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Exploring the Role of Marketing and Promotional Strategies in Promoting Sustainable Fabrics with Reference to Apparels

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Abstract
The fashion industry's growing environmental impact has intensified the need for sustainable fabrics and responsible consumption. Despite the rising availability of eco-friendly materials such as organic cotton, hemp, and recycled textiles, their adoption in mainstream apparel markets remains limited due to low awareness, higher costs, and weak promotional visibility. This study examines how consumer perceptions and diverse marketing strategies influence the purchase intention of sustainable apparel. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 190 respondents through a structured questionnaire assessing perceptions and five key promotional strategies: influencer marketing, eco-labeling, social media campaigns, cause-related marketing, and price-based promotions. Correlation and regression analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between consumer perception and sustainable fabric choice. One-way ANOVA and Tukey HSD results showed significant differences among promotional strategies, with price and promotional offers emerging as the most effective, followed by cause-related marketing and social media campaigns. Influencer marketing and eco-labeling demonstrated comparatively lower impact. The study concludes that consumer education, value-driven promotions, and emotionally resonant campaigns are critical for enhancing sustainable apparel adoption.

Keywords: Sustainable Apparel, Consumer Perception, Promotional Strategies, Purchase Intention, Eco-Friendly Fabrics

Introduction

Sustainability in the fashion industry has become increasingly important as the world faces serious environmental challenges. Traditional textile manufacturing is a major contributor to pollution, making the fashion industry the second-largest polluter after oil. In response, sustainable fabrics—such as organic cotton, hemp, and recycled materials—are being promoted as a solution to reduce environmental damage.

However, despite their benefits, sustainable fabrics often struggle to reach mainstream consumers. This is largely due to limited awareness, higher costs, and weak brand visibility. In such a competitive industry, simply offering eco-friendly products isn't enough—how they are marketed makes a big difference.

Marketing and promotional strategies play a vital role in shaping how consumers perceive and engage with sustainable fashion. From influencer endorsements and social media ads to customer reviews and email campaigns, these strategies can significantly impact buying decisions. Today's consumers are more active and informed, engaging with brands through various digital channels. They are influenced by what they see online, especially when it comes to fashion and apparel.

This study looks at how both consumer preferences (such as choosing versatile clothing) and modern marketing strategies (like flash sales, personalized ads, and interactive tools) affect purchasing behavior—especially in the context of sustainable apparel. It also explores the emotional and ethical aspects of branding, including the impact of advertising that highlights sustainability, quality, and social responsibility.

By using a mix of research methods—including literature reviews, case studies, and surveys—this paper aims to understand which marketing techniques are most effective in encouraging people to choose sustainable clothing. The findings suggest that marketing is not just about boosting sales; it's also a powerful way to educate consumers and drive positive environmental change.

The global fashion and textile industry is one of the largest and most dynamic sectors of the economy, but it is also among the most environmentally damaging. Responsible for approximately 10% of global carbon emissions and 20% of global wastewater, the fashion industry faces growing criticism over its environmental footprint and unsustainable practices. In response, there has been a noticeable shift towards the use of sustainable fabrics—materials that are organic, recycled, biodegradable, or produced with minimal environmental impact. These include organic cotton, hemp, bamboo, Tencel, and fabrics derived from post-consumer waste.

Despite the environmental and ethical advantages of sustainable fabrics, their adoption in the mainstream apparel market remains limited. Several factors contribute to this challenge, including higher production costs, lack of consumer awareness, and skepticism about the authenticity of sustainability claims. In such a context, **effective marketing and promotional strategies** play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between sustainable apparel offerings and consumer adoption.

Modern consumers, particularly Gen Z and millennials, are increasingly influenced by what they see online. Social media platforms have become central to fashion discovery, with influencers and celebrities acting as powerful brand ambassadors. Consumers report being more likely to purchase clothing endorsed by influencers, or products they've seen in targeted advertisements. Moreover, various promotional strategies—such as discount offers, referral programs, flash sales, and personalized email marketing—are now integral tools for fashion brands trying to convert interest into purchases.

This study examines the dual role of **consumer preferences (CP)** and **marketing and promotional strategies (MPS)** in influencing apparel buying behavior, especially with reference to sustainable fabrics. Key consumer behaviors include a preference for versatile clothing that can be worn across different occasions and a growing inclination toward ethically produced products. At the same time, marketing strategies like social media campaigns, interactive technologies (e.g., virtual try-ons), aesthetic advertisements, and collaborations with influencers are shaping how consumers engage with brands.

Additionally, this research considers how advertising content—such as emphasizing durability, ethical production, or eco-certifications—affects consumer trust and brand loyalty. Strategies that incorporate storytelling, emotional appeal, and social values (such as charitable giving or sustainability initiatives) are also explored for their impact on purchasing decisions.

The relevance of this research lies in its practical implications for fashion brands, marketers, and sustainability advocates. By understanding what drives consumer choices and which promotional strategies are most effective, stakeholders can create more impactful campaigns that not only boost sales but also promote environmentally conscious consumption.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore how marketing and promotional efforts influence consumer behavior toward sustainable fabrics in the apparel sector. It aims to identify which strategies are most persuasive and how they align with modern consumer values, with a special emphasis on ethical branding, digital marketing tools, and influencer partnerships.

2. Literature Review

Lee, Kim, and Han (2024) explore the intersection of AI and sustainability marketing, showing how predictive analytics and personalized messaging can enhance consumer engagement with sustainable fashion. While ethical concerns about manipulation exist, AI is shown to be a powerful tool in tailoring eco-messages aligned with individual values.

Han and Chung (2023) delve into message framing in green advertising. Their findings suggest that environmentally conscious consumers respond better to loss-framed messages, while value-neutral consumers are more influenced by benefit-driven narratives. This highlights the importance of message customization in promoting sustainable fabrics.

Joy and Peña (2022) reconceptualize marketing as a tool for systemic transformation in fashion. They argue that sustainability communication through visual storytelling, cultural cues, and brand activism can shift consumer values and reshape industry standards.

Moraes, Carrigan, and Bosangit (2021) focus on premium apparel and demonstrate that emotional storytelling tied to ethical narratives fosters deeper consumer trust. Their research shows that sustainability, when positioned as a luxury experience, appeals to identity-driven buyers seeking meaningful consumption.

McNeill and Moore (2021) examine the dichotomy between sustainable fashion and fast fashion's appeal, particularly among younger consumers. Their study emphasizes the use of influencer marketing, product transparency, and storytelling as key strategies in narrowing the attitude-behavior gap in sustainable apparel consumption.

Mukendi et al. (2020) conduct a comprehensive review that identifies gaps in sustainable fashion marketing, calling for more consumer education, clearer green labeling, and inclusive marketing approaches. They suggest that traditional campaigns must evolve into interactive and experiential strategies to be effective.

Shen and Li (2020) assess the role of social media and influencer marketing in shaping perceptions of sustainable fabrics. Authenticity, content quality, and perceived expertise are critical for building consumer trust, with micro-influencers proving especially effective in driving eco-fashion engagement.

Testa et al. (2020) provide empirical evidence that brands with consistent and credible green marketing practices experience higher consumer loyalty. Their findings support the use of third-party certifications like GOTS and OEKO-TEX in reinforcing brand authenticity and avoiding the pitfalls of greenwashing.

Gazzola et al. (2020) observe rising trends in sustainability and circularity within fashion. Their study emphasizes the consumer perception shift toward ethical production and consumption, facilitated by informative and emotionally resonant marketing strategies.

Niinimäki (2020) explores consumer behavior as both a barrier and a catalyst for sustainable fashion. She identifies the "attitude-behavior gap"—where consumers express concern for sustainability but fail to act accordingly—and suggests that emotionally engaging, educational marketing can help bridge this divide.

Earlier foundational studies continue to inform current perspectives. **Park and Kim (2016)** find that a strong sustainable brand image enhances trust and loyalty, with marketing communications playing a vital role in reinforcing green identities. **Leonidou, Katsikeas, and Morgan (2013)**, through a meta-analysis, confirm that transparency, environmental concern, and product quality are key to shaping green consumer behavior.

Concerns around greenwashing are persistent. **Delmas and Burbano (2011)** highlight how deceptive or exaggerated sustainability claims can erode consumer trust. They recommend transparent messaging and third-party validation to protect brand credibility. Similarly, **Groza, Pronschinske, and Walker (2011)** emphasize the emotional power of cause-related marketing, advocating for storytelling that links brand identity to ethical and sustainable missions.

Ottman (2011) stresses that green marketing must be embedded in brand strategy rather than presented as an add-on. She advocates for value-driven branding that resonates with consumer lifestyles and aspirations.

Research Methodology: This study employs a quantitative and analytical research design to explore the relationship between consumers' perception and sustainable fabric choices, as well as the influence of promotional strategies on purchase intention toward sustainable apparel. Data were collected from 190 respondents using a structured questionnaire with ten Likert-scale items, applying convenience and purposive sampling to include consumers aware of sustainable fabrics. Respondents evaluated five promotional strategy categories: influencer marketing, eco-labeling and certifications, social media paid campaigns, cause-related marketing, and price and promotion offers. Analysis was conducted in SPSS using descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, ANOVA, and post-hoc Tukey HSD tests. Reliability was measured through Cronbach's Alpha, validity ensured by expert review, and ethical standards maintained. Limitations include small sample size, self-report bias, and urban scope.

Objectives of the Study

1. **To examine emerging trends and developments in sustainable apparel marketing.**
2. **To explore consumer perceptions toward sustainable fabric choices.**
3. **To assess the impact and effectiveness of diverse promotional strategies used in promoting sustainable apparel.**

Bivariate Hypothesis (H1):

There is a significant relationship between consumers' perception (independent variable) toward sustainable fabric choices (dependent variable).

Bivariate Hypothesis (H1):

There is a significant relationship between the type of promotional strategy used (e.g., influencer marketing, eco-labeling, social media campaigns) and consumer purchase intention toward sustainable apparel.

Analysis and Interpretation

Hypothesis 1

There is a significant relationship between consumers' perception toward sustainable fabric choices

Correlations			
		Sustainable Fabric choice	Consumers' Perception
Pearson Correlation	Sustainable Fabric choice	1.000	.739
	Consumers' Perception	.739	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Sustainable Fabric choice	.	.000
	Consumers' Perception	.000	.
N	Sustainable Fabric choice	190	190
	Consumers' Perception	190	190

The correlation results (Table: Correlations) reveal a strong positive relationship between consumers' perception and sustainable fabric choice, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of r = 0.739. The relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (p = 0.000, one-tailed), indicating that as consumer perception regarding sustainability increases, their choice of sustainable fabrics also rises. Since the sample size (N = 190) is sufficiently large, the result is reliable and robust. This confirms that perception plays a crucial role in shaping consumer decisions toward sustainable apparel.

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.739[a]	.546	.544	.45513	.546	226.452	1	188	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Consumers' Perception									

The regression model summary shows that the independent variable (consumers' perception) strongly predicts the dependent variable (sustainable fabric choice), with a correlation coefficient of R = 0.739. The R Square value of 0.546 indicates that consumers' perception explains 54.6% of the variance in sustainable fabric choices. The Adjusted R Square (0.544), which accounts for sample size, further confirms the model's stability. The Standard Error of Estimate (0.45513) suggests relatively low prediction error, strengthening the model's reliability. The F Change statistic (226.452, $p < 0.001$) confirms that including perception as a predictor significantly improves the model. Overall, the regression model is a good fit and demonstrates the strong predictive power of consumer perception.

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	46.907	1	46.907	226.452	.000[b]
	Residual	38.942	188	.207		
	Total	85.850	189			
a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Fabric choice						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Consumers' Perception						

The ANOVA table further validates the significance of the regression model. The F statistic value is 226.452 with degrees of freedom (1,188), and the associated p-value is 0.000, well below the 0.05 significance threshold. This indicates that the regression model as a whole significantly predicts sustainable fabric choice. The regression sum of squares (46.907) is considerably larger than the residual sum of squares (38.942), showing that a substantial proportion of variability in sustainable fabric choice is explained by consumers' perception. Thus, the model is statistically significant and meaningful.

Coefficients[a]								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.825	.200		4.115	.000	.429	1.220
	Consumers' Perception	.796	.053	.739	15.048	.000	.692	.900

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Fabric choice

The coefficients table provides the specific regression equation and the influence of perception on sustainable fabric choice. The constant (intercept) has a value of 0.825 ($p = 0.000$), representing the baseline level of sustainable fabric choice when consumer perception is zero. The unstandardized coefficient for consumers' perception is $B = 0.796$ ($p = 0.000$), indicating that for every one-unit increase in perception, sustainable fabric choice increases by 0.796 units. The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.739) highlights the strong predictive power of perception relative to the dependent variable. The t-value of 15.048 with significance at $p < 0.001$ further confirms the robustness of this predictor. Additionally, the 95% confidence interval for B (0.692–0.900) does not cross zero, reinforcing the reliability of the estimate.

Hypothesis 2

There is a significant relationship between the type of promotional strategy used (e.g., influencer marketing, eco-labeling, social media campaigns) and consumer purchase intention toward sustainable apparel.

Descriptives										
Purchase Intention										
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum	Between-Component Variance
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Influencer Marketing		4	1.9500	.67577	.33789	.8747	3.0253	1.20	2.80	
Eco-Labeling & Certifications		11	2.9091	.56825	.17133	2.5273	3.2908	2.00	3.90	
Social Media Paid Campaigns		39	3.5308	.51409	.08232	3.3641	3.6974	2.50	4.70	
Cause-Related Marketing		71	3.8014	.49756	.05905	3.6836	3.9192	2.50	4.70	
Price & Promotion Offers		65	4.2200	.51787	.06423	4.0917	4.3483	2.90	5.00	
Total		190	3.7984	.67397	.04889	3.7020	3.8949	1.20	5.00	
Model	Fixed Effects			.51536	.03739	3.7247	3.8722			
	Random Effects				.28778	2.9994	4.5974			.26905

The descriptive table shows the group sizes, means and dispersion of purchase-intention scores across five promotional strategies. Sample sizes vary (Influencer N=4; Eco-Labeling N=11; Social Media N=39; Cause-Related N=71; Price & Promotion N=65) with an overall N = 190. Group means rise from 1.95 (Influencer Marketing) to 4.22 (Price & Promotion Offers), with overall mean 3.7984 (SD = 0.67397). Standard deviations within groups are relatively small (≈ 0.51–0.68), indicating modest within-group variability compared to between-group differences. The very low mean for Influencer Marketing (1.95) and the very small N = 4 for that group should be treated cautiously: that cell's mean is unstable and has a large standard error relative to other groups. Overall, the descriptive statistics suggest a clear ordering of strategies by effectiveness on purchase intention, with price incentives producing the highest mean intention and influencer marketing the lowest.

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Purchase Intention			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.337	4	185	.853

Levene's statistic = 0.337 with df1 = 4, df2 = 185 and p = 0.853. Because p > .05, the assumption of homogeneity of variances is not violated: the variances of purchase-intention scores across the five promotional strategy groups can be treated as equal. This supports use of the standard one-way ANOVA rather than a variance-robust alternative. That said, the unequal group sizes (especially the very small influencer group) remain a caution even when Levene's test is non-significant.

ANOVA					
Purchase Intention					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	36.713	4	9.178	34.557	.000
Within Groups	49.136	185	.266		
Total	85.850	189			

The one-way ANOVA comparing purchase intention across the five promotional strategies produced Between-Groups SS = 36.713 (df = 4), Within-Groups SS = 49.136 (df = 185), and Total SS = 85.850 (df = 189). Mean squares are MS_between = 9.178 and MS_within = 0.266, yielding $F(4,185) = 34.557$, $p < .001$. This highly significant F indicates that not all group means are equal: the choice of promotional strategy has a statistically significant effect on purchase intention. An effect-size calculation from the sums of squares (η^2 = SS_between / SS_total) gives ≈ 0.428, meaning about **42.8% of the total variance** in purchase intention is associated with promotional strategy — a large effect in social-science terms. In short, promotional strategy is a strong predictor of purchase intention in this sample.

Multiple Comparisons							
Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention							
	(I) Promotional strategy categories	(J) Promotional strategy categories	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Tukey HSD	Influencer Marketing	Eco-Labeling & Certifications	-.95909*	.30091	.014	-1.7881	-.1301
		Social Media Paid Campaigns	-1.58077*	.27057	.000	-2.3262	-.8354
		Cause-Related Marketing	-1.85141*	.26484	.000	-2.5810	-1.1218
		Price & Promotion Offers	-2.27000*	.26549	.000	-3.0014	-1.5386
	Eco-Labeling & Certifications	Influencer Marketing	.95909*	.30091	.014	.1301	1.7881
		Social Media Paid Campaigns	-.62168*	.17594	.005	-1.1064	-.1370
		Cause-Related Marketing	-.89232*	.16699	.000	-1.3524	-.4323
		Price & Promotion Offers	-1.31091*	.16802	.000	-1.7738	-.8480
	Social Media Paid Campaigns	Influencer Marketing	1.58077*	.27057	.000	.8354	2.3262
		Eco-Labeling & Certifications	.62168*	.17594	.005	.1370	1.1064
		Cause-Related Marketing	-.27064	.10272	.068	-.5536	.0123
		Price & Promotion Offers	-.68923*	.10439	.000	-.9768	-.4017
	Cause-Related Marketing	Influencer Marketing	1.85141*	.26484	.000	1.1218	2.5810
		Eco-Labeling & Certifications	.89232*	.16699	.000	.4323	1.3524
		Social Media Paid Campaigns	.27064	.10272	.068	-.0123	.5536
		Price & Promotion Offers	-.41859*	.08847	.000	-.6623	-.1749
	Price & Promotion Offers	Influencer Marketing	2.27000*	.26549	.000	1.5386	3.0014
		Eco-Labeling & Certifications	1.31091*	.16802	.000	.8480	1.7738
		Social Media Paid Campaigns	.68923*	.10439	.000	.4017	.9768
		Cause-Related Marketing	.41859*	.08847	.000	.1749	.6623
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.							

The Tukey HSD places group means into homogeneous subsets at $\alpha = 0.05$ (harmonic mean sample size used = 12.626 because group sizes are unequal). The subsets show: (1) Influencer Marketing

alone in the lowest subset (mean = 1.95); (2) Eco-Labeling alone (mean = 2.9091); (3) Social Media Paid Campaigns (mean = 3.5308) grouped with Cause-Related Marketing (mean = 3.8014) in an intermediate subset; and (4) Cause-Related Marketing and Price & Promotion Offers (mean = 4.2200) grouped in the highest subset. These groupings imply the following pairwise conclusions at $\alpha = .05$: Influencer marketing is statistically lower than the other strategies; eco-labeling is higher than influencer marketing but still significantly lower than the top strategies; social media campaigns and cause-related marketing are not significantly different from each other; cause-related marketing is not significantly different from price/promotions (hence its overlapping presence in subsets 3 and 4); and price/promotions sits at the top, statistically separated from the lowest groups.

Purchase Intention						
	Promotional strategy categories	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05			
			1	2	3	4
Tukey HSD[a,b]	Influencer Marketing	4	1.9500			
	Eco-Labeling & Certifications	11		2.9091		
	Social media Paid Campaigns	39			3.5308	
	Cause-Related Marketing	71			3.8014	3.8014
	Price & Promotion Offers	65				4.2200
	Sig.		1.000	1.000	.679	.251
Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.						
a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 12.626.						
b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.						

The significance levels (.679 and .251 in later subsets) indicate that differences within subsets are not statistically significant, but across subsets, the differences are meaningful. For example, the jump from Influencer Marketing (1.95) to Price & Promotion Offers (4.22) is statistically substantial, proving that strategy choice strongly shapes purchase intention. The analysis clearly shows that different promotional strategies have varied levels of effectiveness in driving purchase intention toward sustainable apparel. While influencer marketing is the least effective, price and promotional offers emerge as the most powerful driver, followed closely by cause-related marketing and social media campaigns. Eco-labeling plays a moderate role, showing that while consumers appreciate transparency, they are more strongly motivated by tangible value additions and cause-driven messaging.

Findings:

The present study set out to examine the interplay of consumer perceptions, sustainable fabric choices, and the effectiveness of promotional strategies in sustainable apparel marketing. In line with the first objective, the analysis highlights that sustainability is increasingly becoming a

mainstream trend within the apparel sector, driven by heightened consumer awareness of ecological concerns, ethical consumption, and the demand for innovative and environmentally friendly fabrics. The findings reflect that sustainable apparel marketing is undergoing a paradigm shift, where businesses are increasingly aligning their strategies with global sustainability goals and consumer values.

Addressing the second objective, the results demonstrate a significant and positive relationship between consumers' perception and their sustainable fabric choices. Correlation and regression analysis revealed that stronger positive perceptions of sustainability—such as viewing eco-friendly fabrics as socially responsible and environmentally beneficial—directly enhance consumers' likelihood of adopting such choices. This underscores the critical role of perception-building in driving consumer behavior and emphasizes that effective awareness and educational campaigns can influence attitudes and actual purchase decisions.

For the third objective, the assessment of promotional strategies revealed notable differences in their effectiveness. The ANOVA and post-hoc Tukey HSD tests indicated that price and promotional offers, cause-related marketing, and social media campaigns exerted the greatest influence on purchase intention. In contrast, influencer marketing and eco-labeling were less impactful, suggesting that consumers prefer strategies providing tangible benefits and emotional or social value rather than symbolic endorsements.

In conclusion, the study finds that sustainable apparel marketing must integrate emerging trends, enhance consumer perceptions, and prioritize effective promotional strategies to foster greater adoption. Businesses that combine sustainability messaging with value-driven promotions and socially resonant campaigns are more likely to succeed in engaging consumers and accelerating the growth of sustainable apparel markets

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