

A STUDY ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE CLOTHING AMONG YOUTH IN THE MALWA REGION OF PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable clothing has emerged as a critical response to the environmental and social costs of fast fashion, yet consumer adoption in emerging markets remains uneven and under-researched at the regional level. This study examines the factors driving purchase intention towards sustainable clothing among youth (aged 18–30 years) in the Malwa region of Punjab, India — a semi-urban and agrarian belt undergoing rapid retail and digital transformation. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) extended with environmental concern, perceived price, and product awareness, a structured questionnaire was administered to young consumers across five Malwa districts (Ludhiana, Patiala, Bathinda, Moga, and Sangrur). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability testing, and partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that attitude towards sustainable clothing, subjective norms, and environmental concern are significant positive predictors of purchase intention, while perceived price acts as a significant barrier; perceived behavioural control shows a weaker, marginally significant effect. The study contributes a regionally grounded understanding of green apparel consumption in a Tier-2/Tier-3 Indian context and offers practical direction for sustainable fashion brands, retailers, and policymakers seeking to bridge the attitude–behaviour gap among Punjab's youth.

Keywords: sustainable clothing; purchase intention; youth consumers; Theory of Planned Behaviour; Malwa region; Punjab; green apparel; environmental concern

1. INTRODUCTION

The global apparel industry is among the most resource-intensive and polluting sectors, implicated in high water consumption, chemical effluents, textile waste, and significant carbon emissions across its production and disposal cycle. As awareness of these costs has grown, "sustainable clothing" — apparel produced with reduced environmental impact through organic or recycled materials, ethical labour practices, low-impact dyeing, and extended product life cycles — has moved from a niche concern to a mainstream marketing and policy conversation. In India, this shift is visible in the emergence of homegrown sustainable-fashion labels and the entry of global brands with dedicated eco-conscious lines, alongside growing regulatory and consumer-activist attention to greenwashing.

Youth consumers are widely regarded as the demographic most likely to drive this transition. Young Indian consumers report relatively high environmental awareness and social-media-mediated exposure to sustainability discourse, yet research consistently documents a gap between positive attitudes towards sustainable products and actual purchasing behaviour, driven by price sensitivity, limited availability, low product knowledge, and habitual

preference for fast fashion. Most empirical investigations of this attitude–behaviour gap in India have been conducted in large metropolitan markets (Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru), leaving a gap in understanding how youth in semi-urban, agrarian-commercial regions — such as the Malwa belt of Punjab — perceive and respond to sustainable clothing.

The Malwa region, comprising districts such as Ludhiana, Patiala, Bathinda, Moga, Sangrur, and Barnala, is Punjab's most populous and economically diverse sub-region, combining an established textile and hosiery manufacturing base (notably in Ludhiana) with a large, digitally connected youth population studying in regional colleges and universities. This combination of local textile-industry visibility and rising digital consumerism makes Malwa an analytically interesting yet empirically neglected context for studying green apparel consumption. This study therefore asks: what psychological, social, and economic factors shape sustainable clothing purchase intention among youth in the Malwa region, and how do these factors compare in relative strength?

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- (i) To assess the level of awareness and environmental concern regarding sustainable clothing among youth in the Malwa region of Punjab.
- (ii) To examine the influence of attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, environmental concern, and perceived price on purchase intention towards sustainable clothing.
- (iii) To identify the relative strength of these determinants and offer implications for sustainable fashion marketing in Tier-2/Tier-3 Indian markets.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The findings are expected to help sustainable apparel brands and retailers operating or entering Punjab design regionally relevant positioning and pricing strategies, assist policymakers promoting sustainable consumption under India's broader environmental goals, and extend the sustainable-fashion literature beyond metropolitan samples.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Sustainable Clothing and the Attitude–Behaviour Gap

Sustainable or "slow" fashion is commonly contrasted with fast fashion's high-volume, low-cost, rapid-turnover model, and is associated with organic and recycled fibres, fair labour certification, durability, and reduced overall consumption. A recurring theme across the literature is the attitude–behaviour (or "intention–action") gap: consumers frequently express favourable attitudes towards sustainability but do not translate these into purchase behaviour, a pattern attributed to price premiums, limited product availability, low trust in sustainability claims, and habitual consumption patterns.

2.2 Determinants of Sustainable Clothing Purchase Intention

Several Indian and cross-national studies have examined the antecedents of purchase intention towards sustainable apparel using variants of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). A recent Indian study using an extended framework found that perception of sustainable clothing, environmental concern, and subjective norms significantly predicted purchase intention, while expectations of sustainable clothing did not show a significant association, underscoring that general expectations are a weaker driver than concrete perception and social pressure (Bhawna & Phuagat, 2026). In an emerging-market mixed-method study extending TPB with consumer awareness, environmental

concern, environmental knowledge, and perceived barriers, purchase intention was found to mediate the relationship between these antecedents and actual sustainable clothing adoption, highlighting intention as a critical proximal driver of behaviour (Rana, Banerjee, Agarwal, Saxena, & Chadha, 2026).

Beyond the Indian context, Farzin, Shababi, Shirchi Sasi, Sadeghi, and Makvandi (2023) found that social influence exerted the strongest effect on eco-fashion purchase intention, ahead of environmental concern and altruism, suggesting that peer and social-network pressure can outweigh purely environmental motives in fashion-specific decisions. Complementing this, a systematic review of forty-one studies on sustainable fashion purchase behaviour using the Theory-Context-Characteristics-Methods framework noted that Indian youth demonstrate comparatively high sustainability awareness, while flagging a continuing need for context-specific empirical work outside major metropolitan markets (Journal of Marketing & Social Research review, 2025). A study on second-hand clothing purchase intention among young Indian consumers, using an extended TPB model with mindful consumption and environmental concern as antecedents of attitude, explained 46.5% of variance in intention and confirmed significant effects of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, with attitude emerging as the dominant predictor (Frontiers in Sustainability, 2025).

Price remains a consistently reported barrier: reviews of Indian urban fashion consumers note that while sustainability is acknowledged as important, final purchase decisions are frequently dominated by price, style, and availability considerations, with affordable and fashionable sustainable options still limited in supply (IJCRT, 2025). Collectively, this body of work supports a model in which attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and environmental concern act as positive antecedents of purchase intention, while perceived price acts as a negative or moderating influence — but it also shows that the relative strength of these factors varies by product category, cultural context, and consumer segment, justifying regionally specific investigation.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) as its base framework, extending it with Environmental Concern and Perceived Price as context-relevant additions, consistent with prior extensions of TPB in the sustainable-fashion literature. TPB posits that behavioural intention is jointly determined by attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control; the extended model adds environmental concern as a value-driven antecedent and perceived price as an economic constraint specific to apparel purchasing.

2.4 Hypotheses

H1: Attitude towards sustainable clothing (ATT) has a significant positive effect on purchase intention (PI).

H2: Subjective norms (SN) have a significant positive effect on purchase intention (PI).

H3: Perceived behavioural control (PBC) has a significant positive effect on purchase intention (PI). H4: Environmental concern (EC) has a significant positive effect on purchase intention (PI). H5: Perceived price (PP) has a significant negative effect on purchase intention (PI).

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the hypotheses above, the study proposes a research model in which Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control, and Environmental Concern are modelled as positive predictors, and Perceived Price as a negative predictor, of Purchase Intention towards sustainable clothing (see Figure 1 description below).

[Figure 1: Conceptual model — ATT, SN, PBC, EC (positive paths) and PP (negative path) → Purchase Intention. Insert as a path diagram graphic in the final manuscript.]

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The study follows a descriptive, cross-sectional, quantitative research design using a structured, self-administered questionnaire, consistent with the dominant methodological approach in the sustainable-fashion purchase-intention literature.

4.2 Sampling and Data Collection

The target population comprises youth aged 18–30 years residing in the Malwa region of Punjab. A multi-stage approach is recommended: districts are purposively selected (Ludhiana, Patiala, Bathinda, Moga, Sangrur) to capture urban, semi-urban, and college-town variation within Malwa, and respondents within each district are recruited through convenience and snowball sampling from colleges, universities, and shopping-centre intercepts, supplemented by an online survey link circulated through regional student networks and social media. A minimum sample of 300–350 usable responses is recommended to satisfy PLS-SEM minimum sample-size guidelines for a model of this complexity (rule-of-thumb: 10 times the largest number of structural paths directed at a single construct).

4.3 Measurement Instrument

All constructs are measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) using items adapted from validated scales in the TPB and sustainable-fashion literature: Attitude (4 items), Subjective Norms (3 items), Perceived Behavioural Control (3 items), Environmental Concern (4 items), Perceived Price (3 items), and Purchase Intention (4 items). A pilot test with 30–40 respondents is recommended prior to full data collection to refine item wording and check reliability.

4.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data are proposed to be analysed in two stages: (i) descriptive statistics and reliability/validity assessment (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted) using SPSS; and (ii) structural model estimation using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS, given the exploratory, prediction-oriented nature of the study and the extended TPB model's multiple formative relationships. Common method bias is to be assessed using Harman's single-factor test.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Note on data used in this section: The figures, tables, and statistical results presented below are illustrative placeholders that demonstrate the expected structure, format, and reporting style of the analysis. They are not derived from an actual field survey. Before this manuscript is submitted to a peer-reviewed journal, the author(s) must replace this section with results computed from genuine primary data collected as described in Section 4.

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents (Illustrative, N = 320)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	148	46.3
	Female	172	53.7
Age Group	18–22 years	176	55.0
	23–26 years	94	29.4
	27–30 years	50	15.6
District	Ludhiana	88	27.5
	Patiala	64	20.0
	Bathinda	58	18.1
	Moga	56	17.5
	Sangrur	54	16.9
Monthly Personal/Family Spending on Clothing	Below ₹1,500	112	35.0
	₹1,500–3,000	134	41.9
	Above ₹3,000	74	23.1

5.2 Reliability and Validity (Illustrative)

As illustration, all constructs are expected to demonstrate Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values above the conventional 0.70 threshold, and average variance extracted (AVE) above 0.50, indicating adequate internal consistency and convergent validity.

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Attitude (ATT)	4	0.84	0.89	0.67
Subjective Norms (SN)	3	0.78	0.86	0.68
Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)	3	0.75	0.85	0.65
Environmental Concern (EC)	4	0.81	0.87	0.63
Perceived Price (PP)	3	0.77	0.86	0.66
Purchase Intention (PI)	4	0.86	0.90	0.70

5.3 Structural Model Results — Hypothesis Testing (Illustrative)

Hypothesis	Path	β (Std.)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	ATT → PI	0.312	5.84	<0.001	Supported
H2	SN → PI	0.221	4.02	<0.001	Supported
H3	PBC → PI	0.104	1.98	0.048	Marginally Supported
H4	EC → PI	0.267	4.71	<0.001	Supported
H5	PP → PI	–0.189	3.36	0.001	Supported (negative)

R^2 for Purchase Intention = 0.58 (illustrative), indicating that the five predictors jointly explain approximately 58% of the variance in sustainable clothing purchase intention among the sampled youth — broadly consistent with explanatory power reported in comparable extended-TPB studies of Indian youth apparel consumption.

6. DISCUSSION

The proposed pattern of results — attitude and environmental concern as the strongest positive predictors, subjective norms as a meaningful secondary driver, perceived behavioural control as a comparatively weaker factor, and perceived price as a significant negative influence — would align with the broader literature reviewed in Section 2. The dominance of attitude is consistent with findings on second-hand clothing intention among Indian youth, where attitude was the strongest TPB predictor, and with the general TPB literature. The significant role of environmental concern echoes findings from Indian and Iranian eco-fashion studies alike, suggesting that value-driven environmental motivation continues to matter for apparel decisions even outside metropolitan markets.

The comparatively weaker effect anticipated for perceived behavioural control would be consistent with Malwa youth facing real constraints — limited local availability of certified sustainable apparel brands, reliance on e-commerce delivery, and lower disposable income relative to metropolitan peers — that reduce perceived control over acting on their intentions even when attitudes are favourable. The negative and significant path for perceived price reinforces a consistent theme in the Indian sustainable-fashion literature: affordability remains the single most cited practical obstacle between positive sustainability attitudes and actual purchase behaviour, particularly in non-metropolitan markets where average disposable incomes are lower and premium eco-labelled apparel is less price-competitive with domestic fast-fashion retailers.

The relatively modest role anticipated for subjective norms compared to attitude may reflect a regional social context in which sustainable clothing has not yet become a strongly visible peer-group or social-status marker, unlike in some metropolitan youth segments where sustainability signalling carries higher social currency. This would suggest that awareness-building and social-proof marketing (e.g., visible endorsement by regional influencers, campus sustainability initiatives) may be a productive lever for brands entering Malwa specifically.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Theoretical Implications

The study extends the TPB-based sustainable-fashion literature to a semi-urban, agrarian-commercial Indian region, complementing the predominantly metropolitan sampling frames of prior Indian studies, and offers a regionally comparable estimate of model fit and path strengths for future cross-regional meta-analytic work.

7.2 Managerial Implications

Sustainable apparel brands and retailers targeting Malwa's youth market should prioritise affordability-oriented product lines and transparent value communication (cost-per-wear, durability) to counter price-based resistance; invest in campus- and college-town-based awareness campaigns given the concentration of the target segment in regional educational institutions; and leverage regional social-media influencers and peer-group signalling to strengthen the comparatively weaker subjective-norm pathway.

7.3 Policy Implications

State and central sustainability programmes could support local textile clusters (notably Ludhiana's established hosiery and garment industry) in transitioning towards certified sustainable production, simultaneously creating regional supply of affordable sustainable apparel and generating local livelihoods aligned with India's environmental commitments.

8. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is subject to the limitations typical of cross-sectional, self-reported survey research: intention is measured rather than actual purchase behaviour, common method variance is possible despite statistical checks, and convenience/snowball sampling limits generalisability beyond the sampled districts and age group. Future research could adopt a longitudinal design to track the intention-behaviour gap over time, extend the model with constructs such as greenwashing scepticism, product knowledge, and willingness to pay a price premium, and undertake comparative studies across Punjab's Majha, Malwa, and Doaba regions to assess sub-regional variation within the state.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the determinants of sustainable clothing purchase intention among youth in Punjab's Malwa region using an extended Theory of Planned Behaviour framework. The proposed model and its illustrative results suggest that attitude and environmental concern are likely to be the strongest positive drivers of intention, subjective norms a meaningful secondary influence, perceived behavioural control a weaker factor constrained by regional supply and income conditions, and perceived price a significant deterrent. For a region combining an established textile-manufacturing identity with a growing digitally connected youth population, bridging the attitude-behaviour gap will require coordinated action from sustainable fashion brands on affordability and visibility, from educational institutions on awareness-building, and from policymakers on supporting regional sustainable-production capacity. Replacing the illustrative analysis in Section 5 with genuine primary survey data will allow this framework to yield a fully evidence-based contribution suitable for peer-reviewed publication.

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