

Generational Shifts in Sustainable Practices: Perspectives of Textile Entrepreneurs in Varanasi and Kanpur on the Ganges' Environmental Restoration

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Abstract

The Ganges River, a crucial water source for millions in India, is one of the most polluted in the world, with significant contamination attributed to industrial effluents, particularly from the textile industries in Varanasi and Kanpur. For decades, many textile business owners in these cities have resisted adopting environmentally sustainable practices, influenced by the cultural belief that the river can self-purify. This resistance has hindered efforts by environmental scientists and policymakers to address pollution. However, recent shifts in societal attitudes, especially among younger generations, indicate a growing recognition of the need for environmental stewardship. This study explores the perspectives of textile entrepreneurs from three generational cohorts - Boomers, Millennials, and Gen Z - based in Varanasi and Kanpur, focusing on their roles in adopting sustainable practices to restore the Ganges and mitigate environmental degradation. A qualitative approach was used, involving focus group interviews with 12 participants, four from each cohort. Thematic analysis revealed three key findings: (1) Gen Z and Millennials demonstrated greater environmental awareness, influenced by scientific research, while Boomers prioritized traditional practices; (2) Younger entrepreneurs connected pollution reduction with cultural respect for the Ganges, whereas Boomers remained focused on business goals; and (3) While both younger and older entrepreneurs recognized the importance of sustainability, younger entrepreneurs were more proactive in integrating eco-friendly practices into their business models. These findings suggest a generational shift toward environmental responsibility, with younger entrepreneurs more likely to adopt sustainable practices, potentially transforming the textile industry's impact on the Ganges.

Keywords: ganges river, textile industries, environmental sustainability, India, pollution