

WARDROBE SWAPPING: THE FUTURE OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

The growing demand for new trends and fast fashion has had an adverse impact on the fashion footprint. As designers it is essential to create awareness about the waste generated by the textile and fashion industry as well as by the consumers. One of the important ways to do this, would be through creating awareness about wardrobe swapping and collaborative consumption, as consumers today are slowly accepting this concept. The researcher in this paper has explored the available literature to understand the concept and impact of wardrobe swapping. The paper illustrates the impact of wasteful consumption and disposal on the environment and how sharing, renting, and swapping of goods can assist in saving the environment. Understanding the concept and its impact lead to the realization that the fashion industry is in dire need to include multiple methods for waste reduction. From the analysis of the literature, it is seen that wardrobe swapping will lead to better communities that would be able to help each other fulfill their needs. This paper is an attempt to create consumer awareness about conscious shopping as a sustainable alternative to wasteful production, consumption as well as disposal. In today's digital world technology can be leveraged to create digital platforms that can help promote wardrobe swapping.

Keywords: Collaborative Consumption, Conscious Shopping, Fast Fashion, Wardrobe Swapping.

Introduction

India is amongst the world's largest producer of textile and apparel and contributes 2% to India's GDP, 7% of industry output in terms of value, earns a valuable 12% through export and is the second largest employer in the country next to agriculture. However, it has also led to a negative effect on the environment. This realization thankfully has given rise to alternative ways to purchase, consume and dispose of textiles and fashion products. One of the ways to do so has been 'swapping of goods', which has now been emerging for the past few years but has not been as popular worldwide as it could have been. Swapping is a part of the supply chain of textile and fashion goods that can play a major role especially with the advent of fast fashion. For a higher impact of the same, it can be accomplished on digital platforms. The rise of fast fashion plays a major role in impacting the environment negatively, as consumers keep buying new products without consuming them consciously which leads to a heap of products ending up in landfills. So, instead of letting the products go to waste, swapping of several goods can be done under cautionary guidelines which can increase the trust of the consumers amongst each other and even let the goods be consumed wisely and completely. A clothing or wardrobe swapping happens when participants mutually exchange their valued but no longer used clothes for clothing that they will use within the members of the same group. This paper thus aims to enumerate the effects of fast fashion and mindless consumption on the environment and enlighten the modern consumer of ways and means to conscious and collaborative consumption that can benefit them as well as the environment through the medium of wardrobe swapping. The idea of swapping aims to hit two birds with the same stone, fulfilling the need of the consumer but without harming the environment.

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Rationale

The shopping and consumption behavior of the consumers when observed can be noticed to be very impulsive, driven by want and desire more than by need, often done mindlessly without any conscious effort towards creating value for products and without consuming them to their full potential. Since the past decade many ways have been found to generate sustainable outcomes from this industry but nevertheless the waste produced is still large and needs to be reduced. Swapping and sharing has been playing a role in many families and communities in the society but on a very small scale. This can be increased by spreading awareness about the idea and the positive effect it has on the consumers' pockets as well on the environment. Conscious shopping should be a part of the society, especially amongst consumers who are active buyers of fashion and textile goods.

AIM

The aim of the study to encourage wardrobe swapping which is the future of sustainable fashion trends.

Objectives

- To understand the impact of the fashion industry and fast fashion on the consumers and environment.
- To study the various reasons for wardrobe swapping which can encourage consumers to swap not shop
- To analyze wardrobe swapping as a means to create a positive impact on the environment

Review of Literature

The Impact of Fashion on the Textiles Industry

The fashion industry is the second most polluting industry and has a great negative impact on the environment. With a long supply chain, it is related to enormous utilization of water, energy, raw materials and chemicals that causes all kinds of pollution, from air to soil and everything in between. Specifically, textile waste from the industry and consumers has become an enormous worldwide concern, perceived as quite possibly the most contaminating agent with utilization of maximum amount of water. (Jacometti, V. 2019)

In the last two decades, the production of the textile and fashion industry has doubled and an average global annual consumption of textiles and fashion goods has doubled from 7 to 13 kg/person leading to the threshold of 100 million tonnes of textiles and fashion consumption. More than two thirds of the textile and fashion goods go to landfill at the end, and only around 15% of this waste is recycled. (Shirvanimoghaddam, K., Motamed, B., Ramakrishna, S. and Naebe, M., 2020)

Giving a garment a second life in any possible way, reduces its CO₂ impact by 79%. If thrown into a landfill, it generates 12.7 lbs of CO₂ and if reused it generates 2.7 lbs of CO₂. 75 lbs of CO₂ emission (CO₂e) is produced during the manufacture of an average pair of jeans. 700 gallons of water is used for manufacture of one T-shirt and one in two people throw the unwanted clothes in trash. Thus, 64% of garments that are produced end up in the landfill. It is estimated that if consumers bought one used item instead of a new one it would help save 5.7 Billion lbs of CO₂e which is equivalent to 66 Million new trees and 449M lbs of waste which is nearly 18,700 garbage trucks. (Marino. A.S 2020)

Garment production has practically multiplied, driven by an expansion in the quantity of clothing bought every year by a consumer, which is thus predominantly determined by fast fashion, with its low costs and expanded number of garments offered to consumers. The constant changes in style frequently imply that a garment is just discarded without much conscious thought. This has driven consumers to purchase more garments than they need and to treat an ever increasing number of low-evaluated clothing nearly as "expendable" products that can be discarded after only 7 or 8 wears.

In order to achieve the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with reference to the economic, social and environmental impact, it is essential to ensure that economic growth and development prevail along the whole garment value chain, reducing the negative environmental impact through efficient use of resources and sustainable production.

This industry internationally affects the economy and the climate. Once disposed off, just 20% of waste is gathered for reusing at a worldwide level, while the greater part of the garments are not reused and end up in landfills or incinerators. (Jacometti, V. 2019)

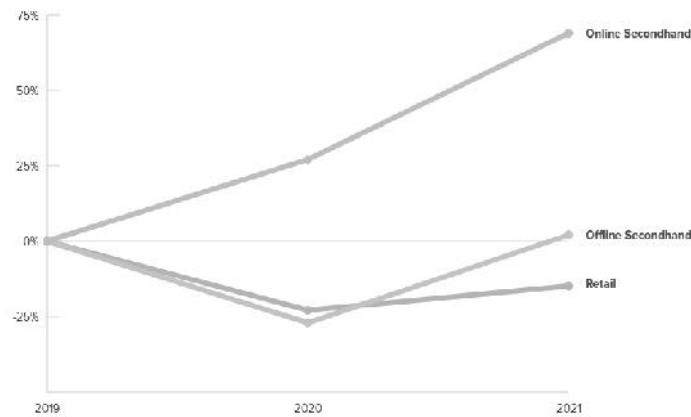
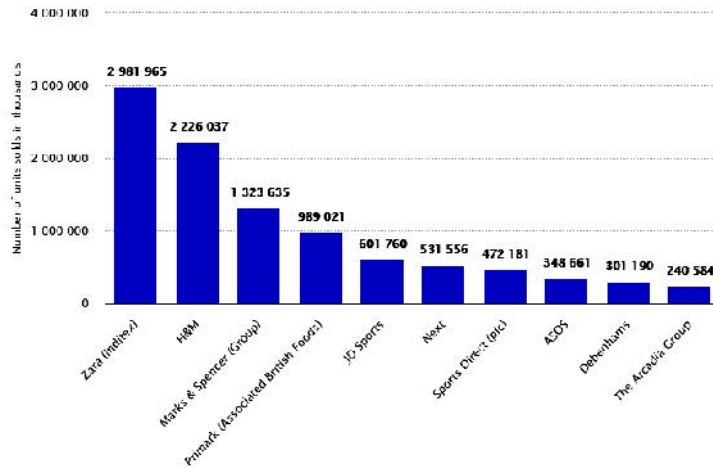
One of the reasons for waste generation in this industry is fast fashion. Fast fashion and expendable culture creates a varied measure of textile waste every year. Garment swapping helps to encourage circularity and has the potential to change consumer shopping behavior. Making optimum use of fashion entails a change in mindset of how one views what one already owns in terms of apparel. (Shen, X. 2020)



Source: www.plunkettresearch.com

Source: [https://www.plunkettresearch.com/fast-fashion-sells-even-faster-tops-70-billion/Units sold worldwide in the financial year 2018/2019 by the ten leading European fast fashion companies:](https://www.plunkettresearch.com/fast-fashion-sells-even-faster-tops-70-billion/Units%20sold%20worldwide%20in%20the%20financial%20year%202018/2019%20by%20the%20ten%20leading%20European%20fast%20fashion%20companies/)

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1094257/european-fast-fashion-brands-ranked-by-units-sold/>



Source: <https://www.thredup.com/resale/#resale-growth>

There is a Presence of more Secondhand Shoppers than ever before



Source: <https://www.thredup.com/resale/#resale-growth>

Consumers are seeking bargains from home and online secondhand is set to increase 69% between 2019 and 2021, while the broader retail sector is projected to shrink by 15%. As per the report conducted in 2020 by Anthony S. Marino, 70% of women are already open to shopping secondhand goods. (Marino. A.S 2020)

Wardrobe Swapping: A Money Saver

More often than not, wardrobe swapping costs less than purchasing new clothes. Therefore, it is quickly getting known as an 'incentive for-money' in fashion. It could even be free, if particularly coordinated among known groups. (Shen, X. 2020). Each piece of a new dress (if not made economically) can be the result of innumerable synthetic dyes, chemicals etc., which can all be harmful to the earth, air, groundwater and the people. Wardrobe swapping helps reduce the detrimental effects on the planet since it is a chance for every one of those garments to be given one more round of life. It helps save money as well as the environment. (Trauth, E.2014).

Swap, Don't Shop

The 'swap, don't shop' theory is now becoming a platform for fashion consumers, especially due to the rise of harmful impact on the environment due to overconsumption and waste from the fashion industry. Keeping this in mind it has been predicted that re- purposed clothing will make up to one third part of our closets till the year 2033. This is one of the new ways to balance a wardrobe along with lending a hand in decreasing the carbon footprint. (Raniwala, P. 2019)

The Sharing Economy

Sharing has verifiably been a part of past cultures. With the rising practice of sharing, trading or renting of services and products, the expression "sharing economy" was presented by Taihagh Arat in 2017. This sharing economy is consciously growing with the presence of digital technologies without the need of a physical platform. (Lauff, N. 2017)

The sharing economy has acquired momentum across the world. Numerous solutions are emerging to approach shoppers and make an impact. Information about consumers' behavior may help in sharing ideas and strategies that would to reinforce the administrations and change their perspectives. (Netter S., Pedersen E.R.G., 2019) Sharing makes a lot of logical monetary sense for the purchaser, the climate, and the local area. It has been recommended that cooperative consumption could be pretty much as significant as the Industrial Revolution regarding ownership. (Botsman, R. and Rogers, R. 2010)

As per Martin, the sharing economy is gaining more importance as driven by technology as they empower more productive usage of resources. (Jenkins, R., Molesworth, M. and Scullion, R. 2017).

Market Presence of Swapping

Studies indicated that consumers who swapped were generally worried about the size, quality and the colour of the goods they were swapping in return, while, the organizers of the swapping platforms were worried about the outcome or satisfaction of the swap conducted. Information permits which entails making a structure that outlines the supply chain for swapping, in which consumers are suppliers demonstrates that consumption cycles can move from financial (selling) to non-financial exchanges (swapping).

Wardrobe swapping infers a reallocation of goods, whereby things are swapped on a 'like-for-like' premise with or without money related exchanges. Despite the fact that swapping is not new, it can be clarified through the rise of conscious consumers as a driver for elective types of consumption of goods, along these lines encouraging another way of life that looks to diminish fashion wastage.

This variability of consumers being shoppers and providers at the same time is a critical trait of swapping and gives a novel chance of taking responsibility. A chance for consumers turning out to be providers is to create an awareness of others' expectations and responsibility for fashion waste, consequently making a community that is balancing on the effect the textiles industry has on the environment. (Henninger, C. E., Bürklin, N., and Niinimäki, K. -2019)

Collaborative Consumption for Individuals

Collaborative Consumption is disturbing traditional modes of business and changing what goods are consumed as well as how they are consumed. Consistently, individuals are utilizing Collaborative Consumption - conventional sharing, loaning, exchanging, leasing, gifting and trading, through digital technology and networks. It is empowering individuals to understand the huge advantages of access to goods and services instead of ownership and simultaneously save finances, space, and time; and make new companions. (Botsman, R and Rogers, R.2010). All this can be done on an offline or an online mode, an increasing value through Operational Optimization with the use of technology. Basically, it implies discovering innovative ways to improve and upgrade the swapping insight — so swappers continue to use technology to spread responsibility among others, from any place they come from. (Shen, X. 2020)

Discussion of Review

The most leading companies for fast fashion like H&M and Zara, have had the highest sales revenue of \$21.7 Billion and \$16.4 Billion respectively in 2016. And in the year 2018/2019 Zara sold as many as almost 3 billion and H&M sold around 2.2 billion clothing and apparel items. The fashion and textile industry generates a huge amount of waste on a regular basis. The reduction of waste generation has been a huge problem as consumers do not realize the importance of sustainability and at times there are very few ways to manage waste. Consumption of existing products to their maximum instead of temporarily using and then keeping them aside or disposing them is not a practical way to handle products that cause a bigger carbon footprint. Fast fashion is on the rise, increasing waste generation many fold. Swapping of goods is one of the reasonable solutions to this. The shopping behaviour of consumers impacts the manufacturing of goods, as higher the demand the more the goods will be manufactured. In this situation using wardrobe swapping as a platform will increase the cycling of pre-existing goods instead of manufacturing the goods. This will lead to lesser expenses for the fashion consumers as trends and fashion keeps changing rapidly.

Wardrobe swapping can be a way to let the goods be consumed completely as per their capacity and this needs to be incorporated into the behavior of consumers when they shop. This shows how much the fast fashion companies are growing over time. As per the reports women are leaning towards second hand shopping more now than ever before and online secondhand is expected to grow 69% from 2019-2021 and the retail sector is observed to fall by 15%. To give further impetus to this, secondhand shoppers have increased from 45% (in 2016) to 70% (in 2019) which indicates that it will go higher in the upcoming years. In the present time, sharing communities are restricted due to many reasons regarding size, quality, condition and durability. Consumers look for durability in a product but fail to utilize it to its durable limit. Sharing helps reduce financial dependency for active fashion followers and others too. Consumers tend to hold onto items they do not use due to the habit of being attached to their goods or due to the habit of hoarding things. Sharing and Swapping should be a part of a product's life, making consumers conscious about what and how they show value towards the goods they own.

Summary

The waste generated by the fashion industry along with ever increasing demands of customers, puts the problem of reducing the fashion footprint on the back burner. There are several ways to balance the need of the consumers and the need to take care of our environment. One of the ways includes promoting and spreading awareness about wardrobe swapping which will help consumers get what they need and let them use a product to its full potential or lend it to someone who could use it and pass it further. There are certain guidelines regarding hygiene protocol that need to be followed when swapping of goods are done, respecting the other customer as the chain goes from one to another. Digital platforms can be used for the same.

Conclusion

Consumers tend to not understand the amount of waste that is generated by the textile and fashion industry, and very often have the misconception that it is just the industry that is the cause of waste generation, rather than understanding that it is the consumers' high demand that is the leading cause of wasteful expenditure, may it be natural or manmade resources or money. While trying to keep up with customer demands, the industry creates garments which are more than necessary, leading to a higher rate of wastage and thus lowering the value of the products. Consumers have high expectations from the fashion industry, as trends keep changing at a rapid speed and shopping is the most prevalent method of fulfilling the demand. However, there are emerging alternatives now and swapping, lending or renting are few of them. Many consumers look down upon reusing apparel and confuse it with the products being second hand and consider it to be degrading, which is not always true especially if the product is in a good condition. Consumers can be provided with the knowledge of swapping through digital platforms with guidelines that can maintain the give and take of goods amongst consumers. There are very few platforms that provide swapping as an option. Business models do not include sharing, swapping, lending and further ways in their plans but rather just focus on creating organic products which by itself have high demand on the environment thus indirectly still putting pressure on natural resources and the environment rather than on promoting reuse.

Limitations

- Lack of resources to generate a digital platform to promote wardrobe swapping of textile fabrics and fashion products
- Limited research done to understand the amount of awareness that needs to be spread amongst the consumers.

Recommendations

- Business models, which can include sharing, swapping, lending and further ways in their plans.
- Generating flyers, videos and other infographics for better understanding towards reducing fashion footprint
- Creating a digital platform that can help customers display their products that are not being used in their wardrobe and need to be swapped for something they are in need of.
- Spreading awareness about the positive outcome of wardrobe swapping and making it a trend rather than making shopping a trend.

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