

What will remain in the wardrobes after COVID?

February 23 2023, by Renu Singh



Renu Singh. Credit: Bocconi University

It is no surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic instigated dramatic shifts in all of our daily lives, with consumption practices being no exception. Non-essential businesses, including retail stores, were closed for long periods of time, the new norm of working from home allowed for greater flexibility and reduced needs for workplace wear, and fewer

group gatherings overall reduce the need for more clothing generally.

With sustainability already a buzzword in the clothing and [textile industry](#) before 2020, many touted the pandemic as the potential start of a new era in sustainable [fashion](#). Yet, nearly three years into this public health emergency, the jury is still out on whether significant, lasting changes have been made.

The clothing and textile industry plays a significant role in the [global economy](#), adding €2.2 trillion to global manufacturing and employing approximately 300 million people—many of them women—worldwide. This is only projected to grow over the next several years. Unfortunately, the industry also has a substantial carbon footprint. The [fashion industry](#) accounts for 2%–8% of carbon dioxide emissions globally—a larger share than that of both international flights and maritime shipping together. In addition, it utilizes nearly 215 trillion liters of water and is the source of 9% of the ocean's microplastics per year (UN Fashion Alliance 2022).

Both production and consumption have facilitated this trajectory. For example, global garment production between 2000 and 2014 alone doubled. Meanwhile, the average consumer bought 60% more clothes annually and kept them for only half as long (McKinsey 2016). In the EU, personal consumption of textiles is the second highest source of pressure on land use for raw materials and the fourth most polluting lifestyle domain—following household energy use, mobility, and food (EEA 2019). Today we very much live in a fast fashion world.

Given this excess, sustainability concerns were already being brought to the forefront of the debate and into industry practices, government regulations, and consumers' consciousness well before the pandemic hit. Concerns range from those revolving around [social issues](#), such as working conditions and livelihoods of the laborers involved, to

environmental ones, including water usage, emissions, and waste management.

There has also been a focus on [sustainable practices](#) across all levels of the fashion economy, from the production of [raw materials](#) and manufacturing of textiles to their distribution, consumption, and disposal. However, the global disruption brought on from COVID-19 to industry and consumer alike has still led to some additional shifts in attitudes, intentions, and potentially behaviors.

Specifically on the consumer front, understanding both their sustainable fashion consumption attitudes or intentions and their behaviors has important implications for industry and society. In a study I conducted with colleagues across countries in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America, we find that a sizable number of consumers reported the pandemic had affected their attitudes toward clothing.

Overall, we identify five patterns of change in consumer attitudes toward clothing during COVID-19. One of the most common patterns was a decreased interest in fashion, including less interest in aesthetics and fashion trends over comfort. Consumers also had an increased sense of gratitude for and appreciation of what they already owned that reduced the compulsion to buy more; rising concerns about environmental and ethical implications of their purchases; a growing focus on the quality, durability, and timeliness of products; and an outright desire to live with less clothing overall.

These attitudes were further exhibited in consumers' actions, as we show in another study, where all forms of fashion acquisition decreased, including discount and impulse shopping. However, this also applied to more sustainable behaviors, including buying sustainable new and second-hand apparel, tailoring, and swapping, as COVID-19 shifted the accessibility of traditional outlets for such practices, required consumers

to relearn how to engage in alternative options, and also reduced the overall perception of how much more consumers really needed in the first place.

What remains to be seen is to what extent such attitudinal and behavioral changes will remain as the world "normalizes." Will we witness a regression and resurgence in the roaring 2020s or will COVID-19 continue to serve as a tipping point in the trajectory of sustainable fashion consumption? Only time will tell.

More information: Paper: [When mortality knocks: Pandemic-inspired attitude shifts towards sustainable clothing consumption in six countries](#)

Katia Vladimirova et al, Fashion consumption during COVID-19: Comparative analysis of changing acquisition practices across nine countries and implications for sustainability, *Cleaner and Responsible Consumption* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.clrc.2022.100056](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clrc.2022.100056)

Provided by Bocconi University

Citation: What will remain in the wardrobes after COVID? (2023, February 23) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-02-wardrobes-covid.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.