

The Indian Shift: Sustainable Fashion and the Digital Native's Impact

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ABSTRACT

The fashion industry has been consistently critiqued for its negative impact on the environment. In response to the growing criticism, the fashion industry is adopting practices like sharing, co-ownership, and renting to mitigate its impact on the environment. Digital natives have been identified as the fastest-growing market segment and are also environmentally conscious. Accordingly, the purpose of the study is to investigate the influence of personal values (altruistic, biospheric, egoistic, and hedonic) and social norms on legitimizing sustainable fashion sharing practices of digital natives. Quantitative research methodology was adopted by applying PLS-SEM to data from undergraduate and graduate students. A total of 463 usable responses were finalized. The results confirm that there is a strong and positive relationship between altruistic and biospheric values and the legitimization of fashion-sharing practices, whereas hedonic values and egoistic values have shown positive but weak associations with sustainable practices. However, after mediation by social norms, egoistic values significantly influence the acceptance of fashion-sharing practices among the digital natives. The findings of this study assist stakeholders in empirically validating a value-belief model that promotes the acceptance and internalization of eco-friendly fashion practices, while also indicating valuable implications for corporations, practitioners, and policymakers.

Keywords: Generation Z, personal values, sharing practices, social norms, value-beliefs, norms theory, legitimacy

INTRODUCTION:

Digital natives as a generational cohort are frequently highlighted for their heightened awareness of environmental issues and proactive stance on sustainability. Identified as individuals born after the widespread adoption of digital technologies, their decision-making processes, choices, and consumption behavior are evolving rapidly due to the phenomenal growth of digital technology. Web-based interactive technology has become an indispensable part of life for young consumers (teenagers and adolescents), primarily digital natives, i.e., the segment of the population born in the digital era and living through the social media era.

Ziesemer *et al.*, (2021) highlight that the Generation Z (corresponding to digital natives) is the most environmentally conscious generation among the generational cohorts. These consumers prefer brands with a reputation for being environment-friendly (Pencarelli *et al.*, 2020) and consider ethical and environmental values, while making responsible consumption decisions (Valencia *et al.*, 2025). Digital natives, due to factors ranging from convenience (Whalen *et al.*, 2019), minimal or no ownership costs, facilitation of exchange by digital platforms (Wirtz *et al.*, 2019), and concern for the environment (Prieto *et al.*, 2022) etc are becoming a regular user of the sharing economy practices ranging from the platform-facilitated peer-to-peer exchange, co-ownership, on-demand access, rentals, bartering, and purchasing pre-owned fashion products (Lindblom and

Lindblom, 2017). Simultaneously, they are the largest market segment for the fashion industry, critiqued for its unsustainable practices.

Fashion industry has been consistently critiqued for their negative impact on the environment. Their manufacturing processes requiring toxic chemical dyes, marketing communication exhort frequent buying leading to evolution of fast fashion concept. It has been estimated that 1500 gallons of water is required for manufacturing a single piece of denim. Therefore, these anti-environment practices have led to increasing calls for their regulation by the consumers. In response to such growing criticism, the fashion industry is adopting various measures and practices to mitigate their negative impact on the environment including promoting sustainable fashion-sharing practices among the digital natives.

The present study is focused on India since Indian consumers are ranked high on environmental consciousness (Patel *et al.*, 2017). India is emerging as a pioneer market for nature-friendly fashion on the strength of its young population. Chaturvedi *et al.* (2020) estimate that 45 percent of the Indian population is under 25, comprising Generation Z consumers. Therefore, it is imperative that while formulating marketing strategies for Indian consumers, fashion companies research the values and belief systems of Indian digital natives since, as Jain (2021) discovered, they vary significantly from those of their Western counterparts. Accordingly, the study aims to explore the influence of social norms and personal values (altruistic, biospheric, egoistic, and hedonic) on

legitimizing sustainable fashion-sharing practices of digital natives. To meet the aforesaid purpose, the following RQ's have been framed:

RQ1: How do personal values impact the legitimization of sustainable sharing fashion practices among digital natives?

RQ2: Do social norms mediate the relationship between personal values and legitimization of fashion-sharing practices among digital natives?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

Digital natives are individuals born in or after 1995 (Reid *et al.*, 2023). This generational cohort assimilates and processes information in a radically different manner compared to earlier generations. These consumers were born amongst gadgets and digital technology and hence have developed frenzied text minds, due to which they think differently. Their social contacts are radically different than earlier generations. There are a few empirical studies regarding the motivation of digital natives in the sharing economy (Duffet, 2020), this market segment has the ideal characteristics required for becoming the drivers of sharing economy practices due to their tech-savvy and digital nature (Kim and Park, 2020). Kapferer (2018) describes them as advocates of nature-friendly sharing and collaborative economy practices.

'Fashion' has been denoted as a product of consumption, materialism, commercialization, and marketing. The term 'fashion' transcends the material need for apparel to protect consumers from the weather and their modesty. It is 'consumed' for its symbolic function and as an identity creator rather than for material functions. Thus, there is a profoundly social nature of fashion, where the user is affected by the decisions and actions of others. Through certain 'fashion' items, consumers tend to satisfy their psychological needs of acceptance and participation in their peer group(s), affection, and individualistic identity (Neerattiparambil and Belli, 2020).

The fashion today is associated with customised products with the choices and preferences of users, enabling a diversity of styles based on shared beliefs, cultural symbols, and consumer experiences. Accordingly, fashion brands adhering to consumers' demands transform their strategies into sustainable fashion practices. This transition towards sustainability is being adopted by fashion companies ranging from luxury designer houses like Gucci, Prada, and Burberry to streetwear brands like HandM.

Based on previous studies (Sandberg, 2021), the authors postulate that sharing practices as an alternative form of consumption are environment-friendly and, hence, should be acceptable to digital natives. Globally, too sharing practices within the fashion industry are becoming popular. Sharing practices in the fashion industry can refer to services like swapping, renting, and platform-mediated exchange instead of purchasing new products. The increasing eco-consciousness and green mindset among consumers, particularly young consumers, has motivated the fashion industry to deploy these sustainable sharing services (Yang *et al.*, 2024).

Furthermore, Gen Z is socially more communicative, open to collaboration (Kobul, 2022), and secure in their identity based on relationships instead of possessions (Tabassum *et al.*, 2020). Davlembayeva *et al.* (2020) opined that personal values drive the beliefs, attitudes, and consumption / reflection behaviour of digital natives toward participation in sharing practices and, hence, need to be studied in detail.

The generational cohort theory suggests that individuals experiencing similar events, irrespective of their political, economic, technological, and social nature, develop similar values, beliefs, and behavioural patterns (Črešnar and Nedelko, 2020). Global events like climate change, the proliferation of social network sites (SNS), social media marketing and new digital channels for short, 15-second communication platforms like Instagram Reels, TikTok, and other instant connectivity methods (e.g., Threads, X) have created unique value systems among consumers (Brännback *et al.*, 2017). These evolving value systems create behavioural patterns unique for different generations (Dastane and Haba, 2023). These universal occurrences provide the defining and distinguishing moments for identifying different generations.

Indian Generation Z too has been exposed to global products, practices, and processes, which has led to the evolution of their value systems (Jain, 2021) and influenced their choices and consumption decisions (Patel *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, the study of digital natives transcends the need to identify their current consumption or reflection behaviour and seeks to gain insights into their future behaviours due to the interaction of global events with their values, mediated by prevailing social norms. The consumption of fashion products and apparel is one such behavioural trait, significantly affected by social networking, fast fashion trends, and the desire to stand out. This behavioural trait is widely prevalent among Generation Z (Roy *et al.*, 2018; Varma *et al.*, 2024)

In accepting shared consumption, individuals' values, attitudes, norms, and habitual behaviours have been identified as significant inhibitors (Zollo, 2024) (Barnes and Mattsson, 2016). Therefore, these factors must be studied to mitigate their adverse effects and promote sustainable fashion consumption practices among digital natives (Cárdaba *et al.*, 2023). The need to research these attributes in Indian digital natives becomes significantly important since India is home to almost one-fifth (1/5th) of young consumers. Secondly, previous studies on fashion-sharing platforms are based on different cultures and countries.

Hence, the present study operationalizes sustainable fashion sharing as allowing desirous consumers (digital natives) access to fashion products through an eco-friendly method. These practices range from renting the apparel, co-ownership, subscribing for short durations, sharing, and purchasing pre-owned garments, also referred to as pre-loved fashion in literature (Agrawal *et al.*, 2022). While there have been studies (e.g., Machiraju and Sadachar, 2014) on the impact of values on consumer behaviour, in the context of sustainable fashion consumption practices, the influence of personal values is still to be understood in clear terms (Stringer *et al.*, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study is based on the *Value-Belief-Norm* (VBN) theory, which suggests that an individual's personal values, beliefs, and norms play a crucial role in shaping pro-environmental behaviors (Stern *et al.*, 1999). VBN theory postulates that individuals with high altruistic and biospheric values are likelier to adopt environmentally sustainable behaviors, such as participating in fashion-sharing practices. This theory also highlights the role of social norms in mediating the relationship between personal values and environmental behavior, particularly in a collectivist context like India, where social expectations and group norms are particularly influential.

Though VBN has been applied widely in sustainability studies, its application to the fashion industry, specifically in the digital natives' cohort, is still underexplored. While the literature on VBN theory is expansive, the present study aims to apply the theory within a context that has received less attention. A more explicit connection between VBN theory and sustainable fashion-sharing practices could enhance the understanding of how these practices are legitimized among young consumers. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how personal values—altruistic, biospheric, egoistic, and hedonic—interact with social norms to shape the behavior of digital natives in India toward sustainable fashion consumption.

Values are prominent in consumer choices and behaviour guiding (Groot and Thøgersen, 2018). Claeys *et al.* (1995) showcased that personal values are stable constructs that direct an individual's behaviour, allowing individuals to assimilate with their surrounding ecosystem. In the same vein, Kautish *et al.* (2020) also highlights personal and social values' influence on consumer buying decisions. The enhanced impact of values in influencing consumers' pro-environment consumption behaviour has been established by Wang *et al.*, (2020). Hence, ideating from extant literature, the present research analyzes the influence of personal values, namely, altruistic, biospheric, egoistic, and hedonic values, to legitimize sustainable fashion-sharing practices among the Indian digital natives.

Altruistic values can be described as values emphasizing empathy for living beings: humans and other biological forms of life. Kiatkawaskin and Han (2017) assert that empathy motivates people to engage in eco-friendly decision-making. Researchers (e.g., Pickett-Baker and Ozaki, 2008; Yadav and Pathak, 2016) are increasingly focusing on the impact of ecological concerns as an essential determinant of consumers' buying behaviour. Several extant studies place an individual's concern for their environment as a reflection of their altruistic values (Prakash *et al.*, 2019). Piscicelli *et al.* (2015) proved that sharing consumers have stronger altruistic values than non-sharing consumers, which leads to adopting eco-friendly behaviour on the sharers' part.

Biospheric values relate to an individual's concern for the ecosystem, its inhabitants, surroundings, climate, the atmosphere, the physical environment, and flora and fauna in the natural ecosystem (Stern *et al.*, 1999).

Consumers measuring highly on biospheric values seek to minimize the harmful influence of their behaviour on the environment. They are of the firm opinion that individuals, through their actions, can mitigate the adverse effect of consumption on nature. Cohen and Kietzmann (2014) believed that increasing awareness of climate issues drives consumers to adopt environment-friendly sharing economy consumption models instead of conventional buying and consuming models.

Egoistic values are an individual's self-interest vis-a-vis society (Stern *et al.*, 1999). Thus, the self becomes paramount and can be reflected in ways including but not limited to wealth accumulation, seeking domination over others, gaining positions of authority, and being influential. Recent studies (Davlembayeva *et al.*, 2020) have extended egoistic values from the self to concern for family members. The perceived benefits to self and family in good health, longevity, and improved life quality may encourage consumers to adopt eco-friendly consumption (Verma *et al.*, 2019).

Hedonic values explain the consumers' predisposition "mainly focused on improving one's feelings and reducing effort" (Steg *et al.*, 2014, p.5). Hedonistic value is considered consumer experience in the form of pleasure derived during the purchase and consumption processes (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Hedonic orientation focuses on 'self-pleasure or gratification for oneself' and, as such, is evaluated on the perceived benefits such as enjoyment, aesthetics, and symbolic meaning due to consumption. Kozlenkova (2021) highlighted that hedonic values extend beyond mere pleasure to include symbolic consumption—encompassing the social, performative dimensions of consumption. Thus, by adopting and participating in sharing economy practices the consumers can satisfy their intrinsic need to showcase their new acquisitions (Eckhardt *et al.*, 2019).

Consumer legitimacy has been described as the "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p.574). Previous studies (Agrawal *et al.*, 2023; Autio and Thomas, 2020) equated legitimacy with social acceptance by positing that legitimacy is required for an emerging ecosystem and its organizations to grow and prosper. The dual influence of personal values and social norms reflects the broader institutional theory context in which legitimacy is granted or withheld based on individual acceptance and institutional support. Legitimacy derived from the institutional theory asserts that the new business models will seek to ensure they conform to the prevalent values and norms of society and their stakeholders. In these times of consciously aware consumers and eco-friendly behaviour, understanding how consumers internalize and accept an organization's communication, product and service is equally necessary for researchers and corporates alike (Shim *et al.*, 2018).

Labrecque *et al.* (2013) discuss the shift in acceptance of a particular process, idea, or practice from the marketer to the consumer. Generation Z is a consumer of the perceptible future (Kanchanapibul *et al.*, 2014) and is the

guardian of environmental issues (Verma and Chandra, 2018). Similarly, Ahmed *et al.* (2021) highlights the importance of accepting sustainable business practices by digital natives. Therefore, the authors have considered consumer legitimacy for sustainable fashion-sharing practices as a desirable outcome to mitigate the negative impact of fashion on the environment.

A seminal study by Rokeach (1973) arranged values in a hierarchical order and posited that individuals use social norms to adapt to emerging and evolving situations. Cialdini and Trost (1998, p. 152) defined social norms as the “ rules and standards that members of a group understand, and that guide and/or constrain social behaviour without the force of laws.” Thus, social norms can be understood as shared understanding between cohorts about desirable, non-desirable, acceptable, and compulsory behaviour within a specific context (Crawford and Ostrom, 1995). Social norms are not learned in isolation but by observing the behaviours of significant others (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2017), and socialization through various media. In the context of digital natives, socialization has accelerated due to the phenomenal growth of interactive digital technology-based social media (Vishnoi *et al.*, 2025). Social media has become an indispensable part of the life of the i-Generation, which has adopted digital advancements (James and Levin, 2015). Adopting social media channels allows the i-generation to instantly connect with their peers during shopping and gather their views. There are differences between Indian digital natives and Western digital natives’ behaviours which is stated in Table 1 based on few studies.

Table 1: A comparative analysis of Indian digital natives and Western digital natives’ behaviour

Study	Key Findings	Indian Digital Natives	Western Digital Natives (U.S. and European)
Vodanovich (2014)	Global connectivity and peer interaction in digital spaces.	Value community and family-oriented interactions online, with strong social bonds influenced by familial structures.	More likely to engage in individualistic interactions and value freedom in digital spaces.
Eng and Bogaert (2010)	Motivations and associations were found to influence luxury consumption. A significant	Indian consumers are motivated by factors such as socioeconomic status, personal values and symbolic	Consumers buy luxury brands to gain social acceptance

Study	Key Findings	Indian Digital Natives	Western Digital Natives (U.S. and European)
	moderating effect of social influence on the relationships between motivations and consumption .	meaning to purchase luxury products	
Mäntymäki and Riemer (2014)	Social influences and gratification in virtual spaces.	Exhibit strong social ties, often influenced by family or close-knit communities.	Emphasis on self-expression and personal gratification, more influenced by individual autonomy.
Gentina (2020)	Value of technology in socialization and media interaction.	Preference for collaborative and family-centric use of technology, heavily influenced by traditional values.	Engage more with technology for individual socialization and entertainment, with less emphasis on familial influences.
Hameed and Mathur (2020)	Digital native behaviors and their cultural impact.	Strong attachment to family and community; technological use often aligns with collective values.	More focused on individual self-expression and independence in digital engagements, with a stronger alignment to consumerist behaviors.
Teo and Yurdakul (2016)	Comparison of digital natives in Turkey and the U.S.	High value placed on community and familial roles, with technology reinforcing	More autonomy in digital interactions, with less emphasis on

Study	Key Findings	Indian Digital Natives	Western Digital Natives (U.S. and European)
		traditional values.	familial control.

Kautish and Sharma (2019) discuss the intention to purchase environment-friendly products and behaviours among digital natives. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence in the context of digital native consumers adopting sustainable fashion practices (Tewari *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, the extant literature (Dastane and Haba, 2023) highlights the lack of research on environmental issues and consumer behaviour and impact of social norms (Xie and Madni, 2023) among digital natives, hence, the key purpose of the study is to analyse the impact of personal values on the legitimization of sustainable sharing fashion practices among digital natives.

The review of extant literature yields the proposed model (Fig.1) and following hypotheses:

H1: Altruistic values of digital natives will lead them to legitimize sustainable fashion-sharing practices.

H2: Biospheric values of digital natives will lead them to legitimize sustainable fashion-sharing practices.

H3: Egoistic values of digital natives will lead them to legitimize sustainable fashion-sharing practices.

H4: Hedonic values of digital natives will lead them to legitimize the sustainable fashion-sharing practices.

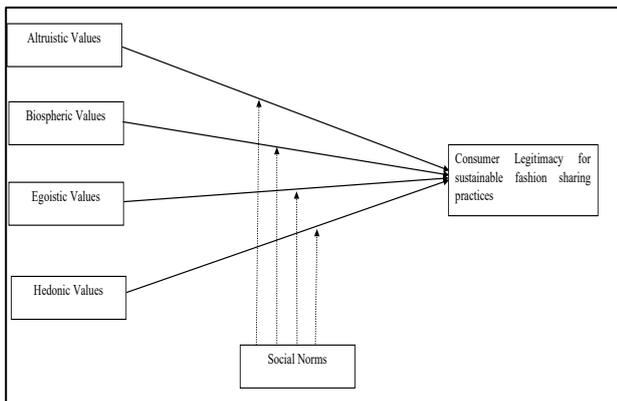
H5(a): The relationship between altruistic values and consumer legitimacy are mediated by social norms

H5(b): The relationship between biospheric values and consumer legitimacy is mediated by social norms

H5(c): The relationship between egoistic values and consumer legitimacy is mediated by social norms

H5(d): The relationship between hedonic values and consumer legitimacy is mediated by social norms.

Figure 1: Hypothesised Model



Source: Author

The authors validated the hypothesized model (Fig.1) by following the natural field approach that Barratt *et al.* (2015) recommended. This approach allows researchers to explain the variance among the constructs necessary for testing the theoretical framework.

Research methodology

The research used a structured questionnaire to understand Indian digital natives' values and the intervening impact of social norms on their intention to accord legitimacy to sustainable sharing practices in fashion industry. The questionnaire was divided into two sections – the *first section* comprised items related to personal values, social norms, and consumer legitimacy towards sustainable fashion-sharing practices. The *second section* had questions related to demographic details, preferred retail channels, and frequency of purchases by the respondents. The study adopted the existing scales to develop the survey instrument (Table 2). The constructs were measured on a points Likert scale from 1- extremely unimportant to 7 – extremely important.

S. No.	Constructs	References
1.	Altruistic values	Stern <i>et al.</i> , (1999); Kiatkawsin and Han (2017)
2.	Biospheric values	Han (2015); Kiatkawsin and Han (2017)
3.	Egoistic values	Stern <i>et al.</i> , (2000); Gilg <i>et al.</i> , (2005)
4.	Hedonic values	Steg <i>et al.</i> , (2014)
5.	Social norms	Choi <i>et al.</i> , (2015); Yadav and Pathak (2016)
6.	Consumer legitimacy	Randrianasolo and Arnold (2020)

Table 2: Constructs and Sources

Source: Author

The data was collected through structured questionnaire and questionnaires were mailed to a total of 625 undergraduate and graduate students (as a part of digital native cohort) from various universities and higher education institutions across India during September-November 2024. The authors collected the responses from the digital natives who had purchased fashion products at least once in the month (June-August 2024) preceding the survey was conducted. The response rate was 74 %, translating to 463 valid responses. Student samples were used to understand the values and behaviour of digital natives as being the most active segments in purchasing fashion apparel (Goldsmith *et al.* 2012; O’Cass and Siahtiri, 2014) and following the past studies conducted on a similar theme in the context of emerging economies (Srivastava and Balaji, 2018).

Dastane and Haba, (2023) showcased that ‘student’ is the highest searched keyword when searching for Digital natives in the Scopus database. As per their study, research on digital natives has been primarily conducted in US followed by Australia and Europe. They posit that “digital native research in the rest of the globe is still progressing slowly”. Therefore, the data collection from the cohort of Indian students seeks to address a previously under-explored area of research. The authors employed PLS-SEM as it is a causal-predictive approach that helps to analyse complex models with multiple constructs and structural paths (Dash and Paul, 2021) with a sample of 463. The minimum sample size required was derived as 244 (Hair *et al.*, 2019) using principal axis factoring (PAF) and Promax rotation principle, at significance level was assumed at 5% based on ‘value of the smallest path coefficient in the PLS path model’. The resultant data was analyzed via SPSS. Based on the valid responses, the respondents were profiled for analytical purpose. Table 3 displays the demographic profiles of the respondents.

Table 3: The Demographic Profile of the Respondents

S. No.	Respondent Particulars	Number
1.0	Demographics	363
1.1	Female	269
1.2	Male	94
2.0	Education Level	
2.1	Under-Graduates	168
2.2	Graduate	295
3.0	Frequency of Purchase (per month)	
3.1	5+	80
3.2	3-4	211
3.3	1-2	172

(Source: authors)

Results

The integrated conceptual model has been validated through the use of structural equation modelling (SEM). It is applied to examine the connections between components and variables with superior statistical analysis to satisfy the researcher's standards. SEM allows the researchers to determine the link between several independent and dependent constructs concurrently while taking moderating and mediating factors into consideration. For the purpose of this study’s data analysis, AMOS 20 software has been deployed.

The use of AMOS and SmartPLS in this study is justified by their complementary roles in SEM: AMOS for theory testing and SmartPLS for predictive analysis. This approach enhances the robustness of the findings. Recent studies often combine both methods to validate results

from different perspectives (Sarker *et al.*, 2024). Using both tools is a strategic decision, as AMOS is suited for theory testing with large models, while SmartPLS is effective in exploratory research and predictive modeling.

Table 4 showcases that the required measurements are within the parameters as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2012). The recommended value depends on the sample size taken for the analysis as well. The authors have used the CFA single-factor model to detect the potential problem of common method bias in the dataset. In a single-factor CFA model, all the measured or manifest variables for each latent construct were grouped together. Consistent with recent behavioral science studies employing Harman's single-factor test (Aguirre-Urreta and Hu, 2019), the authors applied the test to align with the broader methodological framework for ensuring data validity and addressing potential biases (Kock, 2024). Harman's single-factor test indicated that the covariance for a single component is 26% (i.e., less than 50%), thereby showcasing that CMB is not significantly relevant in the study. Secondly, since no interconstruct correlations were found to be greater than 0.90, it indicates that CMB was not a concern.

Table 4: Research Model-fit Measurements

Measure	Estimate	Threshold	Interpretation
CMIN	949.391	--	--
DF	805	--	--
CMIN/DF	1.179	Between 1 and 3	Within range
CFI	0.966	>0.95	Within range
SRMR	0.037	<0.08	Within range
RMSEA	0.078	<0.06	Within range
NFI	0.900	--	Accepted
TLI	0.975	--	Accepted
GFI	0.948	--	Accepted
AGFI	0.037	--	Accepted

His study's validity might be affected by the respondents' behavior, known as socially desirable responding (SDR), while filling out the survey. Hence, prior to filling out the survey, the researchers assured the respondents that their replies would be collected anonymously, no identifiable personal details would be collected, and all the information would be aggregated, kept confidential, and used exclusively for academic purposes, thereby encouraging them to complete the survey. Further, since the survey was online and self-administered, the respondents could fill it out as per their convenience and in solitude, thereby reducing the effect of social desirability bias (Table 5).

Table 5: Reliability and Discriminant Validity

	C R	A V E	M S V	Max R(H)	Pers onal valu es	So cia l no rm s	Legiti macy
Personal Values	0.899	0.641	0.206	0.901	0.801		
Social norms	0.823	0.608	0.206	0.826	0.454** *	0.779	
Legitimacy	0.977	0.796	0.031	0.981	0.177** *	0.125*	0.892

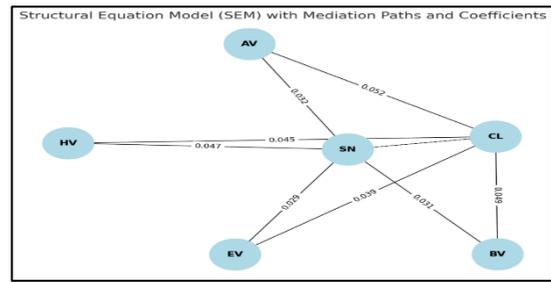
According to Hair *et al.* (2012), after confirming that the latent variable/construct measures of the research are consistent as well as valid, at that time, the next step is to address the assessment of the structural model's outcomes. This process includes the model's predictive, analytical capabilities and the relations between all the constructs. The test was done by Smart PLS 3.3.6 software (Table 6).

Table 6: Hypotheses Testing and Validation

Hypothesis	Relationships	Std.	Std.	T	P
		Beta	Error	Values	Values
H1	AV → CL	0.152	0.052	3.114	**
H2	BV → CL	0.167	0.049	5.453	***
H3	EV → CL	0.028	0.039	1.890	NS
H4	HV → CL	0.067	0.045	4.648	**
H5(a)	AV → SN → CL	0.438	0.032	6.584	***
H5(b)	BV → SN → CL	0.357	0.031	6.182	***
H5(c)	EV → SN → CL	0.214	0.029	4.961	***
H5(d)	HV → SN → CL	0.186	0.047	5.207	***

Note: *Indicates significant paths: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, NS = not significant

Figure 2: Final Results and Relationship



The results are shown in Table 6 and graphically presented in Fig. 2. Table 6 showcases the hypothesized path, estimates, Standardized Estimates (SE), z-value, p-value, and significance levels. The research finds a strong, positive relationship between altruistic and biospheric values and the legitimization of fashion-sharing practices. Hedonic values have a positive but weak association with legitimizing sharing practices. Table 6 shows an analysis of mediation effects. Social norms have a positive mediation effect on personal values and consumer legitimacy. As is evident, even the egoistic values, which directly had an insignificant relationship with the legitimacy granting behaviour (H3), the mediation by social norms strengthens the relationship (H5c). The effect of hedonic values too strengthens in relation with social norms.

Discussion

Barnes and Mattsson (2016) identified an individual's principal values, attitudes, norms, and habitual behaviors as major impediments to shared consumption. Therefore, the present study adopts the values-beliefs-norms theory to understand digital natives’ values and the role of social norms in legitimizing sustainable fashion-sharing practices (internal acceptance).The study theorizes that digital natives are expected to behave favorably towards sustainable fashion, provided they grant legitimacy to the sharing pra

The present study contributes to the literature by (i) studying the consumer legitimization of Indian digital natives towards sustainable fashion practices and (ii) provthat the the egoistic values of the digital natives are non-significant in the context of sustainbehavior.our. The positive impact of social norms can be discussed through the very nature of the sharing practice, wherein the users are willing to barter, rent, or share their pre-loved products with other similarly inclined consumers.

Thomas and Autio (2020) posited that the acceptance of any practice is determined by the number of adopters, their interrelationships, and the nature of these relationships, where a higher number of adopters leads to greater legitimacy. These relationships will be mediated by social norms since communities of adopters affect the social ethos, validating Han (2023). Globally consumers understand and adopt access-based services (Fritze *et al.*, 2020); they are increasingly likely to legitimize the fashion-sharing practices by renting, allowing co-ownership, or buying second-hand apparel. The understanding of digital natives' motivation to accept and adopt sustainable fashion trends and green-practices is

useful for apparel manufacturers, retailers, and prospective entrepreneurs. They can devise strategies and business models for profitable business ventures. The findings of this present study assist the stakeholders with empirically validating a value-belief model towards acceptance and internalization of environment-friendly fashion practices. The study shows that the consumers have legitimized the various sustainable practices.

Further, the platforms (Luxury Closet, Uber Lux, and Rent the Runway) and retailers should be conscious of the evolving social norms. These platforms provide spaces for collective behavior to emerge, where social norms can be strengthened or challenged by users' shared practices, values, and interactions. Zollo (2024) asserts that these platforms, through consistent engagement and interaction within their ecosystems, play a role in shaping and reinforcing social norms over time. Hence, the fashion-sharing platforms keen to gain consumer legitimacy for their business models should focus on adhering to the prevailing norms, be mindful of any changes in them, and adjust their marketing communication and offerings accordingly. Understanding the impact of social norms will ensure practitioners can design their offerings, communication, and marketing strategies to increase the consumer internalization of sustainable practices.

Stakeholders in the fashion industry within the context of Indian digital natives can gain advantageous insights by recognizing the limited influence of an individual's hedonic values on fashion-sharing practices. The respondents do not feel the intense emotions represented by hedonic values while purchasing secondhand apparel. Hence, companies need to embed the spirit of hedonism in their products/services. This can be done by building an exciting narrative around the pre-loved products in promotional campaigns, increasing the consumer's involvement through explaining about voluntary, conscious lifestyles, i.e., adopting their lifestyle towards a less materialistic world, thereby leading to a better and healthier/greener planet for the future generations (Prasadh and Suresh, 2016). These measures will increase adaptability, resulting in the acceptability of sustainable fashion practices. The mediation of egoistic values by social norms suggests that digital natives' concerns about their self-interest such as personal image and social status are increasingly shaped by the prevailing social norms. Specifically, in the context of sustainable fashion-sharing, the motivation to adopt such behaviors is no longer based solely on personal benefit but is reinforced by the desire to conform to social expectations (Yang *et al.*, 2024). This aligns with research on social conformity and image signaling, where individuals adjust their behaviors to align with the norms of their social groups to signal their social identity (Huh and Kim, 2024).

The fashion industry has been alleged to be averse to being sustainable environmentally and socially. The industry is accused of increasing conspicuous consumption, exhibiting conspicuous wealth, prioritizing personal gratification over societal welfare, engaging in ostentation, and resisting external normative pressures. The acceptance of sustainable fashion practices by digital

natives will assist in overcoming negative psychological perceptions among the masses. The study focuses on the values-belief system of Indian digital natives, excluding demographic controls such as gender, income, and place of residence (urban/rural), as these fall outside the scope of the current investigation. Future research could enhance the model by incorporating these variables to explore their impact on the mediation of social norms in the values-legitimacy relationship. Additionally, Indian digital natives represent a diverse cohort; future studies could further explore socioeconomic stratification, regional cultural differences, and access disparities within this group.

Future studies can examine the model in specific practices like car sharing, knowledge sharing, accommodation sharing, etc. Further, future researchers can analyze consumer behavior on digital platforms. Such an exploration will offer observations about the consumer psyche during their decision-making process regarding sustainable fashion practices. Finally, the present framework of integrating the VBN theory with the institutional theory can be enriched by adding and examining new variables like materialism, warm glow, mindful consumption, and environmental commitment.

Conclusion

The research purpose of investigating the impact of an individual digital native generational cohort's personal value system on the acceptance of sustainable sharing fashion practices has been achieved in this study. The current research is in response to the fashion industry's adoption of access-based business models and their need to understand the behavior of young consumers, who are one of the captive customer segments in the apparel industry. By focusing exclusively on digital natives' values and behavior, the research, through an integrated model of personal values, social norms, and their impact on the consumer legitimation process, finds that the altruistic, biospheric, and hedonic values have a direct relationship with eco-friendly fashion sharing practices; thus, they remain unaffected by the prevailing social norms. However, egoistic and hedonic values require the mediation of social norms to allow the digital native to accept fashion-sharing practices.

Further, the research highlights the alternative business models for the fashion industry, based on the consumer acceptance of sustainable fashion practices. In conclusion, young consumers (Gen Z) in India are increasingly aware of their environmental responsibility and are likely to prefer eco-friendly products and green business practices. Consequently, the fashion industry must adopt alternative business models aligned with consumer values to ensure sustainable growth.

Declarations:

Conflict of interest: On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest...

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