

Sustainability & digital transformation: A journey of talks or walks!

Indian textile industry needs to take a bigger pie from the global market. Industry 4.0 & sustainability are a prerequisite & so new technology advancements are the need of the hour, says **Avinash Mayekar**.



sensitive issue and fast-tracked mandates adoption by the brands which no longer limits sustainability to organic textiles. It is a 360o act from accountable sourcing, to responsible production, pledged to ethical human right practices, the commitment for recycling & the giving back to the community.

Let us have a look at the main elements of these 360-degree sustainability practices and how by rooting this practice into actions today one can have a better future not just for its own business but for the generations to come.

Accountable Sourcing:



Committing towards Sustainability!
Is the only constant trending phenomenon across the manufacturing sector, to state the obvious, buzzing on top of the chart box these days is the Pandemic & its crisis management. Of course, the buzz is well justified as the pandemic has not only given a nudge to the economy but it has shaken up the world pretty hard, people all around are literally in the dilemma of strategizing for either managing, thriving, or just surviving. Well, the topic of sustainability is quite different it has been the major headline for conferences & seminars even in pre covid era. There are talks on the need for immediate implementation for quite years now. To be honest for a very long period there have only been talks on this topic & the practice of implementation lacked to grab the larger pie. It is, however, the early covid period and the current state of the world that has seen the much-needed action for sustainability across the various value chain of textiles. It has finely grabbed the needed momentum. The crisis has somehow been the catalyst for channeling the textile industry towards sustainability.

The anchor however was set long back & actions were being taken by the brand towards the sustainable practices. Organic textiles were the foundation towards sustainability however it saw a very little momentum as far as adoption by the consumers was concerned. Organic textiles somehow lost the fight when it came to the majority of consumer's age-old fight of choosing pocket-friendly items.

However, this pandemic has bought limelight to the

The ban of Xinjiang cotton of China has awakened the world around not just for stopping the imports of this particular variety of cotton. But it has set a much-needed mandate to show accountability by manufacturers across the value chain. It has introduced the need for raw materials traceability across the finished product. By doing this it has equally bifurcated the responsibility mantel across the entire value chain.

We all know key Account customer practice for better Management has already channeled the manufacturers to develop few trustworthy suppliers & collaborate for betterment. A further traceability angle to the raw material sourcing right from check on fiber suppliers/ farmers up to the finished garment producer along with the checks on using responsible ancillary supplies like appropriate dyes & chemicals is what will truly see the accountable sourcing being practiced.

It is not a mere step in selecting an organic farming

option but a step to ensure that responsible practices are being practiced at all walks of productions. The aim of reducing the carbon footprint not just in one's own manufacturing unit but seeing to it that the selected suppliers are practicing the same. This small act thereby enforces the value chain to bring the accountable sourcing into actual practice. It is not an overnight job but starts with the small step like being accountable for the product source. A need to thrive good quality for the best price is slightly elevated to selecting good quality from a compliant producer for the best price. Collaboration in supply chain management is the right way to reduce carbon footprints in logistics & transportation.

Responsible Production:

Shifting to sustainable practices is not an overnight job. There are lot many changes that will have to be adopted starting from making changes in the age-old technologies to age-old material handling practices, to educating the workforce by providing training and awareness about sustainable practices. Additionally, apart from changing the machinery & working habits, there are many limitations on the use of dyes & chemicals thereby increasing the overall manufacturing cost of the product.

The zero liquid discharge to eco-friendly finishes is all the first in the many steps towards responsible production. Though government mandates have already accelerated the adoption of effluent treatment plants or zero liquid discharge. The later focus of developing the state of art facility for responsible production not only supports the need for adopting sustainability but in the long run will also aid in reducing the power cost thereby improving the cost margins. Enhancing productivity & adopting better technologies that consume less power & less water is the first step in selecting a balanced investment plan for new technology. JIT (Just in time) adoption for raw material sourcing to the enactment of ERP & cloud computing is one of the many ways that will ensure that the investment in machine technology & industry 4.0 digital interface will be profitable & also a step towards sustainability.

Synergy with Industry 4.0 is the easiest way for sustainability adoption. It will provide following benefits



- Improved Efficiency
- Compliance Friendly
- Better Customer Experience
- Better use of resources
- Faster manufacturing
- Less machine and production line downtime
- Fewer quality issues with products
- Less resource, material, and product waste
- Lower overall operating costs

Pledged to Ethical Human Practices:

Human as a resource is into acceptance in the industry for quite some time. We all have acknowledged the importance of a skilled workforce. However, when it comes to ethical practices especially concerned with labor there is always a loophole chalked out by either of the parties - be it the management of factories or even the labour unions. The vial of any outburst or unethical practices by either of the parties often leads to the suffering of both parties, in the long run. Hence it is essential to have management set rules & structures that should always be at a bar higher than the necessary mandate. This ensures an atmosphere of trust & respect. A practice and due importance to it from top management will only see it flowing down the line across the organization. Today it's a world that has embraced the true meaning of the word 'care' and sustainability in this segment will only be ensured by adoption of it by all parties concerned from stakeholders to the workforce. A mere change in perception from labour to workforce will go long way towards ensuring that the workforce practices & adopts the changes that sustainability demand from it.

Commitment for Recycling:



Circular fashion for sustainability aims at addressing the most essential element of waste generated. Earlier the value chain of the product ended after the finished product reached the consumer. But with rising concerns & the much-needed awakening for the environmental impact, a new dimension is introduced wherein the finished garment after its residual life instead of ending

up at landfills are rebought by brands & introduced into the manufacturing process right at the beginning in the form of recycled fibers. The end use of these fibers is far too many right from re-engineered garments to technical textiles. This business is starting to gain momentum. The true form of circulation has just begun to see its way into the textile industry.

Top brands once leading the fashion are today utilizing their influential role in the industry & contributing to environmental betterment. Brands like Adidas have introduced the Infinite Play model through its app currently only practiced in the UK, which allows customers to trade worn or unused Adidas gear for an e-gift card and Adidas creators club points. The items traded back will then be resold or recycled. The Tokyo Olympics introduced recycling & eco-friendly plays in all ways, right from recycled textile torch bearer costumes to the use of electric vans to the recycled metal torch & medals it was truly a remarkable feat towards sustainability. It embraced the essence of sustainability & gave it a much wider platform. It showed the entire world how being sustainable is not just a talk but a way of life & enlightened the path for introducing recycling in the value chain. New developments are happening for use of recycled pet bottles for apparel grade textiles.

Moreover, when it comes to recycling it is not just the recycling of finished product but recycling wherever possible of all the utility & production parameters right from water recycling & reuse to reducing the overall HVAC load requirements by utilising efficient colour cooling shades for the roof & wall finishes to ultimately when possible switching to the alternate power source like solar energy installations.

Giving back to the Community:

CSR once viewed as a moral obligation & tax saving loophole is now seeing its true utilization. It is far more than corporate image creation. Today's world is far away from perfection but knows the importance of growing together with the community. CSR has bought communities together & helped channel growth for all concerned. A small step only will uplift the business in the long run. It's a world of social influence. Pandemic has seen social media driving business. It is only vital that a trend of good community work be created. Stocks are risen by good deed and ultimately a bad trend can make it fall four times so it is better to uplift the CSR work for the betterment. From rural community upliftment to the women empowerment all steps will contribute directly or indirectly towards the sustainability & brighter future for the organization.

Conclusion

I think the most promising digital future will be the one where a man gets up in the morning & with a few



clicks of buttons on a machine fabricates his outfit for the day. A click to choose the material, type of garment, colour combinations, fit, accessories on the outfit & so on. Similarly, when he wishes to dispose of the outfit he can just pass it on into a solvent-containing tub for recycling & reuse. This will be the flag end of digitalization. In today's highly customised world which has already seen innovations of auto measurement machines & virtual trial fit display booths at select retail outlets, this particular digitization reality is not far away.

In today's context, we are going back to nature, global warming, green textiles & disposable textiles are the buzz words taking us towards nature. Nobody would have thought that the European continent much known for the cold weather would ever encounter a maximum temperature of 48 degrees Celsius. This has led to the importance of using natural fibers that are extremely skin-friendly, having a soft feel & are adapt to take care of human needs of protection from heat, cold, etc. basically from all atmospheric conditions.

Indian textile industry has a great future. We need to take a bigger pie from the global market. Industry 4.0 & sustainability are a prerequisite & so new technology advancements are the need of the hour. Environmental concerns need to be our priority thus Recycle & Reuse should be the mantra for the future. Let us introspect ourselves to incorporate new norms & scan our existing facilities to remove weak areas & adopt appropriate technology to spin profits. Also, today with the introduction of electric cars dependency on petrochemicals needs to be scrutinized for long-term perspective.

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About the Author

Avinash Mayekar is the Managing Director & CEO, Suvin Advisors Pvt Ltd. Suvin - having experts who have worked in the textile industry for more than 30 years - carries out market research, techno-economic feasibility & technology selection. The company offers business models with refreshing ideas and techniques that will help in identifying weak areas that remain unnoticeable but play a vital role in increasing profitability & global competitiveness. Suvin supports a customer till implementation of the project & also assists in manpower recruitment & marketing assistance.

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