

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Despite affinity for slow fashion, consumers unwilling to pay up: report

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*Although consumers shop with a brand's ethics in mind, the gap between their intentions and actions remains wide. Image credit: Shutterstock*

By AMIAH TAYLOR

Consumer searches for clothing companies with ethical practices have skyrocketed, but actual patronage of said brands still lags, per a new study from Australian price comparison website, [Compare the Market](#).

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The organization has found that from 2015 to 2020, global Google searches for the term "sustainable fashion" climbed exponentially, reflecting a 460 percent increase. While a mere 101,800 people were looking for sustainable clothing in 2015, a more significant 570,500 searched for the term in 2020.

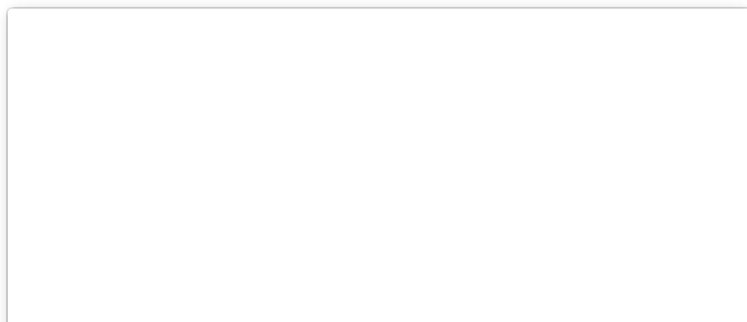
"We have all been a part of a business model built on exploitation; t-shirts should not cost \$5," said Bronwyn King, ethical campaigner and CEO at [Tobacco Free Portfolios](#), in a statement.

"It is time for productive dialogue with brands," she said. "We need to urge them to take human rights and workers' rights into consideration when they map out their supply chain."

### Ethical concerns

While the overall public consciousness regarding abuse and unfair working conditions in the garment industry has risen 52 percent of customers want more ethical clothing only 29 percent would pay more for sustainably-made equivalents, according to a Nosto [report](#).

The concern for ethical clothing is there, with higher rates of ethical contemplation in certain countries.



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A post shared by Good On You: ethical fashion (@goodonyou..

*The U.K.'s Good On You provides an analysis of fast fashion brands' environmental impact*

When Compare the Market surveyed adults from Australia, Canada and America on areas of regarding fashion, 61.6 percent of Australians said they were concerned about how ethically sourced their clothes are, as compared to 59.6 percent of Canadians. Americans ranked lowest on this front, at 47.1 percent.

Although there are ethical concerns present, the gap between intention and action remains clear.

A mere 18.3 percent of Australians said that they always actively avoid non-sustainable fashion.

Sentiment stateside was, again, less intense. Only 13.9 percent of Americans are actively moving towards sustainable fashion.



*An infographic from the group lists eco-friendly lifestyle optimizations. Image credit: Compare the Market*

As to why ethical clothing can cost more, there are several factors at play, including the cost of materials and labor, as well as retail markups.

Experts have identified several ways to make ethical fashion choices. This includes purchasing eco-friendly fabrics, repairing, reusing and recycling items, shopping locally and doing due diligence on the sustainability platforms and supply chain conditions of the brands one chooses to support.

**Be weary of greenwashing**

One significant barrier to purchasing ethical clothing besides cost is the smoke and mirrors around the level of legitimacy surrounding self-appointed and so-called sustainable brands.

Fashion companies often engage in a practice known as greenwashing. Deliberately misinformative in nature, greenwashing occurs when a brand displays public-facing pledges or branding that appear climate-friendly, but in actuality, do not fit the criteria for an eco-friendly initiative.

For example, consumers increasingly distrust "clean beauty", an area of the personal care industry that touts

transparency when it comes to ingredients and the environmental impact of its production efforts. Customers today, though, are able to see through these commerce shields, quickly identifying when brands are being disingenuous in marketing ([see story](#)).

It is also crucial for brands to stay cognizant of which consumers are leading the pack in terms of ethical shopping. With Gen Z's buying power expected to reach \$33 trillion by 2033, this cohort has a rapidly growing influence on how brands go to market.

According to a 2022 insights report from marketing agency Adolescent Content, 78 percent of Gen Zers are skeptical of brand commitments to equity, diversity and sustainability. To foster a mutually beneficial relationship with Gen Z consumers, brands must recognize their weaknesses, realign their values with today's consumers and reimagine what it means to be a brand that can withstand shifting cultural tides ([see story](#)).

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