



DRIVING EFFECTIVE BEHAVIOR CHANGE FOR SUSTAINABLE, BETTER AND SIMPLE LIVING

India's Youth Lifestyles Report

2021

Contact

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Disclaimer: This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the SWITCH-Asia Regional Policy Advocacy Component and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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Abbreviations

AIT	Asian Institute of Technology
CNG	Compressed Natural Gas
EU	European Union
ESG	Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RPAC	Regional Policy Advocacy Component
SCP	Sustainable Consumption and Production
TERI SAS	TERI School of Advanced Studies
TERI	The Energy and Resources Institute
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

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1. Background

By 2030, the global middle class is expected to reach 5.3 billion people, implying an addition of two billion people with increased purchasing power than today. Most of this growth is expected in Asia with a paramount representation of middle-class population and consumption from China and India. While this may be construed as the driver for economic development, changes in consumer behaviour and consumption patterns are expected to increase demand for food, water, and energy by approximately 35%, 40% and 50% respectively by 2030 ¹.

India has the world's largest youth population², and they have the potential to transform the production and consumption of goods and services by making conscious and informed choices in their daily lifestyles, shifting to more sustainable buying patterns, limiting waste, and leading technological innovation to foster a resource-efficient economy and equitable society. Whether it is food, fashion, transport or tourism, the decision behind these seemingly tiny choices affects the overall sustainability for the future. This task has also been outlined in the 2030 Agenda. The Sustainable Development Goal 12, referred to as Responsible Consumption and Production, which calls for an urgency to “reduce our ecological footprint by changing the way we consume and produce goods” ³(UNDP).

The current phenomenon of 'unsustainability' essentially denotes a cultural system marked by inconsiderate overconsumption and for the public, the concept of sustainability, presents itself as a technical and scientific solution which is difficult to achieve. Thus, it is important to view sustainability as a cultural revolution in our lifestyles, value systems and worldview to bring about transformational change. Youth have the true power to mobilize and lead this shift in culture and give way to better practices that embody awareness about the outcomes of our actions. Consumers have a vital role to play in the transition towards more sustainable patterns of development and the Millennials will play a key role enabling this transition.

In this context, the activity titled, “Engagement and dialogue with youth on Sustainable Lifestyles in India” was organized as a collective effort to promote sustainable lifestyles under the SWITCH-Asia Regional Policy Advocacy Component (RPAC) funded by the European Union (EU) in partnership with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and TERI School of Advanced

¹ https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/topic/growing-consumerism/more-developments-relevant-growing-consumerism_en

² <https://india.unfpa.org/en/topics/young-people-12>

³ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-consumption-production/>

Studies (SAS). The activity was designed to understand the youth lifestyles in India in key sectors for driving positive behavioural change and switching to simple and sustainable living.

2. Objective

The overall objective of the activity was to understand the landscape and triggers for enhancing youth awareness on sustainable consumption and lifestyles in India through various engagements including a survey, workshops, social media, and youth dialogue. In line with this main objective, the specific objectives were:

- To engage with youth and their peer groups to identify the barriers (personal/cultural) and enabling solutions that will encourage transformation towards sustainable lifestyles.
- To showcase and share impactful yet easily implementable solutions/actions that can bring about radical changes in the way we consume as a society.

3. Methodology

A mixed approach was adopted to identify youth perception and awareness of sustainable lifestyles and how they relate this to their daily actions, the factors that influence their decision making, recognition of the relation between their lifestyle/consumption pattern and environment/human rights/social issues, barriers in adoption and drivers of change. Four key sectors namely food, fashion, travel, and tourism were chosen for detailed investigation.

Following activities were undertaken in a one-month engagement with youth across different geographies in India:

Questionnaire Survey

A questionnaire-based survey was circulated through e-mail and social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn and was open for responses for a period of ten days (from 21-29 October 2021). The questionnaire aimed to collect both quantitative and qualitative responses to assess the prevailing lifestyle preferences among the youth with respect to the realm of sustainability. The survey contained questions related to the thematic areas of food, fashion, tourism and transportation.

Target Group: The survey was open to individuals in the age group of 18-35 years across India. The majority of the participants were reached through university networks and were students or research scholars in varied academic domains.

Survey Outline: The questionnaire containing 31 questions was prepared to collect data on the following areas from the target group -

- Day-to-day or usual behaviour with respect to consumption in the sectors outlined
- Youth's priorities as consumers
- Awareness about sustainability
- Propensity to change behaviour to align with sustainable practices
- Accessibility/uptake of sustainable alternatives

Twitter Chat

Two tweet chats of one hour duration each were organized around causes close to young people's hearts to engage in a dialogue with the social media savvy youth. The involvement of youth in sustainable development is a topic that is being increasingly brought up in the global arena. Yet, there remains a lack of adequate inclusivity for their diverse opinions and personal experiences. The topics, 'Youth on charting pathways to sustainability' and 'Youth on overcoming barriers to making sustainable transitions' were discussed through prompts posted at regular intervals. The Chat was kept in the evening to attract greater participation.

Youth Dialogue

Two youth dialogues on 'Sustainable Lifestyles in India' focusing on the four key sectors food, fashion, travel, and tourism were organized to deliberate on how the largest demography in India is making lifestyle choices, their awareness about sustainable lifestyle practices, barriers in adoption and identifying drivers of change.

Youth Workshop

An online youth workshop was conducted on the four thematic areas to share practical examples of sustainable mobility, responsible tourism, sustainable food choices and ethical fashion. The aim of the workshop was to tap into four critical areas of consumption and raise awareness on conscious consumerism among youth.

4. Findings

Youth Lifestyle Survey

A total of 245 responses were received out of which 154 were in the age group of 18-24 years, 65 in the age group of 25-30 years and 25 in the age group of 31-35 years. There were 119 male

respondents and 126 female respondents. The demographic details of the respondents can be seen in figures 1, 2 &3.

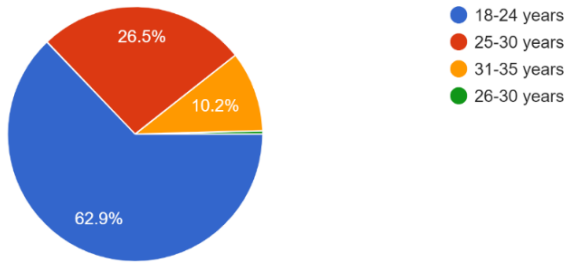


Figure 1 : Age group of the respondents

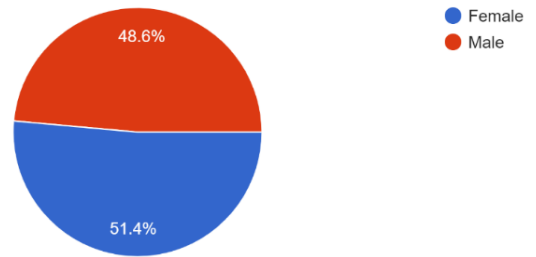


Figure 2: Gender distribution of the respondents

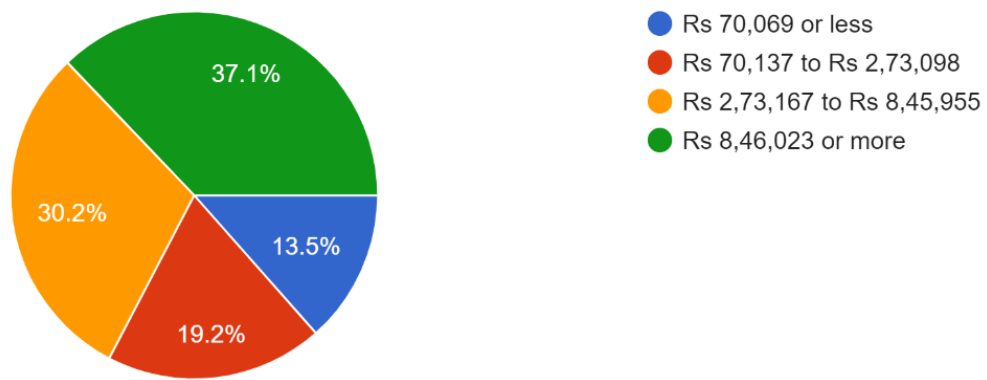


Figure 3: Income group of the respondents in INR/annum

The survey saw participation from 22 states and two union territories of India as shown in the map of India in Figure 4. Maximum participants were from the Northern belt of India, that is, from Delhi (30%), Uttar Pradesh (25%) and Haryana (8%). The participants' location also reflected a mix of tier-one, two and three cities/towns and hence, the responses accordingly provided a diversity of lifestyle patterns and practices prevalent amongst Indian youth with respect to the four sectors food, fashion, travel, and tourism.

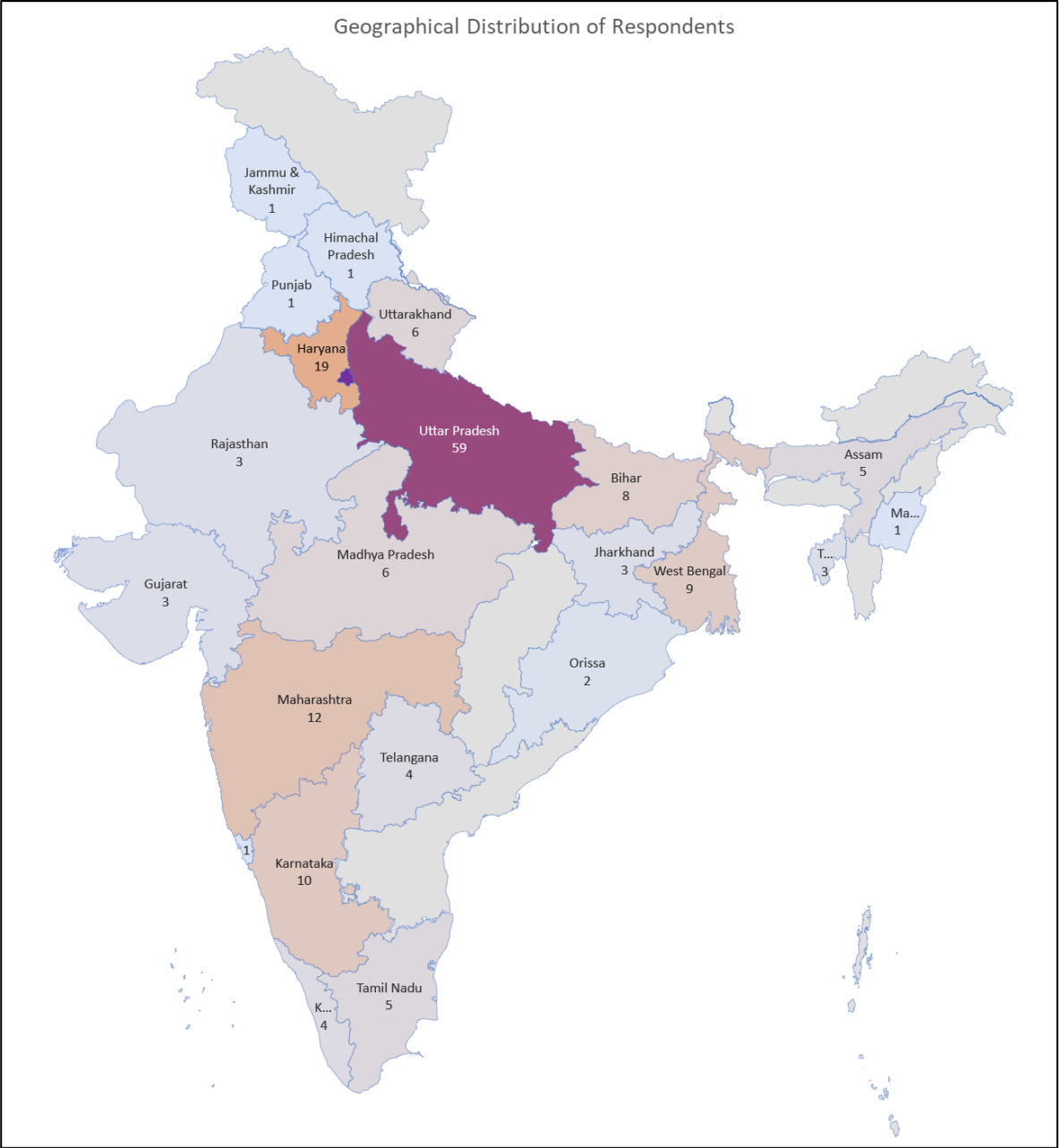


Figure 4: Geographical distribution of the respondents

The participants represented a diverse range of occupations. The responses recorded were salaried employee, student, government, freelancer, private sector employee, manager at not-for-profit, self-employed, programme manager, analyst, environmentalist, research scientist, development professional, chartered accountant, lawyer, graphic designers, and education professional.

4.1.1 Food

The respondents were asked six questions on their food choices and related behaviour. The diet preferences of the respondents are shown in Figure 5.

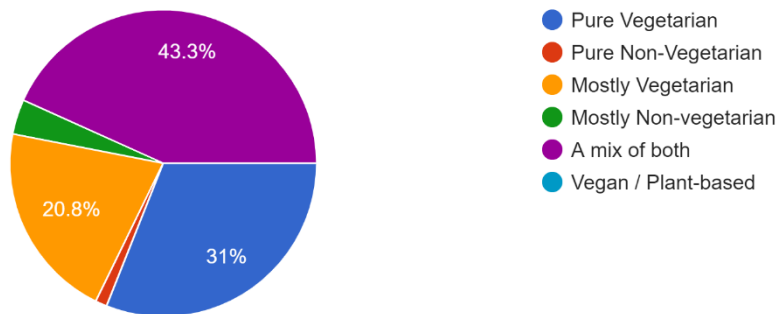


Figure 5 : Diet preferences of the respondents

As is evident from Figure 5, a mixed diet with both vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian items was the most preferred food among the youth. Out of the 51.8% of the respondents who preferred either pure vegetarian food or were mostly vegetarian, 60% were female respondents. There was no one among the respondents who consumed for Vegan food. Only three participants in the survey mentioned that they were pure non-vegetarian.

The survey participants were asked to rate their preference for home cooked traditional or continental food versus purchased. The results are shown in Figure 6. The participants mostly preferred the traditional food prepared at home. 43% of the respondents, mostly students, also showed medium preference for the purchased traditional food. In case of Non-traditional or continental food the responses were nearly identical. There is medium preference for continental in both the homemade and purchased categories.

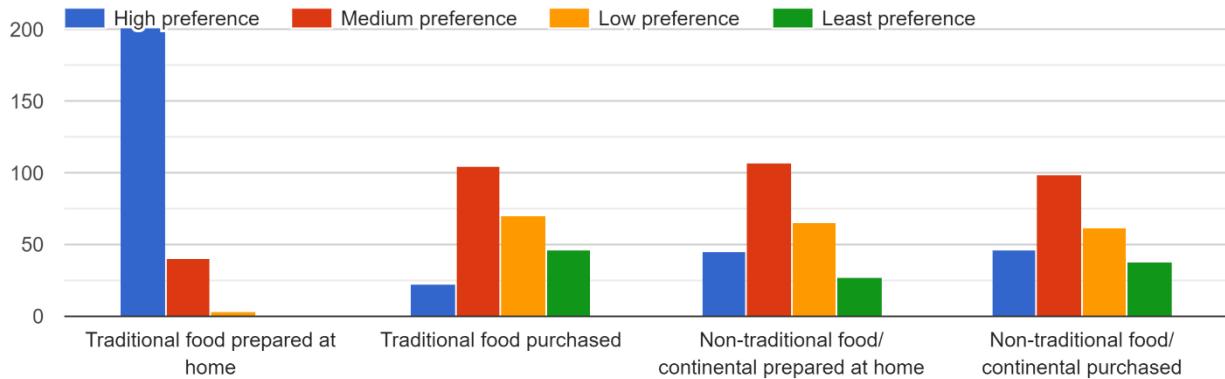


Figure 6: Preference for home cooked traditional or continental food versus purchased food

With use of exotic ingredients gaining popularity in Indian food items, the participants were asked about their preference for such ingredients. As seen in Figure 7, most participants showed preference for local ingredients. All the 39.6% respondents who preferred exotic ingredients were from the highest income bracket of INR 8 lakh and above.

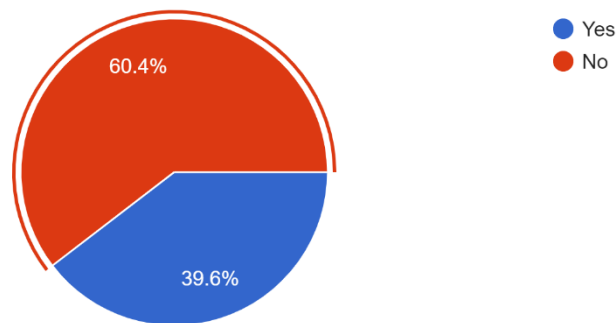


Figure 7: Preference for exotic ingredients in food

Now-a-days the online food ordering applications like Swiggy and Zomato have become an easy-to-use tool and are being used extensively by youth in India. The survey also investigated how frequently people order in food. The responses, as shown in Figure 8, indicate the popularity of ordering in food among the youth. However, a quarter of the respondents from the lower income bracket mentioned that they never order food from outside.

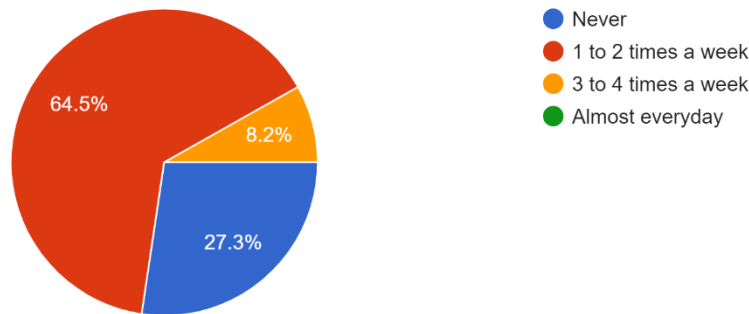


Figure 8: Frequency of ordering in food among youth

Among the 4R (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Refuse) concept, 'Refuse' is one of the vital R for advocating sustainable behaviour. Responses were also sought on things which the youth checks while ordering in.

Among the respondents, 70.2% stated that they look for no plastic bag and cutlery, 12.2% said that they check for locally grown ingredients. 9% mentioned that they do not specifically look out for anything. Other options that youth look out for while ordering food were price, restaurant review, no cutlery, low fat, rating, nutrition value and food quality.

Globally around 35% of the food gets wasted either at the producer level or at the consumer level⁴ while more than 800 million people still go hungry⁵. We tried to understand what people do with the leftover food. The responses are shown in Figure 9.

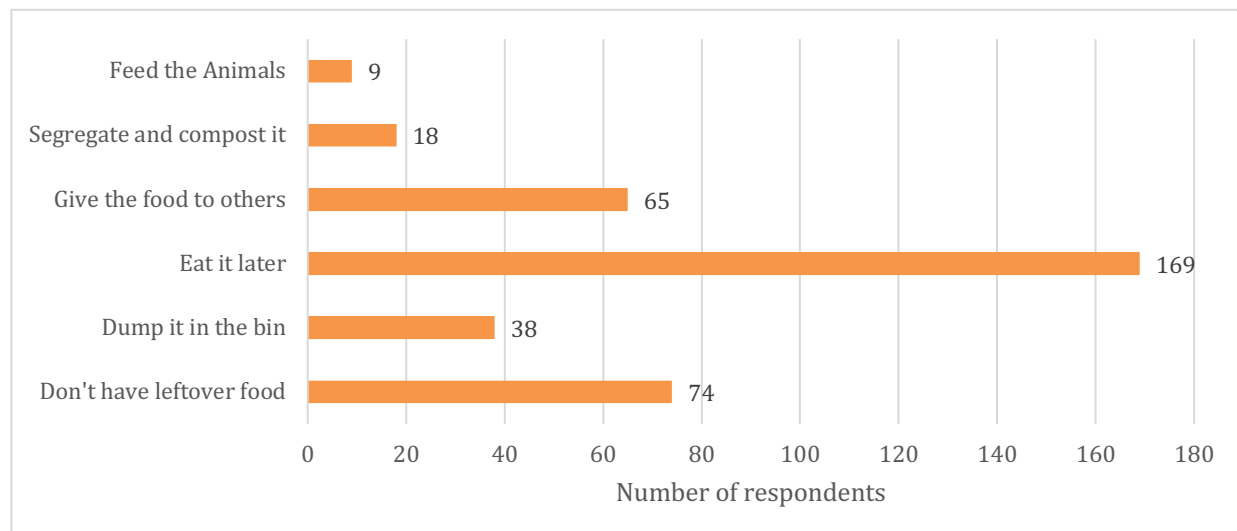


Figure 9: What does youth do to the leftover food?

⁴ <https://www.unep.org/thinkeatsave/get-informed/worldwide-food-waste>

⁵ <https://www.fao.org/food-loss-and-food-waste/flw-data>

Most of the respondents chose to eat the leftover food later. Only about 7% of the participants use it to make compost and about 15.5% dump it in the bin. Overall, the respondents showed a positive behaviour towards minimizing waste and reusing leftovers.

4.1.2 Fashion

The popularity of fast fashion has resulted in increase in consumerism among youth. Through the survey, an attempt was made to understand the prevailing attitudes of youth regarding their awareness about sustainable and ethical fashion.

The first question investigated the frequency of purchasing, to help understand the level of pervasiveness of the fast fashion culture. The results are shown in Figure 10.

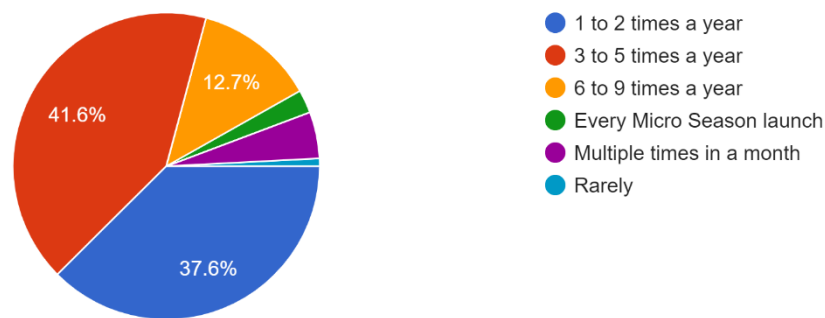


Figure 10: Frequency of purchase

The responses brought out the prevalent consumerism and preference for compliance to the latest fashion in the market. Nearly 79% of the respondents mentioned that they buy between 1 to 5 times in a year. 31 respondents mentioned that they buy 6 to 9 times in a year and another 5% of the respondents mentioned that they buy multiple times a month.

Lately, large number of fashion brands have started attaching ecolabels to the clothes to help consumers make an informed decision. A question was asked on consciousness among average young consumer about eco-friendly or sustainable production of the item.

The whopping number of respondents being unmindful of checking the ecolabels as indicated in Figure 11 can be attributed to the **lack of awareness** and **indifference** towards the environmental footprint of the product. Thus, it is evident that sustainability in production as well as of the product composition does not have any significant bearing on the consumer decisions.

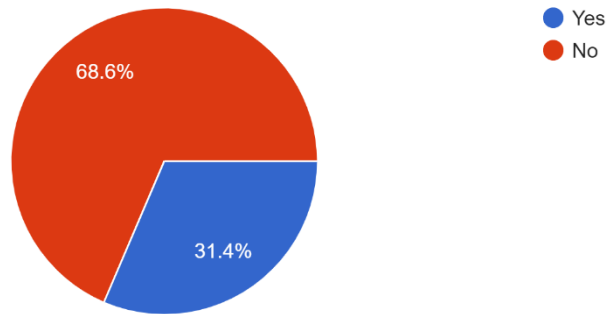


Figure 11: Checking of ecolabels while purchasing

We further found out from 31.4% of the respondents who check the labels as to what do they specifically verify before making a purchasing decision.



Figure 12: What do people check while buying clothes?

The above word cloud represents some of the items in the labels checked by the respondents as the reasons behind their decisions. The **environmental sustainability** of the products dominated

the responses with consumers checking for materials (preferred cotton over synthetics), **safe disposal/recycling**, resources used etc. Yet, there were other responses as well such as the country of origin and **transparency** of the company in terms of workers employed, **abuse of animals, fair wages** etc. Many also relied on recognized eco-labels and would go for known brands as well. Lastly, price and affordability were also cited as driving factors.

The awareness among the respondents about sustainable fashion and clothing is shown in Figure 13.

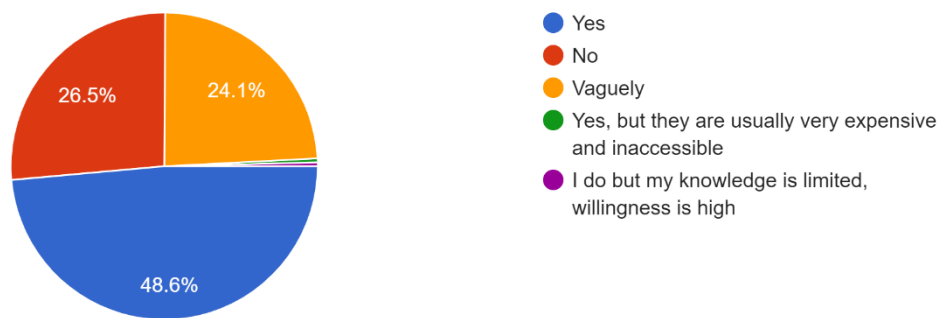


Figure 13: Awareness about conscious/sustainable fashion and clothing

48.6% (119) respondents of which 67% were female, stated that they are familiar with sustainable fashion and clothing. However, approximately 50% of the respondents were either not aware or vaguely knew about it. A very small percentage expressed that they have limited knowledge about sustainable fashion and are willing to learn and that sustainable fashion is expensive.

The responses to the factors that influence buying decision (apparel, accessories, cosmetics) among youth are shown in Figure 14.

Affordability and **quality** were the main criteria which influenced buying decision. Brand name and ethical factors like cruelty free and organic were other aspects that shaped youth buying decision. Trans-seasonal designs came in last and reflected how the given set of respondents weren't necessarily driven by a change in trends and designs and hence, did not feel the need to keep up with them.

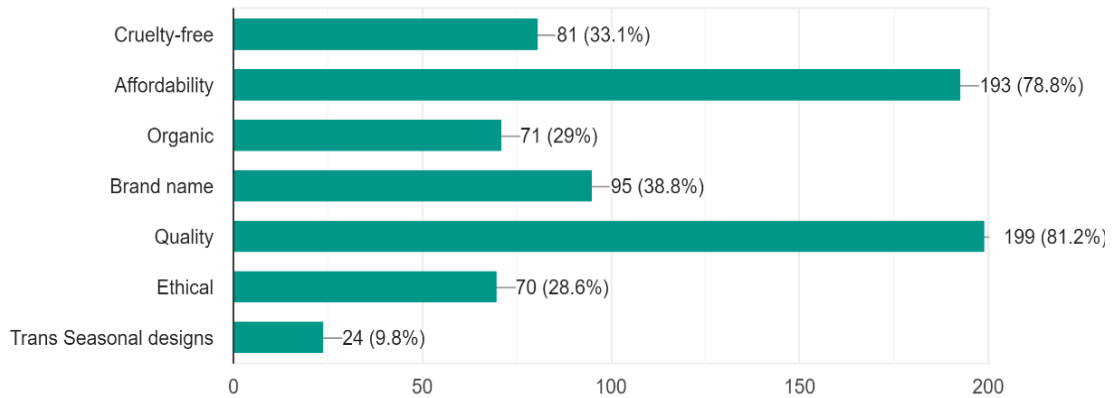


Figure 14: Factors influencing buying decision

Taking care of the clothes or the upkeep and maintenance required to increase the longevity of the product is an often-overlooked factor while talking about the sustainability in fashion. This increases its value to the consumer and reduces the frequency at which the products are disposed of. Furthermore, it's one of the most significant steps that the buyer has control over. The responses to the question on taking care of clothes are shown in Figure 15.

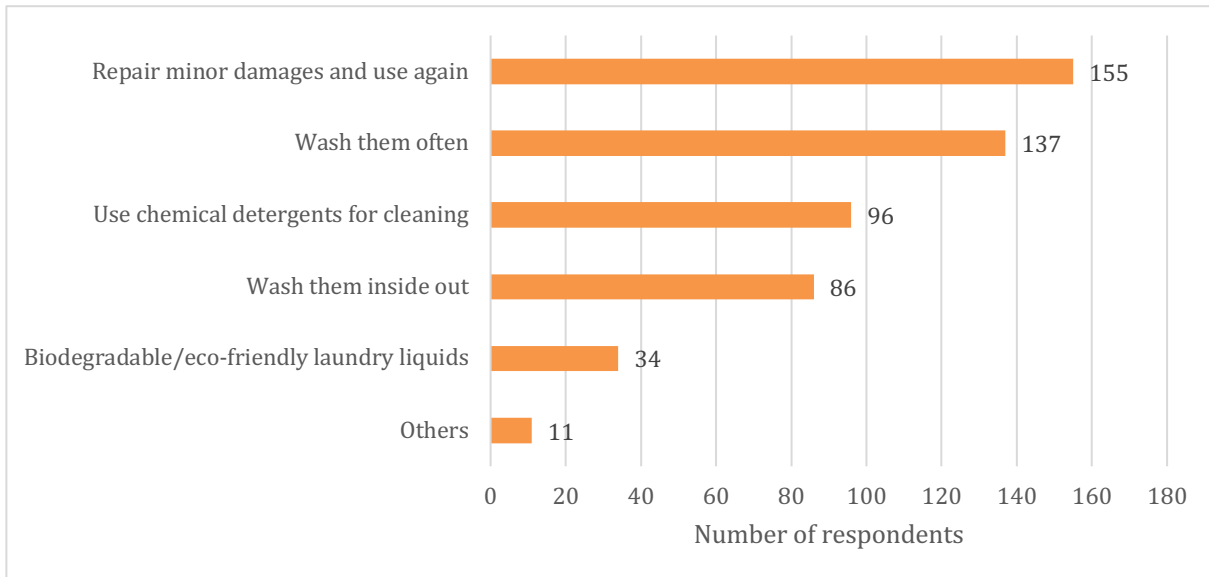


Figure 15 : Taking care of clothes

63% of the respondents stated that they **repair** minor damages and **reuse** the clothes. When it came to washing, most respondents mentioned that they wash their clothes frequently and use chemical detergents. 35 % of the respondents mentioned that they wash their clothes inside out and 14% said that they use eco-friendly liquids. The most popularly cited answer was investing in repairs for items instead of disposing them. Among other options cited by the respondents were **upcycling**, infrequent washing, use of simple detergents and drying them inside out.

It was also important to understand as to what happens to the old clothes as most of them find their way to the landfills if they are not disposed responsibly. An overwhelming majority, 208 respondents out of 245, said that they **donate** their clothes to their house help, NGO's and other people in need. Many of the respondents also stated that it was a combination of giving to the needy as well as any younger siblings/kids in the family. 77 respondents answered that they try to **recycle/upcycle** the items based on the condition. A large segment claimed to make the item into a cleaning product (poncha or mop). There were also some creative answers in terms of making rugs, daris or using them as stuffing. Some of the other answers received in smaller numbers included exchanging them at stores such as H&M for a discount.

Overall, the responses received were largely positive with many respondents trying multiple ways of extending the life of the product. Only seven respondents answered in favour of throwing them away.

Globally, thrift shopping has been gaining popularity as people are getting more conscious about sustainable and simple living. Yet, there remains a stigma attached to it. People are generally apprehensive about the quality of the product. Thus, we also tried to understand if the youth is open to this affordable alternative of shopping at a thrift store and the responses are shown in Figure 16.

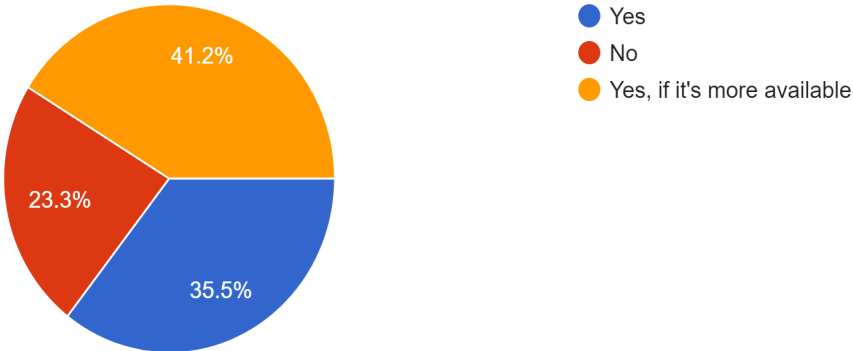


Figure 16: Shopping at a thrift store

Majority of the respondents were open to the idea of shopping at a thrift store. However, the **awareness** about existing flea markets, online thrift stores etc. remained low. Yet, some of the respondents also answered against shopping at thrift stores.

4.1.3 Tourism

Sustainable tourism or ecotourism is slowly but surely gaining popularity as an alternative to mindless travel and has been advocated on global forums as well as the SDG's. In a nutshell, it refers to travel which is based on a sense of respect for the physical environment and support for the local economy and culture. Many countries across the world, including India, are trying to capitalize on the same by offering immersive experiences for tourists looking for more meaningful experiences. Through this survey, we aimed to tap into the level of awareness among youth about sustainable tourism and the practices they inculcate into their lives while going on holidays.

To understand the behavioural pattern among the youth in tourism, the first question asked was the annual frequency of holidaying. The responses in Figure 17 indicates that 84.9% of the participants stated that they go on a holiday 1-2 times in a year. Around 10% of the participants mentioned that they go on a holiday 3-4 times in a year and a miniscule 2.4% of them mentioned that they go on a holiday more than 5 times. Another 2.4% from the lowest income bracket stated that they have never travelled.

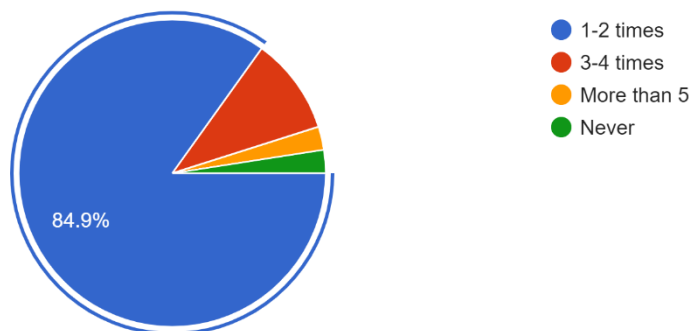


Figure 17: Annual frequency of holidaying

Everybody seeks specific experiences when travelling and choosing a holiday destination. Some people consider affordability as a factor while others may choose luxurious travel experiences. From the responses (Figure 18) to the question on expectations while travelling on a holiday, majority of the people voted for 'visiting uncrowded places', followed by preference for 'local cuisine and interacting with local people' and 'experiencing pristine and remote nature'. These responses were followed by 'seeing native biodiversity', 'increasing knowledge of wildlife', and 'economic benefits to local communities'. Around 18% of the participants from highest income bracket also chose 'luxury stays and experiences' as a priority. The other responses that were least preferred are 'agriculture and cultures museums', 'affordability', 'seeking historical

knowledge of the place', 'religious places', and 'peaceful experiences'.

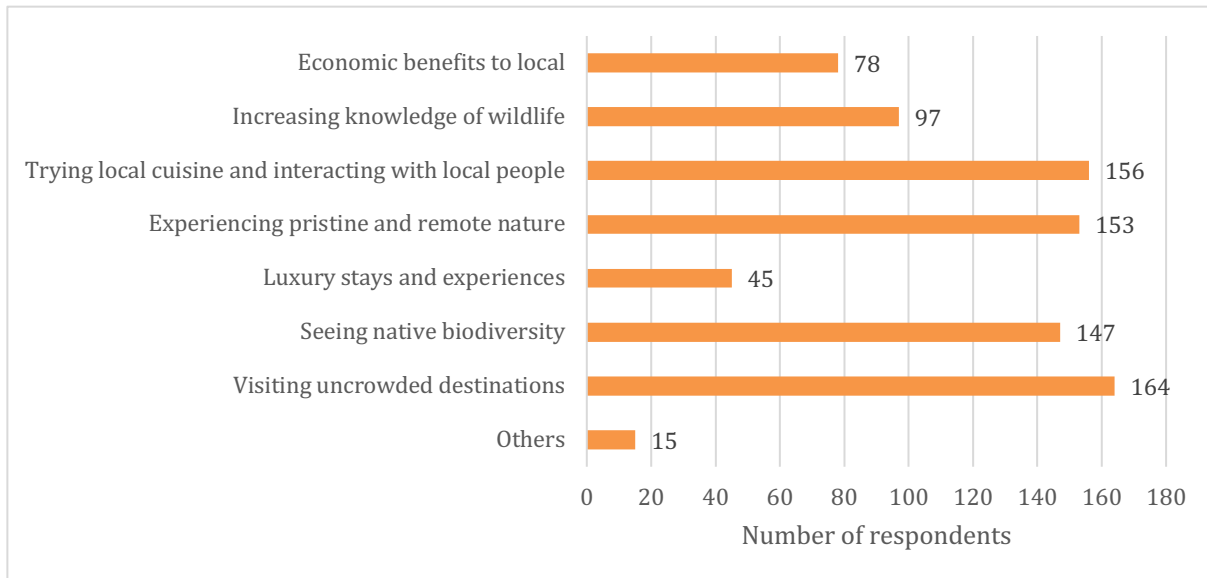


Figure 18: Expectations while travelling on a holiday

The preference for mode of travel is shown in Figure 19.

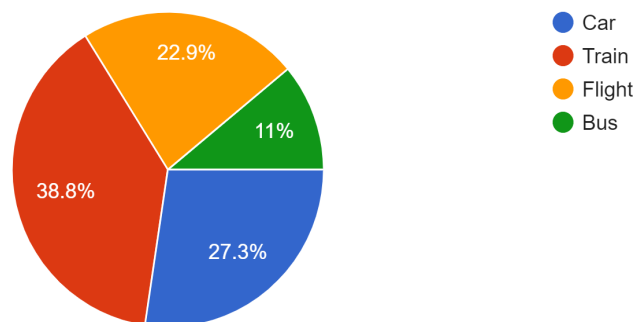


Figure 19: Mode of travel preferred when going on a holiday

The preferred mode of travel for 39% of the respondents of which 82% were from the lower income bracket is 'Train'. Around 27% preferred 'Car' as the favourable mode of travel and 23% of the respondents preferred travelling by 'Flight'. The remaining 11% opted for Bus as their frequently used or preferred mode of travel.

The awareness on sustainable tourism / eco-tourism among youth is shown in Figure 20.

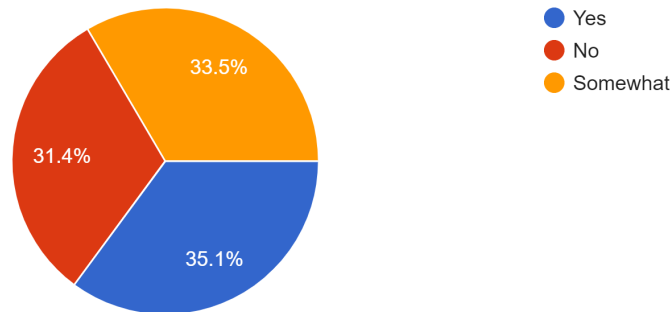


Figure 20: Awareness on sustainable tourism / eco-tourism

The responses reveal that 68.6% the participants are aware (35.1%) or somewhat aware (33.5%) of the concept of sustainable / eco-tourism. However, 31.4% of the participants were completely unaware of the same.

The respondents who were familiar with ecotourism were asked to share any three words that describe eco-tourism. A range of interesting responses were captured. Participants perceived responsible tourism as one that contributes to **conservation** of the environment, development of the community, richness of the natural ecosystem and provides **livelihood opportunities**. Sustainable tourism is also understood to be contributing to **wildlife conservation, encouraging local culture and food, reviving local and traditional knowledge**, and helping achieve the goals towards **carbon neutrality**. Travelling in local transport, enjoying the natural beauties while keeping the environment clean and benefiting the local people is also perceived as 'eco-tourism' by the youth of India. Actions such as 'no-littering', using no plastic and reducing waste are some other responses that were recorded. There were also responses such as 'comfortable', 'price friendly', 'energy saving', 'thoughtful', 'less carbon footprint', 'community welfare', 'locally available materials', 'sustainable development', 'ethical', 'animal friendly', and 'longevity'. The participants also mentioned use of 'reusable bags', 'no straws', 'public transportation', 'travelling by train' and behaviours encouraging responsible tourism.

4.1.4 Transport

Globally, cars and buses contribute to 45.1% of the total emissions in the sector⁶. It, hence, becomes pertinent to evaluate the current trends in mobility to assess preferences for cleaner modes of transportation and, overall attitudes of the current generation as to how they hope/desire to physically navigate urban spaces. There is also a requirement to understand prevailing perceptions and awareness regarding “greener” alternatives in the mobility sector. This may include clean fuels, electric technology or even increasing use of public transport. The accessibility and knowledge surrounding these options must be assessed to take effective action in the future.

The question on preference with respect to purchasing personal vehicles sought to understand youth preference for the following vehicle types - Petrol car, CNG car, Diesel car, Electric car, Petrol two-wheeler, Electric scooter, Electric bicycle and Bicycle. The responses are shown in Figure 21.

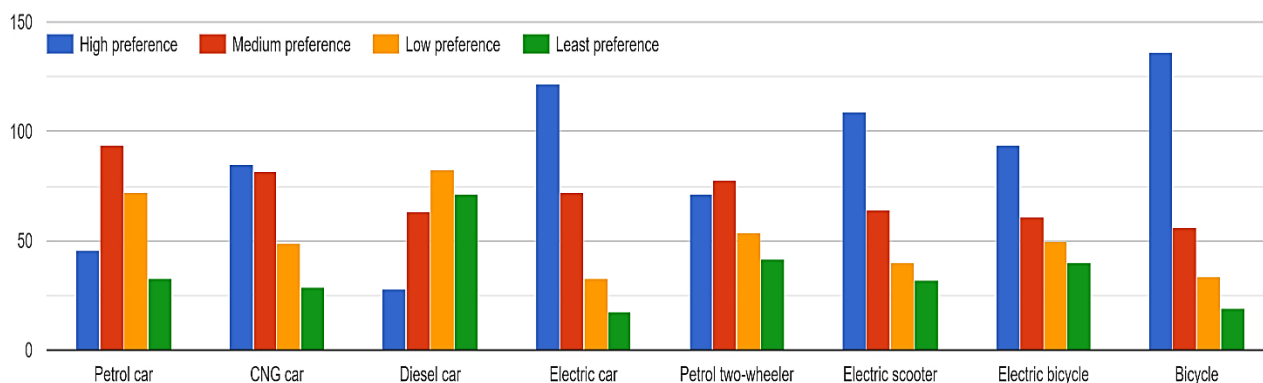


Figure 21: Preference with respect to purchasing personal vehicles

Diesel cars stand as the least preferred choice of personal vehicle for surveyed youth. The highest preference can be noted for electric cars and bicycles. Petrol two wheelers are slightly more preferred than petrol cars although both are indicative of medium-low preference as personal vehicle choices. Electric bicycles are more preferred than petrol-run vehicles but less than electric scooters and CNG cars.

These responses strongly indicate the youth’s desire to switch to cleaner modes of transportation as personal vehicles especially with respect to electric vehicles. There is also a huge preference seen (highest number of high preference responses) for owning bicycles. This indicates the larger need for city infrastructural design that facilitates shorter travel times, safer roads for commutes

⁶ <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-emissions-from-transport>

as well as locally situated spaces for work, study, recreation etc. A growing awareness about climate change, pollution of urban areas especially declining air quality and rising fuel prices could be reasons for lower preference of petrol and diesel run vehicles.

The preference for the mode of transport while commuting to college or workplace is shown in Figure 22. This question aimed to assess how different commuting modes are used by the youth to travel to their place of study or work. The modes of commute specified were Metro, Bus, Autorickshaw, Bicycle/e-rickshaw, Cabs, Private vehicle, and Carpool.

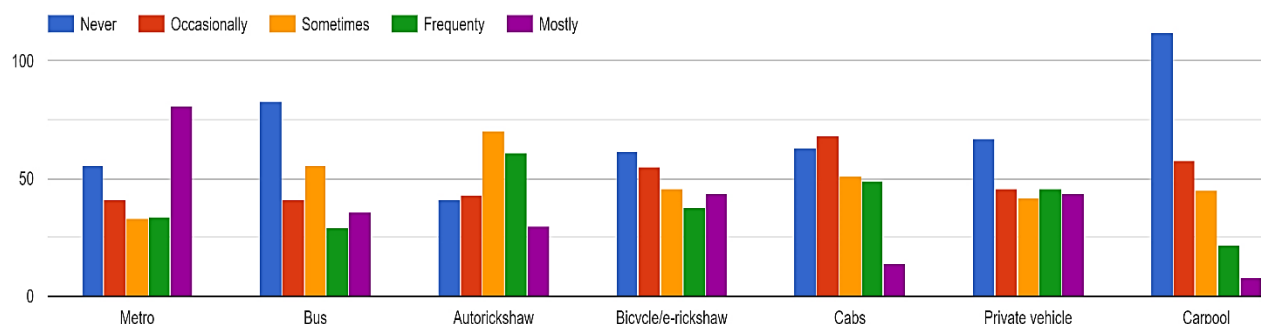


Figure 22: Preference for the mode of transport while commuting to college or workplace

The responses indicate that metro is a highly used mode of commute while carpooling is the least used daily commuting method. Autorickshaw and cycle/electric rickshaws are also preferred by youth to varying degrees.

Note: Responses reflect a highly mixed trend and hence, only the larger pattern in modes of daily commute as reflected through the survey is described here.

4.1.5 Lifestyle Impact and Sustainable Transitions

The youth perception on how they compare the environmental footprint of food, fashion, tourism, and transport was asked to understand how they perceive sectoral impact on the environment. Each unit of consumption has a proportionate impact on the environment and the concept of “footprint” denotes an area-based metric for consumption, that is, the unit of land on earth which is required to provide resources commensurate to per capita consumption on the whole, of a particular commodity or in a particular sector. The responses are shown in Figure 23.

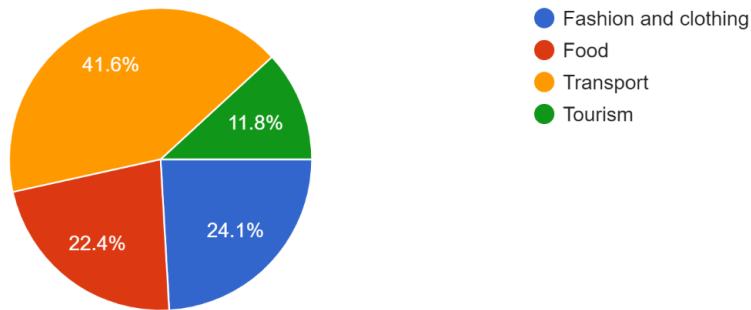


Figure 23: Which among food, fashion, tourism, and transport has the maximum environmental footprint?

41.6% of the survey participants perceived that the transportation sector has the largest environmental footprint. The next two were fashion and clothing sector and the food sector. tourism was mentioned by only 11.8% of the respondents.

Sectors among food, fashion, tourism, and transport, in which youth prefers to make sustainable transitions

The responses are shown in Figure 24 and 25

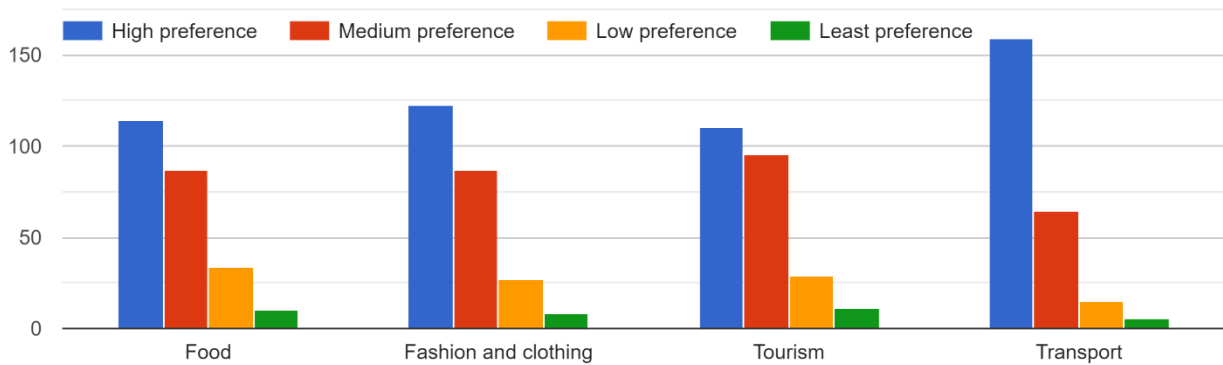


Figure 24: Sector preferred by youth for sustainable transition

In general, the respondents displayed an inclination to make sustainable transition in all sectors.



Figure 25: Sector preference by gender

Considering the total responses for “High Preference”, the transport sector has emerged as the most preferred sector for sustainable transitions. Most male respondents also prefer to make changes with respect to transportation while the female respondents’ highest preference is for the fashion and clothing segment. Total responses also indicate the second highest preference for the fashion and clothing segment. Food follows next and the tourism sector figures in last when it comes to measuring the youth’s high propensity to change consumption patterns in these four segments.

4.1.6 Key Outcomes

Transitions proposed by youth for sustainable lifestyle

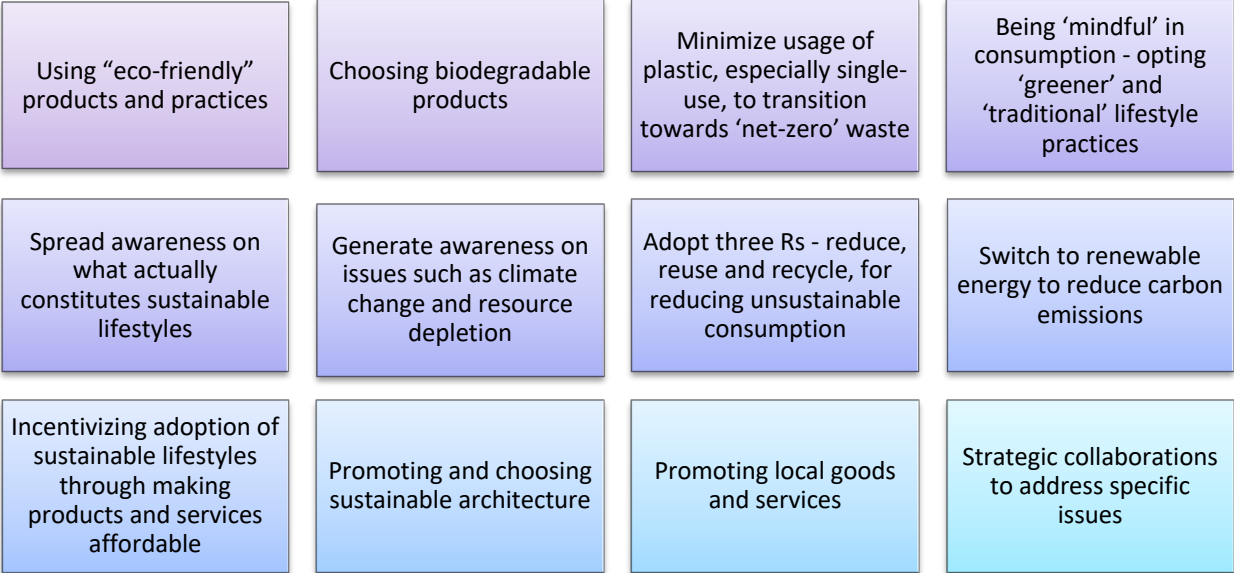


Figure 26 : Transitions proposed by youth for sustainable lifestyle

Sector specific recommendations

Food	Fashion	Tourism	Transport
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Shift to vegan/vegetarian diets•Awareness on high water and carbon footprint of meat and dairy products•Reducing food wastage•Composting of biodegradable waste•Reducing foodmiles - consumption of locally grown food•Purchasing food from local vendors and smaller restaurants•Consumption of organic food over genetically modified or lab grown items.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Buying less clothes and/or buying clothes that are durable•Shift to buying clothes from local producers- traditional handloom materials and natural fibers•Buying clothes made from upcycled or recycled materials•Thrift-shopping or buying second-hand clothes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Building awareness on sustainable tourism•Consume energy and resources consciously while traveling.•Being “carbon-neutral” as a traveller•Minimization of waste generation and littering while traveling•Promoting local culture and economy as tourists and tourism industry•Choosing destinations that brings one closer to nature and develops respect for flora and fauna.•Traveling less could also be a way to be sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Shift to using public transport especially for cities that have good connectivity•Shift to electric vehicles•Shift to CNG vehicles•Practice of walking and cycling as much as possible•Carpooling and sharing a common vehicle among family members

Figure 27: Sector specific recommendations for sustainability of resources

Twitter Chat

Two twitter chats were conducted in a span of one month on the topics, ‘Youth on charting pathways to sustainability’ and ‘Youth on overcoming barriers to making sustainable transitions’ to ascertain the awareness and the drive among youth in India to transition to sustainable living.

4.1.7 Youth on charting pathways for sustainability

The tweet chat titled ‘Youth on Charting Sustainability Pathways’ delved upon their general awareness and sensitivity towards the environment and their understanding on what drives them to make sustainable changes in their daily lives. There were 19 participants in this chat.

The prompts used for soliciting responses were:

- What is a global environmental concern close to your heart that needs immediate attention?

- What are some of the unique advantages of youth involvement in environmental issues?
- What motivates you to change your current habit to a more sustainable one?
- What sustainable habit/green goal do you want to work towards?

Hashtags Used: #WePledgeGreen #GreenGoal #Youth4action #COP26

The responses to the global environmental concerns close to youth’s heart that needs immediate attention are summarized in Figure 28.

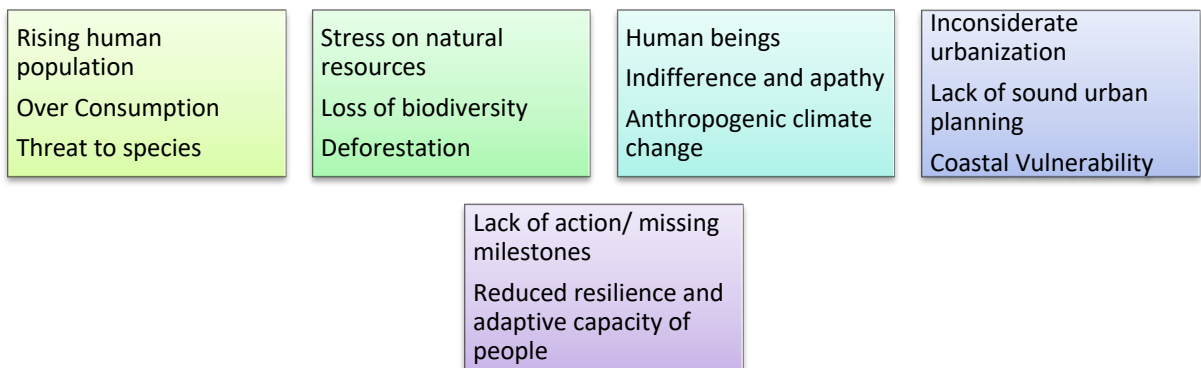


Figure 28: Global environmental concerns

The responses to the prompt on the advantage of youth involvement in environmental issues are summarized in Figure 29.

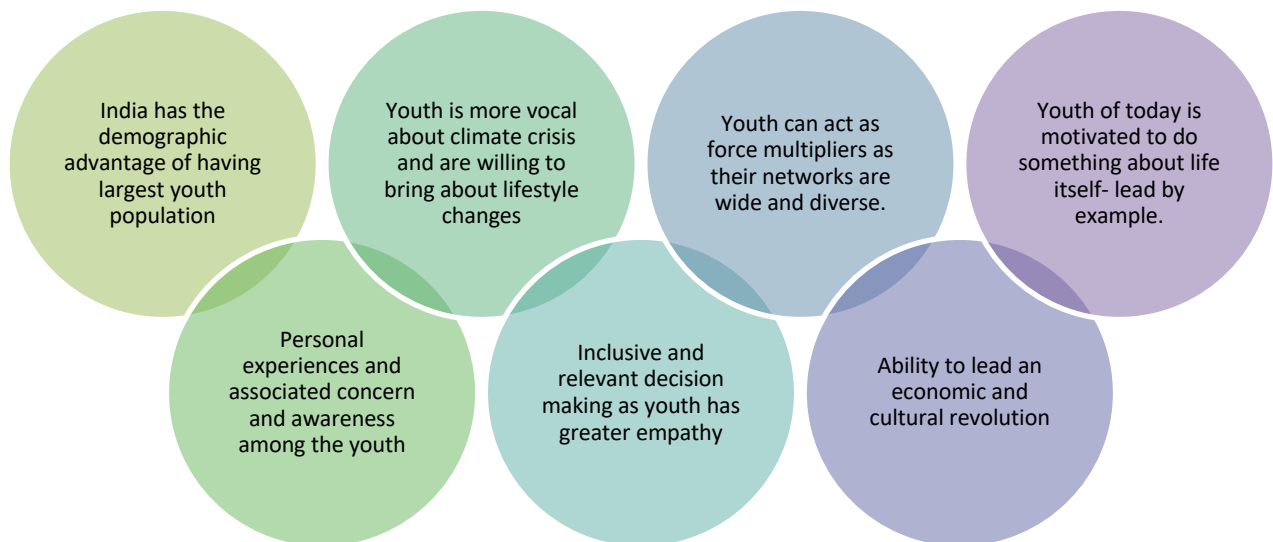


Figure 29: Advantages of youth involvement in environmental issues

The responses to the question on what motivate youth to change their current habits are enumerated in Figure 30.

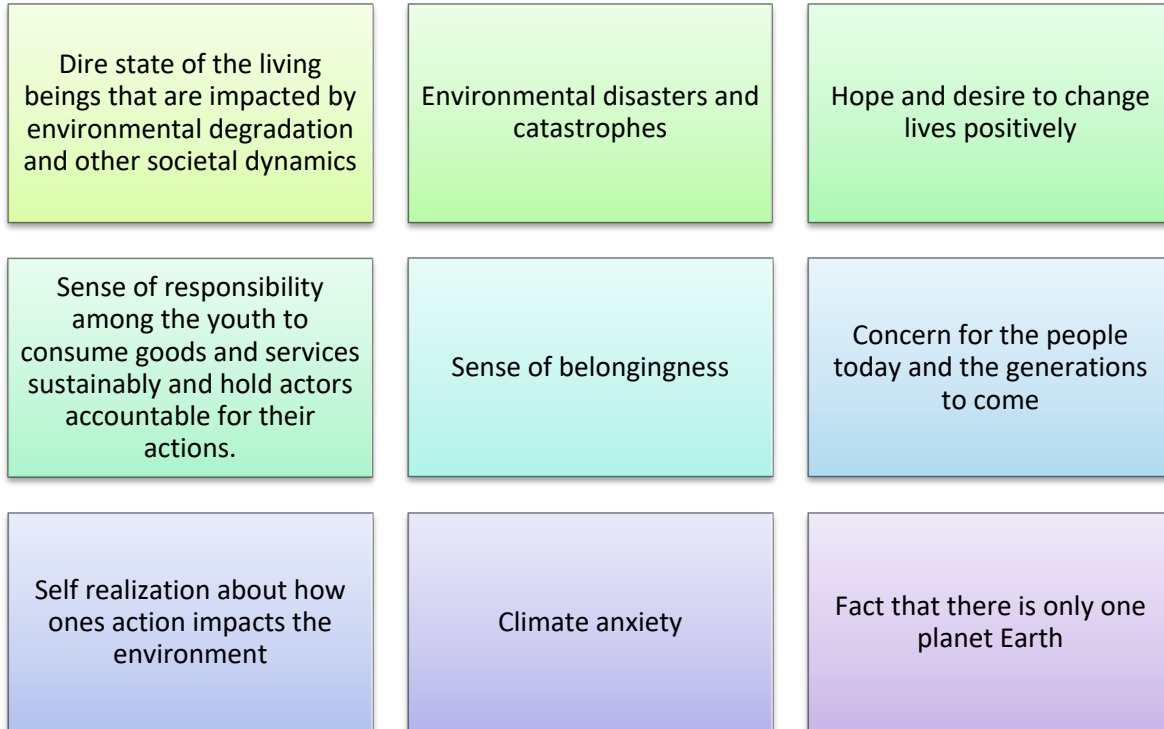


Figure 30: Motivating factors for changing habits

The green goals on which youth is motivated to work on are shown in Figure 31.

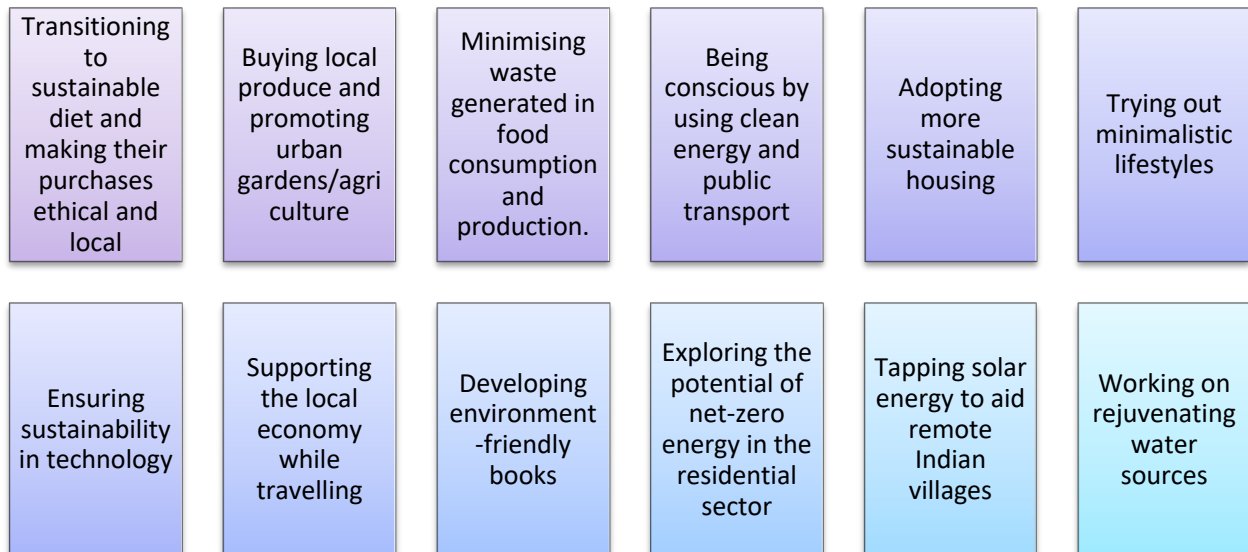


Figure 31: Green goals on which youth wishes to work on

4.1.8 Youth on overcoming barriers to making sustainable transitions

The shift to a more sustainable future remains a pertinent issue and must be addressed in a multi-faceted manner. The identification of issues in the physical environment must also be accompanied by understanding the tangible and invisible barriers that hinder people today. Through this tweet chat, we aimed to understand issues Indian youth face in their sustainability journey and what they feel must be changed to overcome them. There were eleven youth who engaged in the discussion.

The prompts used for soliciting responses were:

- While practicing sustainable lifestyle choices in India, what has been your biggest challenge?
- When searching for sustainable alternatives how do you discern the legitimacy of the green claims made by the producers?
- What according to you is relatively easy to switch to out of the following – sustainable food choices, sustainable fashion choices, sustainable travel choices and sustainable tourism?
- How can one encourage others to switch to more sustainable lifestyles and maintain them?

Hashtags Used: #Breakthebarriers #GetInvolved #SustainableChanges #Sustainabletransition

A few challenges that youth in India face in practicing sustainable lifestyle choices in India are shown in Figure 32.

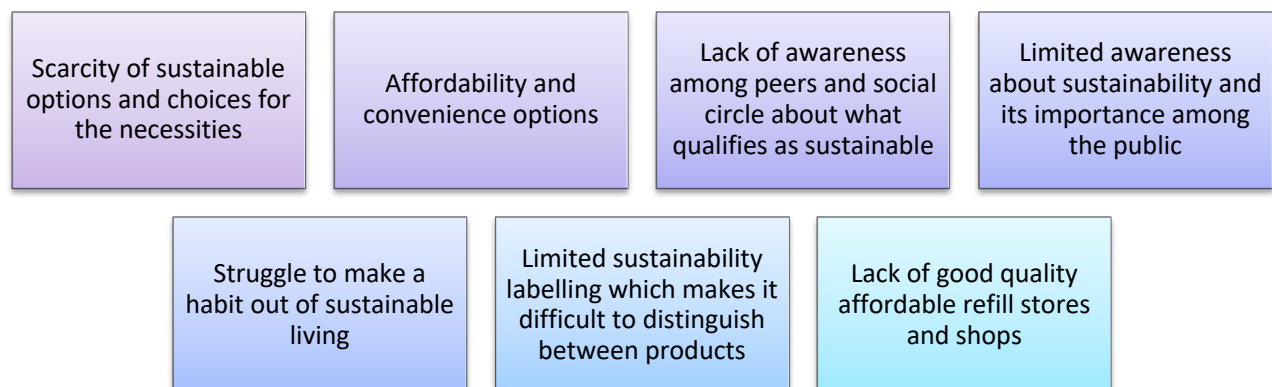


Figure 32: Challenges in practicing sustainable choices

With greenwashing becoming a major concern, it was pertinent to know how youth is discerning the legitimacy of green claims by the producers. The responses are in Figure 33.

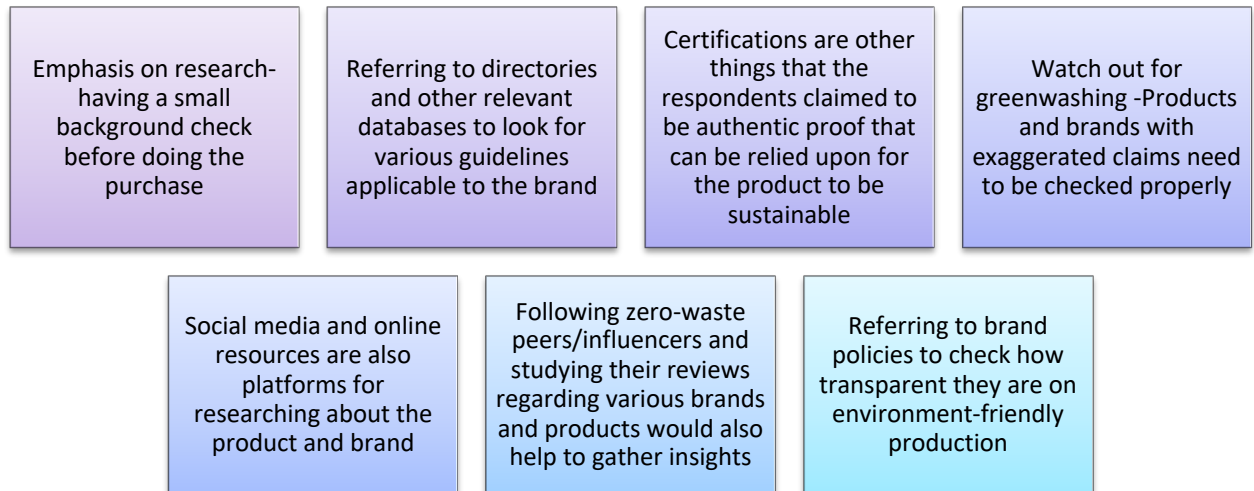


Figure 33: Discerning legitimacy of green claims by producers

In terms of ease of switching behaviour regarding food, fashion, tourism, or transport, the social media savvy youth felt that fashion is the easiest to switch. The responses are detailed in Figure 34.

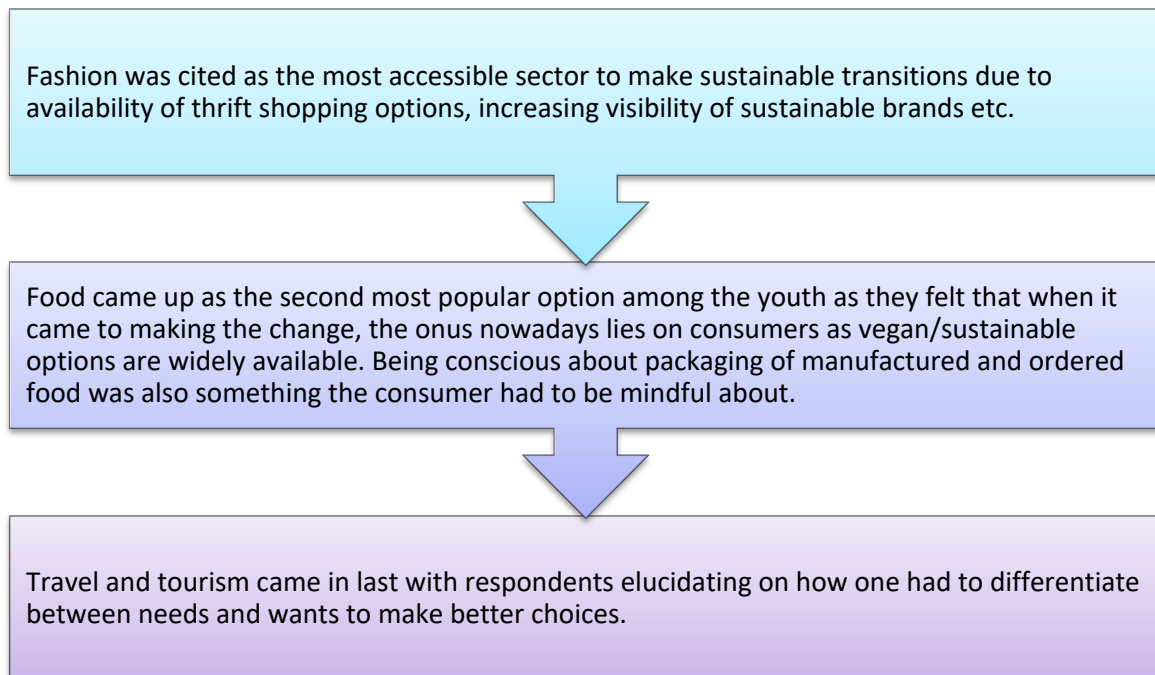


Figure 34: Prioritizing actions for sustainable transitions

Getting to understand how the largest demography in India can be used as agents of change, was the last prompt in this twitter chat. The responses are shown in Figure 35.

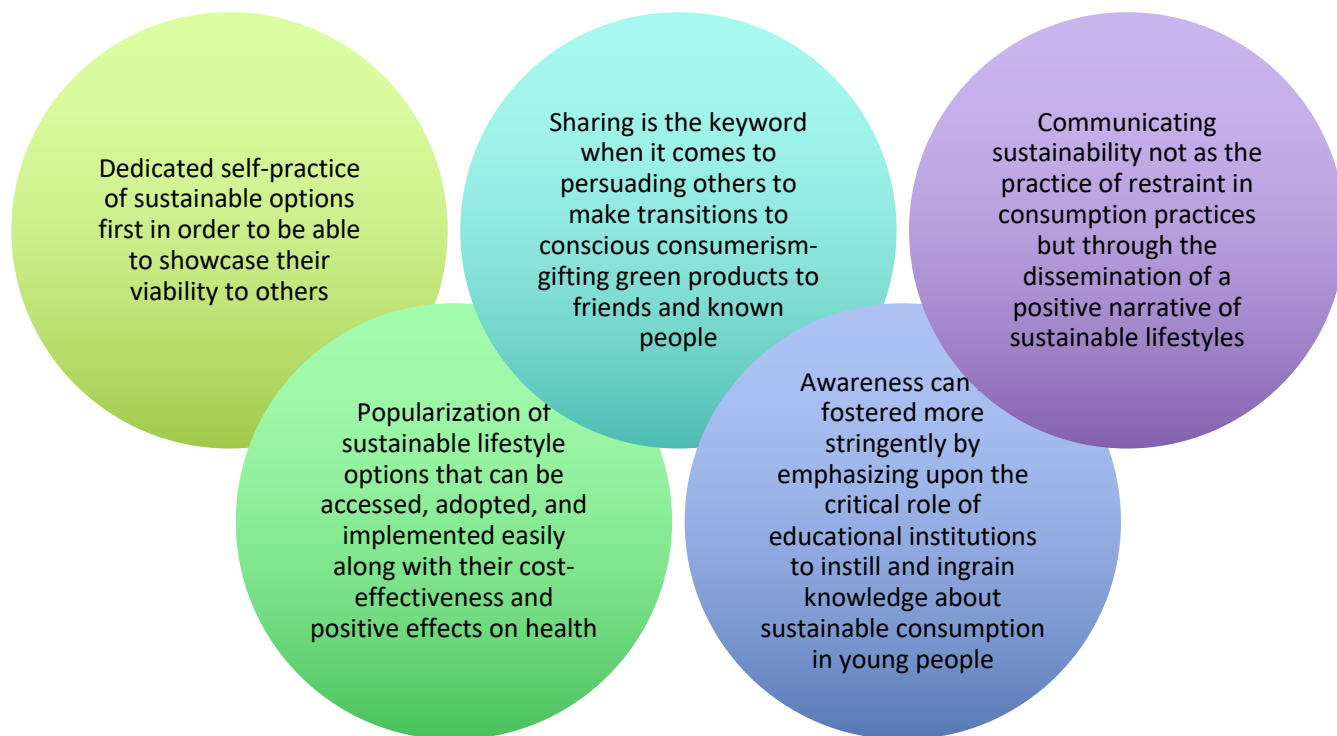


Figure 35: Youth as drivers of change

Youth Dialogue

Whether it is food, fashion, transport or tourism, the decision behind these seemingly tiny choices affects the overall sustainability for the future. Two dialogues on Youth Lifestyles in India were organized by the EU- SWITCH-Asia RPAC in association with the TERI SAS on 08 Nov 2021 (virtual) and 10 Nov 2021 (hybrid) to engage youth in discussion on what influences their decision making when it comes to making choices related to food, fashion, travel, and tourism. The online dialogue on 08 Nov had 191 participants of which 144 were female participants. The hybrid dialogue on 10 Nov had a total of 70 participants of which 42 joined in person and 28 joined online and there were 41 female participants and 29 male participants.

The objectives of the dialogue were to:

- Understand youth perception of sustainable lifestyle choices and how they relate this to their daily actions.
- Document what influences their decision making in terms of the driving forces of youth consumption and especially the influence of media and globalization in shaping their aspirations and values.
- Recognition of the relation between lifestyle/consumption pattern and environment/human rights/social issues
- Understand barriers in adoption and drivers of change

The hybrid event on 10 Nov 2021 was held in the TERI SAS campus in Delhi and was attended by Mr. Edwin Koekkoek, Counsellor, Energy and Climate Action, EU Delegation in India. While speaking on the importance of sustainable lifestyle in the opening remarks, he mentioned that youth are the major stakeholder in the fight against climate loss. Stressing on the IPCC sixth assessment report on anthropogenic climate change, he emphasized upon the need for sustainable transitions and sustainable approach to use all the resources. He further added that to reach the Paris objectives, we need to take sustainable steps and endeavor to reduce our emissions by 55% by the end of 2030. The talk by Mr. Koekkoek was followed by a plenary session where the aspects on sustainable eating, mobility and fashion were discussed by experts. In the breakout session the youth discussed on the three thematic areas and highlighted the factors influencing their behaviour and the barriers and driver for sustainable transition.

The recordings of the dialogue can be accessed from the following links:

Online Youth Dialogue on Sustainable Lifestyle, Pune 08 Nov 2021

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLOusV0Qc_o&t=1s

Youth Dialogue on Sustainable Lifestyle, Delhi, 10 Nov 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmBFlysIC7A&t=1s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzKhYWobfqk&t=212s>

4.1.9 Key Takeaways

The key reflections from the dialogue are detailed in Figure 36.

Perception and preferences

- A clear preference for non-vegetarian food over vegan food was observed
- Food preferences develop at home
- A general perception was that sustainable lifestyle is pretentious, expensive and options are not easily available
- Fashion is a way of self reflection
- Preference was seen for handloom certified products and classics which do not go out of style and hand me downs - a practice which prolongs the life of a garment
- Preference for using bicycle or public transport

Factors influencing decision making

- Affordability and accessibility
- Convenience
- Taste of food
- Social media specially posts on Instagram
- Culture
- In tourism the influencing factors were safety, activities available, pristine location, commercial venues like malls

Recognition of connection between lifestyle and environment and human/social rights

- The awareness was largely missing with regard to food
- In fashion and clothing a few responses were around unfair labour, water footprint and greenwashing
- In travel and tourism, linkages were drawn to carbon emissions, irresponsible disposal of garbage, exploitation of fragile ecosystem, impact of local vendors during COVID 19 pandemic

Barriers

- Lack of sustainable options, more so affordable options
- Veganism lacks public acceptance and there is also an apprehension that it lacks nutrition.
- There is also systemic inertia to change
- In fashion, youth even considered sustainability as limiting self-expression
- Sense of entitlement among tourists as they feel that they have paid for what they are demanding
- Ignorance
- Lack of transparency

Drivers

- Sustainability has to be mainstreamed as a culture
- The discourse needs to shift from consumer to producer responsibility-extended producer responsibility
- Cooperation across different industry players, across different actors in the policy sphere, across people who want to promote sustainable lifestyle
- More options at affordable price
- Normalisation of sustainable lifestyle from elitist to egalitarian
- Monetary incentive to promote sustainable lifestyle
- Awareness campaign and for this awareness to occur organically, the people must experience locations, food, ethical fashion and travel immersively to realize how an alternative option is just as fulfilling if not more

Figure 36: Outcome of youth dialogue

The key takeaways from the sessions are enumerated below:

4.1.10 Sustainable Mobility

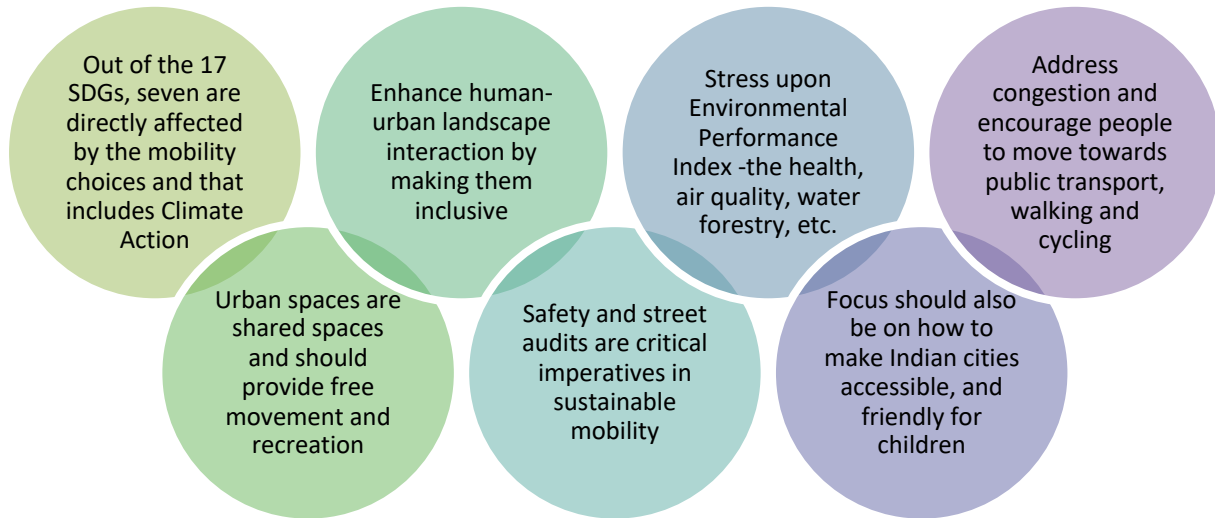


Figure 38: Sustainable mobility takeaways

4.1.11 Responsible Tourism

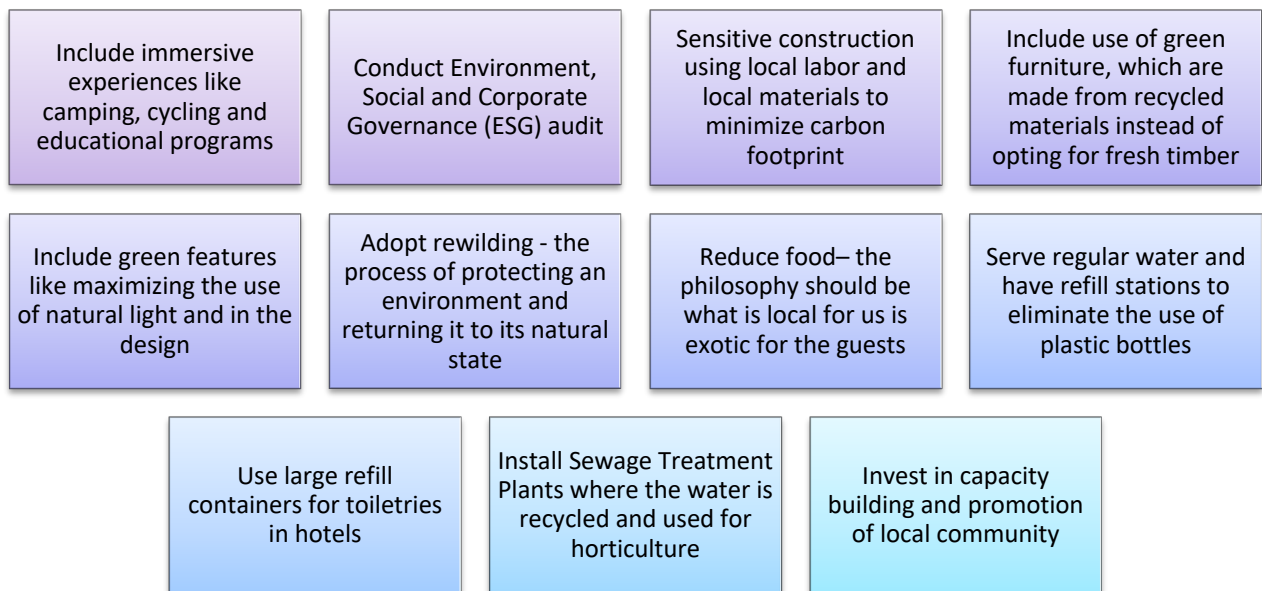


Figure 39: Responsible Tourism Takeaways

4.1.12 Sustainable Food Choices

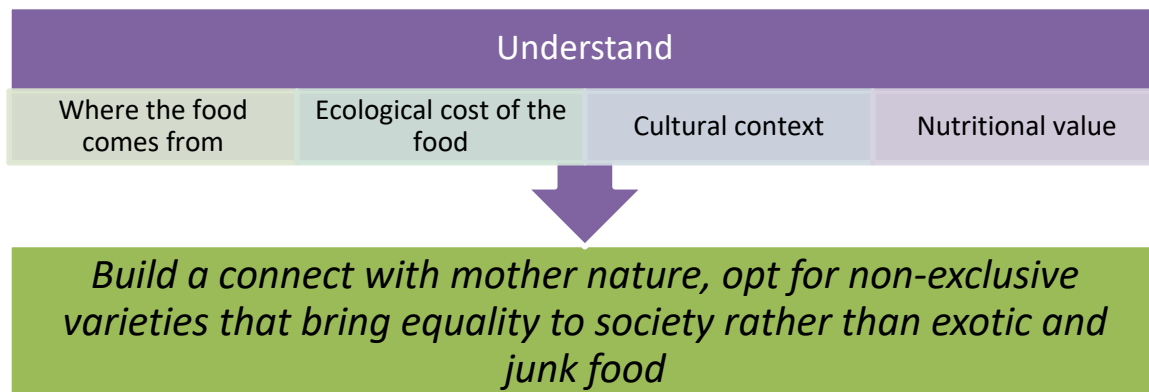


Figure 40: Sustainable Food Choices

4.1.13 Ethical Fashion

Supply chain of the fashion industry has complex interlinkages with other sectors –agriculture transportation, manufacturing, retail etc.

While the fashion industry generates huge intersectoral employment, it also creates a bigger problem of multifaceted pollution in each sector with items finally ending in landfills.

Issues such as bonded labor, unfair wages, infamous sweatshops, child labor and gender inequality impart notoriety to the garment industry.

Glaring lack of policies to regulate practices in this industry calls for the responsibility on brands to be more ethical about their supply chains.

Absence of policies against the practice of greenwashing by brands pose a huge challenge on consumers to differentiate between an actual sustainable product and a “green-washed” product.

Fashion industries should be transparent in public disclosure of information and proper sustainability reporting that enables people to hold decision-makers to account.

Youth is a potent force for change as world over they have been leading movements that demand the uncovering of actual practices in fashion Industry supply chains.

Consumers can also make the effort to look for marks like Fair-Trade Certified Mark and ecolabels in the clothes they buy.

Policy intervention and government regulation could be better agents of ensuring fair and ethical practices as marks and certificates are expensive propositions for small traders.

Figure 41: Ethical Fashion Takeaways

5. Conclusion & Way Forward

Current Status

Food

There is a clear preference of a mixed diet that is a combination of vegetarian and non-vegetarian food among the youth. However, vegan diet is still not popular among Indian youth. A general perception is that vegan diet is pretentious, expensive, and bland. The youth preferred traditional food over continental, and it could be home cooked or purchased. Exotic ingredients and ordering in of food are found to be more popular among the higher income brackets. Youth appeared to be mindful of their environment footprint and usually opted for no plastic bag and cutlery while ordering in. They demonstrated a positive behaviour towards minimizing waste and reusing leftovers.

Fashion

Consumerism in Indian youth was found to be high with 80% of the respondents mentioning that they buy clothes 3-9 times in a year. They usually do not bother to check out for ecolabels and there is a lack of awareness and indifference among them towards the environmental footprint of the product. The awareness about sustainable or ethical fashion is low and affordability and quality were the two top criteria which influenced buying decision among youth. The youth however is in favour of repairing and reusing clothes and donating them to house help or NGOs rather than disposing off in the garbage bin.

Tourism and Travel

One to two holiday trips in a year are more common among the youth. Majority of them prefer visiting uncrowded places, show inclination for local cuisine, interacting with local people, and experiencing pristine and remote nature and native biodiversity. The preferred mode of travel is train, though a few from the high-income group prefer air travel. Youth show a strong preference for using bicycle for travelling to college/work if the distances are short. For longer distance the preference is for metro, autorickshaw and cab. The preference is also for electric cars over petrol cars.

The gamut of activities that were undertaken revealed that the youth are inclined to make sustainable transition in all sectors. While male participants were more motivated to make transition in their travelling behaviour, the females were disposed to behavioural shift in fashion and clothing.

Challenges



Figure 42: Challenges in making transition to sustainable lifestyle

Barriers

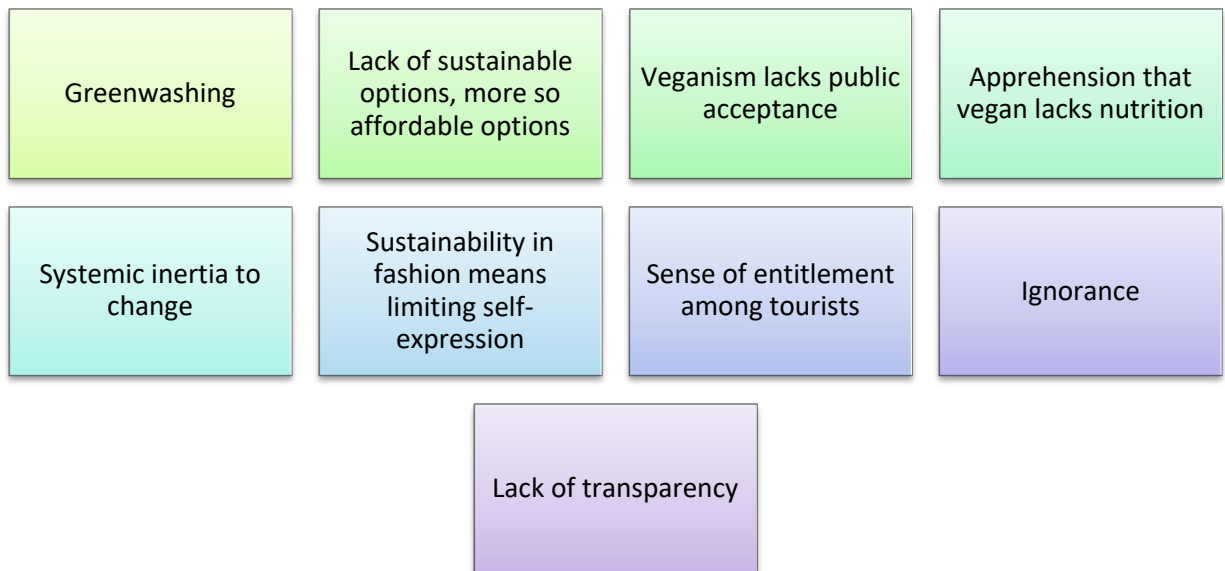


Figure 43: Barriers in transitioning

Way Forward

Switching choices and drastically altering one's lifestyle might be challenging, but it is not insurmountable. Starting small is the key to living sustainably. The youth in India brought out that sustainable local cuisine is the way to go because they enable an individual to drastically reduce their carbon footprint. Likewise, the contribution to GHG emissions and the environmental and social footprints by the fashion industry has also risen steeply. Youth in India may demand governments for policies that favour and incentivize sustainable transition and the brands that they buy to become more responsible of their own supply chains. Suggestions were also provided on buying less, shifting towards buying second-hand clothes, thrift shopping and repairing or restyling the ones already in possession. There is an apprehension among youth related to higher cost of sustainable lifestyle options as the hidden costs related to social and environmental impact of low-priced options are ignored. Awareness on sustainable choices and their impact shall help in bringing about behavioural transitions. The youth also showed leaning towards sustainable travel and tourism. While youth is willing to make transitions to greener mobility alternatives, they are often constrained by poor infrastructure. This must be taken up at the strategic and policy level by the government to provide enabling environment to accelerate the transition towards sustainable lifestyle. The specific suggestions for making transition to a sustainable lifestyle in India are stated in Figure 44.

Sustainability in India presently is regarded and elitist movement which can be afforded by a few. There is a need to normalise sustainable lifestyle from elitist to egalitarian and make it accessible and affordable for everyone.

Training and awareness programs may be undertaken by educational institutions and other sustainability focused organizations on sustainable lifestyle, what it would entail and on how youth could be drivers of change.

Communicating sustainability not as the practice of restraint in consumption practices but through the dissemination of a positive narrative of sustainable lifestyles may support behavioural change.

Leading by example helps in accelerating transition. Promoting thrift stores in malls, schools, and colleges, keeping sustainable food options in canteens and home delivery applications like Swiggy, Zomato etc. and having enabling policies for incentivizing the vendors/producers may help in leap frogging.

The government may consider launching schemes that make organic and local food affordable and easily available to people.

In the fashion and clothing domain, government through their programs can consider supporting start ups engaged in upcycling and recycling of materials through soft loans and market linkages.

Eco-labelling and sustainability reporting must be made mandatory for all products through policy interventions. Alongside, awareness may be generated among masses on greenwashing and sources from where people can verify the claims made by the manufacturers.

Green spaces and tracks for walking and biking must be made integral to urban planning. Youth through citizens collective must demand this from the policy makers and practitioners. Public transport network may also be augmented to decongest cities and town.

Schemes must be devised to support and promote eco-tourism to make them affordable and entertaining. Waste recycling, composting and extended producers' responsibility must be enforced.

A multistakeholder strategy may be developed to promote cooperation across different industry players, different actors in the policy sphere and across people who want to promote sustainable lifestyle to mainstream it as a culture.

Figure 44: Recommendations for driving behavioural change

About Organizers

SWITCH-Asia

SWITCH-Asia is a programme funded by the European Union to promote sustainable consumption and production to contribute to the economic prosperity and poverty reduction in Asia. The programme is implemented through three components: i) the SWITCH-Asia Regional Policy Advocacy Component (RPAC); ii) the Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) Facility, and iii) Grants. Every component is managed by a different organization. The RPAC is managed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); the overall objective of this component is to strengthen the dialogue on policies on sustainable consumption and production at the regional, sub-regional and national level.

TERI SAS

TERI School of Advanced Studies (TERI SAS) is a deemed University in India and a multi-disciplinary institution, with capabilities in academics, research, policy, consultancy, and implementation. TERI SAS was established as a trust in 1998 to cater to the need of disseminating the vast reservoir of knowledge created by TERI (The Energy and Resources Institute), a not for profit, independent research institute recognized globally for its contribution to scientific and policy research in the realms of energy, environment, and sustainable development.

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