HUMAN PSYCHE AND NEW NORMAL POST COVID-19 IN FASHION RETAIL SPACES IN INDIA

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Abstract

The year 2020 began with the globe facing an unforeseen crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic sent tremors throughout global communities. One of which could be seen through dislocating national and international supply chains triggering steep changes in markets. According to the Retailers Association of India, the retail industry achieved 93 percent of pre-COVID sales in February 2021. However, the COVID-19 crisis has had a severe impact on the Indian retail industry and overall revenue generation. Apparel and accessories industry was one of the worst hit. The players who would sustain are the ones who act fast and are resilient. It has already become clear that the high street will take on a very different form once the pandemic is over. The intermittent lockdowns arrested people in their homes. Many who were locked up in concrete jungles wanted to break free. There was stress of not being able to take care of the sick and stress of losing the near and dear ones. In normal day‟s retail therapy used to be a solution. All this had a cumulative impact on human psyche. Roger Doodley in his book Brainfluence states that, "ninty five percent of our thoughts emotions and learning occur without our conscious awareness." Health and safety was of prime importance. With health andsafety taking the front seat, the urban retail landscape is witnessing a transformation. The localbrands are acclimatizing from traditional to multi & omni-channel, neuro and social media marketing. The retail platforms driven by technokinesis had to be adapted quickly. Thisdrive isexpected to linger and to support this change; consumers and retailers need to adjust tonew normalities. The aim of this research is to observe the measures the Indian fashion retailershavetaken and also to propose the measures that they could take with the interventions of technopathy. This paper will collect and collate information from approximately 1000 Indian customers who have made transactions in apparel stores post the second wave of pandemic in India. The sample will comprise of a mixed demography belonging to age groups 18 & above,and from various towns and cities, belonging to various strata of society in India. This data willalso be supported by personal observations and interviews with about 50 stores across India.

The findings and analysis will provide significant insights and highlights for onsite stores to reposition to multi-omni- channel business, based on reports of Retail heads.

Introduction

The year 2020 began with the globe facing an unforeseen crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic sent tremors throughout global communities. One of which could be seen through dislocating national and international supply chains triggering steep changes in markets. Apparel and accessories industry was one of the worst hit. The players who would sustain are the ones who act fast and are resilient. It is already evident that after the pandemic is over, the high street will take on a totally different shape. The outbreak of novel coronavirus created disruptions for millions of people in the form of travel restrictions, health scares and stock market turmoil. It has been a rather unexciting time for most employees working in the design industry. A lot of designers used this time to future proof their designs and invested their time to prepare after the lockdown is over. Many professionals worked with reduced or half salaries hoping for compensation when the industry resumes. Payment delays from client have resulted in cash crunch seriously affecting cash flow. With the migrant laborers gone back it took almost a year for things to crawl towards normal. COVID 19 has been a big learning. People were locked up in their home due to intermittent lockdowns and fear of COVID19. There was a lot of anxiety and hysteria due to the inability to take care of your near and dear ones. Many a times seeing them passing away, without being able to help or comfort them, by being near to them or holding their hand. To overcome this hyper anxiety in normal days one would have resorted to retail therapy or window shopping. But being locked up at home this outlet was also available only in the virtual world, thereby lacking the sensorial experience. All this had a cumulative impact on human psyche.

However, to sustain themselves in the pandemic times, the brands had to reinvent themselves taking resort into multi & omni-channel, neuro and social media marketing. All this brought about an urban transformation in retail and other spaces. To summarise, the changes the lockdown brought about in spaces:

Lockdown one: first “Work from home” period taught us that we need separate him and she rooms. There is a point of time when everyone is wired and talking. They all need well-appointed rooms with proper acoustics, ventilation and lighting.

Once we learned to grapple with technology came the **Lockdown two**. With the food supply getting over the need for going to get the grocery arrived and then came the necessity of contained units. This is when we realized and relooked at our city planning. Character in neighbourhood became the prime focus.

Lockdown three came with larger learning‟s. Until now it was me and my family. This is the time the maids were coming back to homes, people had to go to offices for work. There was a fear “how do I protect my family”. This is when the need for new space designs came into being. There was a need to have sanitization rooms at the entrance. Have more of touchless technology built in; talking lifts, touchless toilets, swipe card door locks, Sensor based lighting operations or all operations of fans and lights connected to your mobile phone would be the

new norm of homes: smart homes. Anything in the name of anti-bacterial started selling be it paints, furniture polishes, flooring tiles, kitchen table tops, soft furnishing like carpets, upholstery, bed linen and the like. The principle of self-cleaning was discovered in 1973 by the botanist Wilhelm Barthlott and his team called it the lotus effect. Today it‟s called as nanotechnology. Bengaluru-based nanotechnology startup: the CoronaOven; device which uses UV-C Light to destroy coronaviruses within 10 minutes was being used in homes and retail outlets.

Lockdown four saw major changes. The migrant labourers went back to their natives. The offices and retails were to open and challenge now was design of spaces in these areas. One of the most important points in Visual Merchandising is "customer is God". This statement was emphasized to attract customers. The customers would enter the shop that would lure them with empathy and assure them of safety. The aisle spaces were being widened, apart from sanitization protocols. Movement passages were defined. Number of customers at a time inside the store was regulated. Queue boxes through floor graphics helped in social distancing. This was mostly in FMCG product category. Few of the solutions discussed pre-opening were upping the HVAC systems to meet the requirement of air changes in the retail space. Electrical infographics, floor graphics, wayfinders and shelf talkers reduce in-store staff interaction. Omnichanel marketing would be a must for all retailers even big Indian brands like Bata are looking at adopting it. The stores might just remain to be experience centres. However, self-check outs and contactless payments to avoid human interaction may be the new design. Emotional design will be a big thing and a new norm of space design, be it retail, office spaces or urban and public spaces.

During lockdown the handloom and handicraft industry was the worst hit. Swadeshi became the buzz word post honorable PM‟s concept of Make in India. But would the consumer leave the comfort of the brands they endorse to adopt the Swadeshi is yet to be assessed.

The aim of this research was to observe the measures taken by the Indian retailers through personal observations, including visual documentation and interviews with store managers of about 50 stores across India. The paper also collected and collated information from approximately 700 Indian customers who have made transactions in apparel stores (offline) post the second wave of pandemic in India. The sample comprised of a mixed demography belonging to age groups 18 & above, and from various towns and cities of India. The data was collected as a guided classroom assignment to cover stores across India. Based on observations, interviews with store personnel and customers and surveys these points came forth. Apparel and lifestyle brands comparatively saw less or no customers in store. The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was realigned to have restricted entry for people wearing mask. Temperature check and offering sanitizer was mandatory and then the personal information was also noted down. Few stores use „Occupancy app‟ to keep a track of number of customers in the store at any given point. COVID warning posters can be seen around the store and in trial rooms. Work force reduced in store. The attire of sales personal was modified with extra protection layering to assure the customer of safety. Workers equipped with masks. They reduced chairs and reclamation areas, limited number of dresses for trial rooms. Alternate trial rooms were closed. Companies turned towards virtual trials which might become the new norm. The trial rooms

were sanitized after every use. One of the most interesting things in the store were the in-store displays using mannequins wearing masks conveying how necessary it is and has become a part of our lives today due to COVID. Sanitizers were placed at entrance door, billing counter, outside trial rooms, etc. where there is a need for touching different surfaces and cleaning is necessary. The cashier place is also being sanitised every four hours including the ED's machine, mobile tabs, the system etc. The entire garment which was tried by the customers underwent robust sanitization and ironing. In some stores it is put it in a quarantine bin for 12 hours, following which the garment is sanitized inside out. There is an increase in frequency and intensity of cleaning procedures. For payment they are avoiding cash and card and are encouraging the customer to pay using UPI instead. Few stores have “corona protector machine" for purifying the air. Some use sanitizing machine wherein instead of spraying the clothes with sanitizer, it is placed inside this machine for sixty seconds to clean it without causing any damage to the garment. Few brands went a mile ahead to reach out to their loyal customers through WhatsApp video calls and sending photos over. They had tele-calls/messages every day to about fifty to sixty customers out of which about one or two also ended up visiting the store and some also purchased clothes over WhatsApp itself. They also had a return and exchange policy of 30 days, so customer was welcome to try the garments at home and return them in case required. The next study the brands did was to change the strategy of stocks. Comfort fits collection and "active-wear" outgrew the formal sections in store. There was a change in customer psyche from touching and checking out various items to online research and offline purchase making omnichannel the new reality of fashion brands. Few brands did try online shopping options but they didn't get any response, so they are relying on platforms like Myntra and Amazon for selling their goods online. The festive season inspite of all odds saw an upward sale. The brands are turning towards AR, VR and AI to augment sales and understand or tap customer psyche.

Few of the visual references of brand preparedness for COVID 19:

Figure. Brand‟s welcome to the customers post lockdown 4

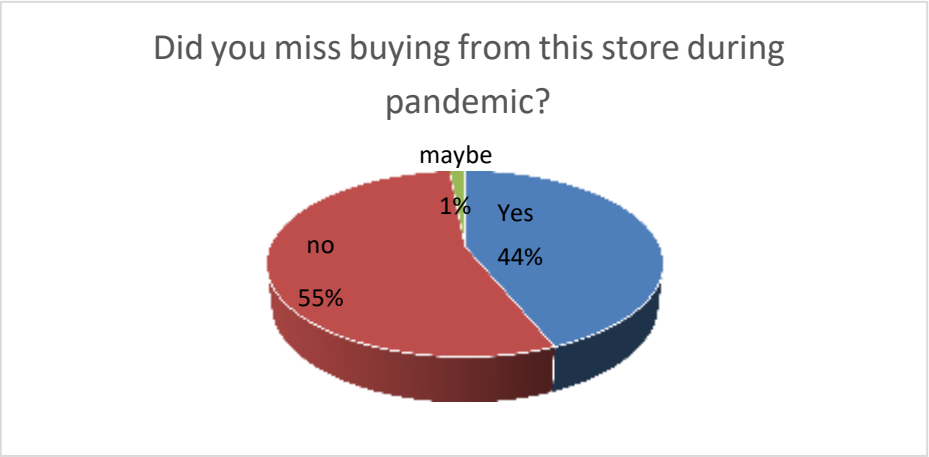
Figure 2. Health and hygiene care for customer

Figure 3. Mannequins with masks as reminders of COVID 19

Figure 4. Temperature check at entrance

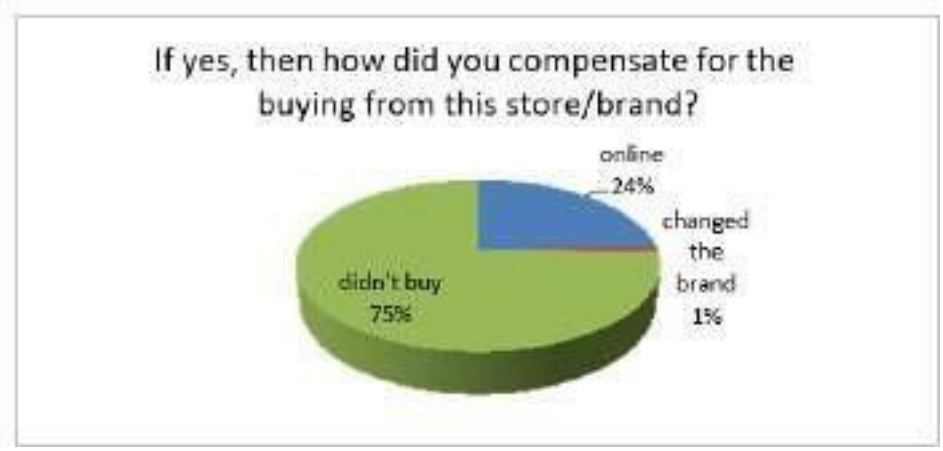
Figure 5. Floor graphics for social distancing

Being locked up at home people had become dependent on online retail therapy. That became a challenge to many of the local brands to acclimatize from traditional to multi, omni-channel and social media marketing. This is also validated by the survey result:



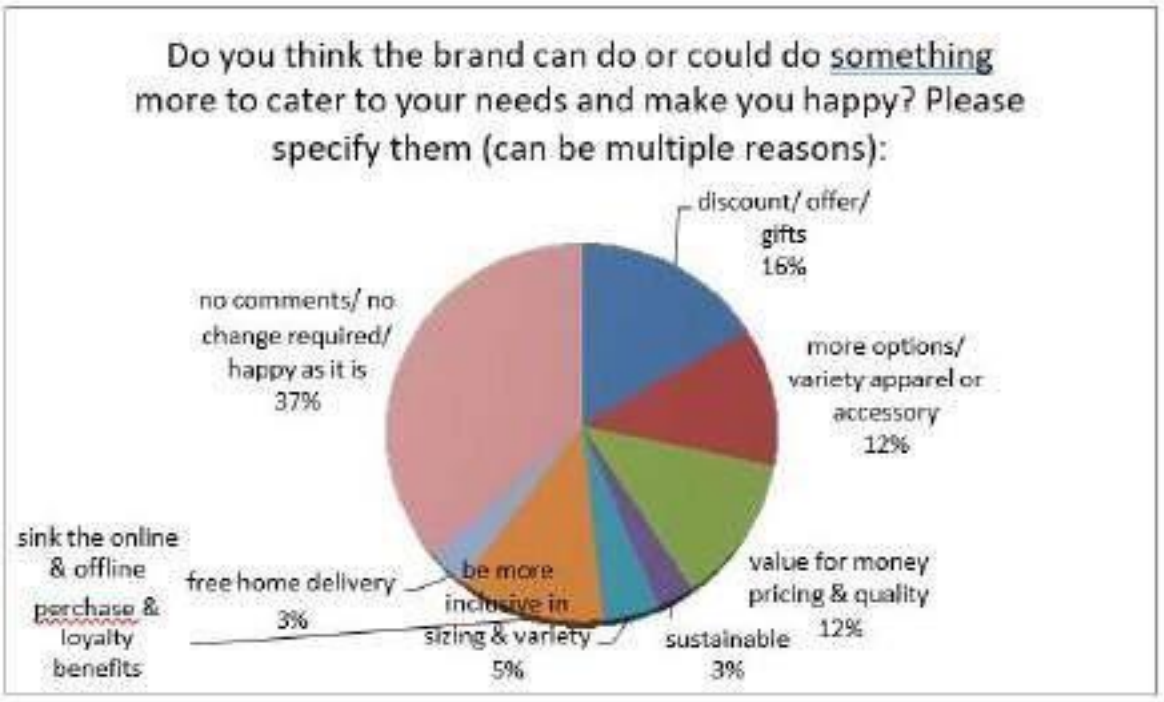
GRAPH 1: Human psyche regarding buying online vs. store

The survey was done pan India and it is interesting to note that people did not buy apparel and lifestyle accessories. There were umpteen reasons for the same: wanted to buy offline, apparel was not an essential commodity and its online delivery was also affected, online delivery did not reach out to towns and villages of India and most importantly loss of jobs and uncertainties of jobs.



GRAPH 2: Compensation for buying

Genius loci, resilience and sustenance would be the future. The brands need to look at a holistic approach: including psychic, physical and human components. It needs to look at customer satisfaction and happiness at both tangible and intangible level. These are some of the reasons for customer's desires for various brands whose names have been concealed.



GRAPH 3: Expectation from brand to make the customer happy

Conclusion:

The future of retails lies with AR, VR and AI. These three in place, reading customer preferences and dissatisfaction would become easier. Brands should work towards the same. However, when choosing a technology, be informed of its impact at all levels and apply them in moderation.

Review the appropriateness of the decision from time to time. Allow and accept changes as said by Skud of Play architecture. Human beings need to connect more psychologically rather than connecting just physically. Value relationship and work towards welfare of people rather than concentrating on acquiring only material wealth and “Plan for safe socializing rather than socially distancing and make buying an experience”. These have been the observations of changes in spaces as a result of COVID 19.

Acknowledgement:

Since it is a new area, most of the matter has been primary data collected through webinars, interviews at stores, observations and surveys of customers. This huge number was possible with the help of students who are stationed at various parts of India due to the pandemic. I wish to thank and acknowledge each one of them.

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Dyeing for likes: a netnographic study of natural dyeing in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

Before chemical dyes were first synthesised in the 19th Century, natural dyes created from flora and fauna had coloured textiles for thousands of years. As we look to mitigate the climate crisis by shifting to more sustainable modes of living and seek reconnection to nature, natural dye crafts are once again becoming popular. Natural dyes can produce stunning colour palettes created from a diverse and accessible variety of natural sources, using a multitude of different skills and techniques. The craft connects practitioners to their surroundings, linking them to other species and ecologies and offers an alternative vision for the production and consumption of textiles. This research seeks to understand contemporary dye craft practice in the UK, explore its sustainable potential and illuminate the human-nature connections that occur when we make 'with' plants. It focuses particularly on how closer engagement with the more-than-human mightenable us to cultivate pathways towards a future that is more socially and ecologically sustainable.This paper presents the findings from the first phase of research: a netnography of natural dyeing in the UK. A selection of social media posts from Instagram, Twitter and Facebook were collected to represent each season over the course of a year and thematically analysed. The aim of this phase was to reveal more details about contemporary dye craft practice, including the techniques, purpose, resources, groups and people involved. Social media platforms create spaces for dyers to share methods and outcomes, resources, best practice and troubleshooting. The imagery and information shared on social media illustrates the ways in which dyers are engaging with their surroundings and the natural world through crafting. Within these social media spaces, botanical knowledge is being transferred from expert to novice and peer to peer, as dyers discover the qualities of plants through processes of experimentation and share their results with others. Additionally, dyers on social media express keen interest and concern about topics related to sustainability, often integrating these into their practice. The knowledge gathered in this phase of research was intended to inform the next stages, which include a survey to understand dyers' introductions to and motivations for natural dyeing, followed by a series of interviews with dyers and participatory visits. Further, this phase has begun to uncover the human-nature interactions that are occurring in the craft.

Introduction

Before chemical dyes were first synthesised in the 19th Century, natural dyes created from flora and fauna had coloured textiles for thousands of years. Natural dyes can produce stunning colour palettes created from a diverse and accessible variety of natural sources, using a multitude of different skills and techniques. As we look to mitigate the climate crisis by shifting to more sustainable modes of living and seek reconnection to nature, natural dye crafts are once again becoming popular

This paper presents the key emerging results from a study of social media posts about natural dyeing. It forms the first phase of my PhD research which seeks to understand contemporary dye craft practice in the UK, explore its sustainable potential and illuminate the human-nature connections that occur when we make 'with' plants. There is particular focus on how closer engagement with the more-than-human might enable us to cultivate pathways towards a more sustainable future.

Methods

Through analysing social media posts, I sought to learn more about how the craft is being practiced today, for example the plants that dyers are using, where and how they practice and the imagery and messaging that are being conveyed about contemporary natural dyeing.

Online platforms create spaces for natural dyers to share techniques and knowledge about the craft with each other. Dyers can access guides, methods, dye recipes, see samples of dyed fibres and textiles, watch content related to the craft and interact with a community of like- minded people, across a variety of different formats and platforms. This user-generated information is easily accessible and offers a window into dyer's current practice.

Netnography is a "qualitative, interpretive research methodology that adapts traditional ethnographic techniques to the study of social media" (Kozinets, 2019). It is an approach pioneered by Kozinets in 1995 and was primarily applied to consumer marketing research. Since then, numerous academic fields have sought to use methodological approaches incorporating data derived from online platforms including social media to further understanding of issues related to their fields (Williams et al., 2013; Hine, 2015). A limitation to obtaining data from social media is that it excludes those dyers who take part in the craft but either do not use or are not inclined to share their practice through social media. The demographics of social media users also varies across platforms; for example, although Facebook is the most used social media website across all age groups, 16–24-year-olds use Instagram more often than Facebook (Statista, 2022). These demographic variations amongst users will undoubtedly have influenced the type of content created and shared on each platform.

In total, I selected 150 social media posts to be included in the analysis and they were sourced from Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. I identified posts through a series of targeted searches using keywords and hashtags or through dedicated groups and filtered them to include only UK based accounts. The posts were collected across the months of September, December, March and June; to reveal how the practice changes throughout the year. I first captured the posts as screenshots and removed any identifying information (and will not directly quote the data). I then

coded the data in Atlas.ti and conducted a thematic analysis to allow me to identify, analyse, organise, describe and report the themes and patterns present within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Nowell et al. 2017).

Emerging results & Discussion

Botanical Knowledge

Much of the content shared on social media related directly to plants and the natural world. Post authors demonstrated a wide range of knowledge relating to plant cultivation and preparation for dyeing, alongside results (commonly including images of dyed fabric samples) of dyeing with specific plants. Many contributors possessed deep knowledge about a plant's qualities and life; for example identifying when a fruit was ripe and what indicators suggested this, such as looking for colour changes. Others were able to recommend specific plant species to dye with and report their own experiences of engaging with them, offering advice and support on how to deal with them to achieve desired results. These examples highlight some of the encounters with the more-than-human that are integral to this craft.

Further, many dyers spoke of their enjoyment tending to their plants and finding a sense of hope and joy in their gardening activities, confirming that gardening was beneficial to their wellbeing. Visual imagery often included samples of dyed fibres/textiles arranged with the plants they'd extracted the dye from. These compositions drew attention to the relationship between the material artefact and the plant, which had become entwined and transformed through the process of dyeing.

In total, over 50 different plants or dye sources were referenced in the social media posts and Table 1 illustrates the ten most frequently cited. They demonstrate the enduring appeal of key historical dye stuffs, including Madder, Weld and Indigo. This information also provides an insight into which plants dyers are using in contemporary applications of the craft, these could be dye stuffs they are growing themselves, foraging for or purchasing.

Dye Source	Frequency
Madder	13
Indigo	8
Weld	8
Coreopsis	6
Marigold	6
Avocado	5
Onion Skin	5
Woad	5
Chamomile	4
Japanese Indigo	4

Table 1. A list of dye sources/plants and frequency of mentions in social media posts

Through social media, botanical knowledge is being transferred from peer to peer and expert to novice. Dyers are discovering the qualities of plants through processes of experimentation and practice and they are sharing their knowledge and dyeing results with others, spreading awareness of the craft and plant life. It's thought that there is a tendency for people to overlook the importance of plants, often referred to as 'plant blindness", a term coined by Wandersee & Schussler (1999). Raising awareness of the "fascinating aspects" and "importance of plant of life in the wider community" (Jose, Wu & Kamoun, 2019) through initiatives such as education (and I suggest, natural dyeing) is one way to overcome this tendency, and this knowledge is also thought to be significant in creating a more sustainable future (Sanders et al., 2015; Thomas, Ougham & Sanders, 2021).

Seasonality

Through collecting a sample of posts across the year, the seasonality of the practice was illuminated. The most evident displays of which were shared on Instagram in the form of visual imagery that shifted alongside the seasons; lush green foliage and blooming dye gardens at midsummer gave way to bark and lichen collected from crisp winter forests. The commentary accompanying the Instagram images on occasion referenced a dyer's need to plan their practice to account for the changing seasons. The slow nature of natural dyeing is also highlighted in the changing seasons as dyers work in partnership with nature: in spring dyers ask for advice and share plans for the growing season ahead, accompanied with imagery of seeds, then the first emerging shoots. They must wait patiently until the summer or autumn (sometimes of the next year) to use them in their practice.

Dyers were also able to observe and identify changes in a plants' dyeing qualities due to seasonal changes in sunlight, e.g. explaining how the strong summer sunlight had developed the dye pigments in plants they'd used.

Localism

Of the locations referenced, the most common were gardens, local areas and the home. Additionally, many dyers shared images of their dyeing 'setup': often dye pots on kitchen stoves in homes or camping stoves set up in gardens. Dyers spoke of venturing out into their local areas, searching for specific plants to make a colour they had in mind, or sampling the different vegetation to see what colour palette their local area could provide them. In contrast, social media provides a platform to share these local encounters with a like-minded, welcoming and far-reaching community. This theme of localism and small-scale production harshly contrasts the global dimensions of the fashion system and is associated with movements such as Fibershed, an organisation developing regional soil-to-soil textile economies (Burgess & White, 2019), of which natural dyeing is a key component.

Sustainability

Alongside the information about the dyeing process and the natural world, messages of sustainability are being communicated too. For some, natural dyeing was an opportunity to upcycle or rejuvenate existing clothing, whether that be garment dyeing old or second-hand clothing or dyeing thread to be used for mending or embroidery. Waste reduction and textile production with a low environmental impact were also something that dyers aimed for in their practice. For example, two dyers were concerned with reducing waste from the dyeing process and questioned what they could do with leftover dye baths or ingredients. Some suggestions included composting leftover dyestuffs or repurposing the dye bath for other fibers. Some of the plants/dyes mentioned e.g. onion skins and Avocado are sourced from food waste and one post featured natural dyeing as a strategy within a wider campaign aimed at a local reduction in food waste.

The relation to practices such as mending, upcycling, waste reduction and recycling suggests that natural dyeing is linked to other forms of alternative consumption. These different perspectives on textile production and consumption are crucial as we seek to address the disastrously damaging socio-environmental impacts of the current fashion system (Fletcher & Tham, 2019; Niinimäki et al. 2020).

Conclusion & further work

The social media analysis has revealed that natural dyers possess and develop detailed knowledge of plants through their practice and that they are embracing a seasonal, slow and local approach to making. In addition, dyers on social media are willing and able to share their knowledge and experience with others, furthering the practice and helping new dyers to navigate an expansive and complex craft in an accessible and amenable way. Through natural dyeing, practitioners are taking part in alternative ways of producing and consuming textiles.

This research phase has begun to uncover the human-nature interactions that are occurring in the craft by identifying the plants, collection practices, seasonal changes and methods that dyers have experienced and shared online. To develop a more detailed understanding of *who* dyers are, *how* and *why* they practice, a survey was launched in June 2021 seeking to expand on the knowledge of contemporary dye craft practice gathered in phase one. This will be followed by a series of interviews with dyers and participatory visits with an aim to focus on connections to/embodied interaction with plants.

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