear and supports local weavers. In her posts she is seen flaunting different silks and natural fabrics used for weaving sarees which is an ethnic traditional Indian wear. In such influencing the main intention of the influencer is to bring her followers closer to the knowledge of ecofriendly fabrics which in the long run will have lesser strain on environment. On the other hand, they propagate the need of acknowledging the work of local weavers. By doing so they try to influence people in avoiding machine-made products which definitely carries more carbon footprint.

##### **Styling:**

Some other influencers promote styling tips and by doing so they slow down the urge of buying new clothes. Styling old clothes give new life to them. Styling is thus a sustainable way of keeping away clothes from reaching dumping zone soon. It definitely slowdown the journey of a cloth from production to the landfills. In other words styling provides more life to a particular cloth. It may thus be taken as a better way of using clothes while providing option against fast fashion. Influencers like Jenna @ironicminimalist, Sandra @windsorburylane, Adity Mayer @aditimayer and many others are example of those influencers who are committed to sustainable influencing through styling. Re-wearing and restyling clothes are the mantra of their influencing.

##### **Circularity of fashion:**

Many women influencers are those who talk about circularity of fashion in their space. The circularity of fashion and the content made around it made these influencers capable in spreading awareness on sustainability and fashion. The idea of circularity in fashion is not new but it’s awareness is very low. Thus, women influencers who are growing awareness on this are doing a lot on different aspects of circularity in fashion to make the idea popular. Some of the most important ideas which can bring our fashion to circularity are Thrift, swap, mend, upcycle, reuse, etc. Suggesting many of these methods Aparna @stylishsuitcase writes

in the Instagram post published on 2nd May /2022,

“My focus is to rescue and save what already exists on the planet than give my money to brands mass producing from fossil fuel based fabrics and exploiting labour, particularly women in the global south..... when buying new, I support weaving communities or brands empowering weavers or using futuristic and regenerative fibers which are sustainable.” (Aparna Mishra) Along with this, she has again said “The most sustainable fashion is fashion you already own”(Aparna Mishra)

### **Thrifting:**

To bring circularity and sustainability in fashion, thrifting is the best option. It is one of those major ways in which we can bring clothes closer to the idea of sustainability. In thrifting, emphasis is given on accepting old clothes from a store. The idea might be a little weird but yes there are stores from which we can buy used clothes and they are called thrift stores. These thrift stores can provide ample opportunity for buying preloved or preowned clothes.

### **Swap :**

Swapping clothes is another idea which may give longer life to a piece of clothes. Here the idea is to swap garments. Swapping clothes can be sustainable in nature as this can definitely retain clothes away from landfills while giving newer life to it. When two individuals swap clothes they can easily mitigate the demand of following fast fashion trends without wasting money or without adding any fast fashion material to the wardrobe. In many cities swapping events are organised in regular intervals.

### **Upcycle:**

Upcycling clothes can be another option for adopting sustainability in fashion. Upcycling clothes can provide new look to the older garments. It is like giving new life with new appearance to the used outfits. Upcycled clothes are fun to carry and may give us new fashion goal.

### **Reuse:**

Reusing clothes is a useful technique to persuade sustainable way of understanding the journey of clothes. In the apparel industry refusing can be one of the best way of accepting a sustainable option. Reusing clothes while mending it, making it new, changing its shape and pattern can definitely help in achieving the goal of sustainability. On the other hand, handed down clothes are great choice when we talk about reusing them. Tanishka Mishra in one of her posts reminds us about Indian ancient technique of *Kantha* work where different pieces of clothes are woven together with beautiful needle works that may be used as comforter. *Kantha* works are done on sarees as well. Here *Kantha* comforters are such good example of

reusing clothes. In many of her posts Sanjana Rishi has talked about using second hand clothes. She has suggested how using second hand or refurbished clothes can reduce our carbon footprint on the environment. She prefers a lot of preowned materials when it comes to fashion and thus suggests different second-hand cloth stores for her followers from where they can buy as well as sell their old clothes.

### **Conclusion:**

We can conclude this study by saying that many women influencers can be meaningfully termed as green influencers as these influencers are set in a journey of spreading awareness on sustainability in fashion through their chronicles on slow fashion. These content creators are consciously trying to influence their followers on different aspects of sustainable fashion. Through their creative talent they are playing the role of green warriors. These green warriors are continuously fighting against the malignant effects of fast fashion on our environment. The referred green influencers in this study are among many who are taking the challenge of changing the mindset of people while being the example of change. Collaborating with these women green influencers fashion industry can bring potential change in their marketing strategies and even in consumer behaviour. All in all it may be said that these women green influencers are the strength of the present and hope for a bright and green future.

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