

The Disposable Economy Dilemma: A Comparative Study on Consumption Habits of Males and Females in Koshi Province, Nepal

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Abstract

This research explores the gendered dimensions of consumption patterns in the emerging disposable economy in Koshi Province, Nepal. As global luxury and fast-fashion markets infiltrate provincial regions, the traditional, cyclical economy of rural areas is being replaced by a throwaway consumption culture. Through a quantitative analysis of 2,000 respondents (1,000 males and 1,000 females), this study examines the differences in consumption habits between genders, exploring motivations, product categories, and sustainability awareness. The results indicate that both males and females in Koshi Province exhibit distinct consumption behaviors, with females primarily purchasing fashion and beauty-related items, while males favor electronics and automobiles. The study highlights a concerning trend toward non-sustainable consumption, with both genders showing low levels of environmental awareness. The findings point to a growing reliance on disposable products and its adverse effects on local economies, which are already under strain. Recommendations for policy interventions to promote sustainable consumption and protect local industries are discussed.

Keywords: disposable economy, gender, consumption habits, sustainability, waste culture

Introduction

The term disposable economy refers to the growing consumption of products that are designed for short-term use and rapid disposal, often at the cost of environmental sustainability and local traditions. The disposable culture, powered by globalization, has made significant inroads into rural and semi-urban regions in developing countries like Nepal. In particular, Koshi Province—home to a mix of urban and rural populations—provides a unique context for understanding how the rise of luxury consumption and fast fashion affects local economies.

Luxury consumption, once limited to urban elites, has become increasingly prevalent in provincial areas, disrupting traditional economic systems based on agriculture, small trade, and handicrafts. This paper focuses on gendered consumption habits, specifically examining whether males and females in Koshi Province differ in their engagement with the disposable

economy. We hypothesize that although both genders participate in disposable consumption, the motivations and types of products differ, with significant implications for local economies.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze gender differences in disposable and luxury consumption patterns in Koshi Province.
2. To assess the impact of disposable consumption on traditional local economies and livelihoods.
3. To understand the motivations behind male and female engagement with the disposable economy.
4. Research Questions
5. How do males and females in Koshi Province differ in their disposable and luxury consumption habits?
6. What effects does the rise of disposable consumption have on traditional economic activities in the region?
7. What motivates men and women to participate in the disposable economy?

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it highlights the gendered nature of consumption patterns within the growing disposable economy in Koshi Province, offering a deeper understanding of how men and women differently engage with fast fashion and luxury goods. By examining these differences, the research sheds light on the broader impacts of disposable consumption on traditional livelihoods, such as agriculture and handicrafts, which are vital to the local economy. Furthermore, the findings can help policymakers and development organizations design gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate strategies to address the challenges posed by rapid consumerism, ultimately supporting sustainable economic development in the region.

Literature Review

The concept of a disposable economy represents a significant shift in global consumption patterns, marked by the rise of products designed for short-term use and rapid disposal. This shift has far-reaching implications for environmental sustainability, cultural traditions, and economic structures, especially in developing regions experiencing globalization. The literature on luxury consumption and disposable economies offers

important insights into these phenomena, highlighting the ways in which global market forces have transformed consumption into a linear, wasteful process that undermines sustainability and entrenches new socio-economic dynamics.

The Disposable Economy and Global Consumption Patterns

Bauman (2007) conceptualizes modern consumption as “liquid consumption,” where the emphasis lies on constant renewal and disposability rather than durability and reuse. This reflects a broader societal transformation where objects and experiences are designed for fleeting satisfaction, and their disposability becomes an intrinsic value. The disposable economy is closely tied to this shift, where consumer goods—especially in the fashion and luxury sectors—are produced and marketed for rapid turnover, stimulating continuous consumption cycles that exacerbate waste generation (Bauman, 2007).

Gino and Ariely (2012) further elaborate on how behavioral economics explains the human inclination towards luxury consumption and rapid disposal. Their studies demonstrate that consumers derive utility not only from the possession of goods but also from the process of acquiring and discarding items, which can be driven by psychological needs such as status signaling, novelty-seeking, and self-identity reinforcement. These motivations underpin much of the disposable economy's growth, particularly in contexts where luxury and fast fashion blur the lines between necessity and status-driven consumption.

Gendered Consumption Patterns in Global Contexts

Consumer behavior research has long noted gender differences in preferences and motivations. Easwaran and Khanduja (2020) review a broad range of studies in consumer psychology, revealing consistent patterns where females typically show greater engagement with fashion, beauty, and personal care products, driven by social and cultural expectations around appearance and identity. In contrast, males often demonstrate stronger preferences for technology, automobiles, and gadgets, which are associated with power, functionality, and performance.

These gendered preferences are not merely individual choices but are embedded within cultural narratives and economic structures that shape consumption habits. For example, Dittmar et al. (2014) argue that female consumption of fashion is often linked to the pursuit of social inclusion and self-expression, whereas male consumption patterns may be tied more directly to utility and symbolic capital. Moreover, globalization has intensified these trends by amplifying the availability and marketing of gender-targeted products, creating a highly segmented market landscape that reinforces gender-specific consumption.

Disposable Economy and Sustainability Challenges

The rapid expansion of disposable consumption poses critical challenges to sustainability. According to Fletcher (2013), the fashion industry—one of the largest contributors to disposable consumption—accounts for significant environmental degradation through resource-intensive production processes, high carbon emissions, and excessive waste generation. The concept of “fast fashion” epitomizes this problem, where garments are produced cheaply and quickly to meet ever-changing trends, leading to a throwaway culture with substantial social and environmental costs.

Environmental scholars such as Jackson (2016) emphasize that this linear consumption model conflicts with the principles of circular economy, which advocates for the reuse, recycling, and longevity of products to reduce ecological footprints. The disposable economy undermines these principles, particularly in developing countries where waste management infrastructure is often inadequate. Consequently, communities face increased pollution and resource depletion, which can exacerbate poverty and health issues (Sachs, 2015).

Gender and Disposable Consumption in Developing Countries

While global research has documented general gender differences in consumption, the intersection of gender and disposable economies in developing country contexts remains underexplored. This gap is particularly pronounced in rural and semi-urban settings where traditional economies based on agriculture, handicrafts, and small-scale trade still prevail. Here, the penetration of luxury and disposable goods represents both an economic opportunity and a cultural disruption.

In South Asia, studies such as those by Bhattarai (2018) have examined the rise of consumerism among rural women, noting that increased access to luxury and disposable goods can enhance women's social status and economic independence. However, this consumption is often mediated by patriarchal norms that limit women's autonomy, shaping the types of products they acquire and the motivations behind their purchases. Conversely, men may engage more openly with luxury consumption as a display of wealth and social power, reflecting entrenched gender roles (Acharya & Upadhyay, 2019).

Nepalese Context: Consumption, Culture, and Economy

Nepal provides a distinctive setting for studying the disposable economy, given its unique blend of urbanization, globalization, and strong traditional cultural values. Research on Nepal's consumption patterns is limited, but emerging studies indicate that urban middle-

class consumers increasingly participate in global consumer culture, adopting fast fashion and luxury goods Sharma & Gurung,(2017). This transition is often accompanied by shifts in values, where traditional practices centered around sustainability and communal resource-sharing are challenged by individualistic and status-driven consumption.

McCabe et al. (2012) provide a useful parallel by exploring how globalization influences value systems in Nepalese higher education, with concerns about academic dishonesty reflecting broader anxieties about moral erosion and short-term gain mentality. Although their study does not directly address consumer behavior, it underscores the cultural tensions between modernity and tradition that frame the disposable economy's rise in Nepal.

In Koshi Province, where urban and rural populations coexist, these dynamics are particularly acute. The province's economy still relies heavily on agriculture and small-scale industries, but luxury and disposable consumption are gaining ground, especially among younger generations. Despite this, there is a lack of empirical research examining how gender shapes participation in this evolving economy, leaving a critical knowledge gap.

Gendered Consumption in Koshi Province: Research Gap

The scarcity of studies on gendered disposable consumption in Koshi Province is notable. Few investigations have quantitatively analyzed how males and females differ in their engagement with fast fashion and luxury goods in this context. Most existing work tends to focus on urban centers like Kathmandu or broader national trends, neglecting the nuanced socio-economic realities of provincial regions (Karki & Thapa, 2020).

This research seeks to fill this gap by providing an empirical assessment of gender-based consumption patterns in Koshi Province, exploring not only what products are consumed but also the motivations behind these choices. Understanding these patterns is essential for assessing the local economic impacts, including potential disruptions to traditional livelihoods and social structures.

Economic and Cultural Impacts of Disposable Consumption

The disposable economy's expansion in regions like Koshi Province raises significant questions about economic sustainability and cultural continuity. Traditional economies based on agriculture, handicrafts, and small trade are vulnerable to displacement by consumer goods that are imported, mass-produced, and marketed aggressively (Poudel & Basnet, 2019).

Moreover, the cultural implications are profound. According to Lama (2016), the infusion of global consumer culture challenges indigenous practices and values, particularly

in rural Nepal, where communal sharing and long-term use of resources have been foundational. The adoption of disposable luxury goods may foster individualism and status competition, potentially weakening social cohesion.

From a gender perspective, these shifts may produce differing effects. While women might find new avenues for empowerment through consumption, they may also experience increased pressure to conform to globalized beauty and fashion standards, sometimes at the expense of traditional roles ,Khadka, (2018). Men, on the other hand, might use luxury consumption as a means to assert dominance and social hierarchy, reinforcing existing patriarchal structures Shrestha, (2021).

The literature reveals a complex interplay between globalization, gender, consumption, and economic transformation. The disposable economy is both a cause and consequence of shifting values and practices that challenge sustainability and cultural continuity. Although global patterns of gendered consumption are well documented, there is a significant lack of research in developing country contexts like Nepal, and particularly in provinces such as Koshi.

This study aims to contribute to this emerging field by quantitatively examining gendered disposable consumption in Koshi Province, assessing its motivations, patterns, and impacts on local economies and traditions. Filling this gap is crucial for informing policies that balance economic development with cultural preservation and environmental sustainability.

Methodology

Study Design

This research employs a quantitative research design to explore gender differences in consumption habits within the disposable economy. A survey questionnaire was developed based on prior literature and tailored to the socio-cultural context of Koshi Province. The survey was conducted across both urban and rural areas to capture diverse consumption patterns.

Sampling and Data Collection

A total of 2,000 respondents were surveyed—1,000 males and 1,000 females—from rural and semi-urban areas of Koshi Province. The sample was stratified to represent different age groups (18–60 years) and income levels (low, middle, and high) to ensure diversity. Respondents were selected using random sampling from both rural and semi-urban areas to represent the population accurately.

Data were collected over a period of three months through face-to-face interviews and online surveys. Respondents were asked to provide insights into their consumption habits, motivations for purchasing luxury goods, and awareness of the environmental impacts associated with disposable products.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentages, and inferential statistics such as Chi-square tests to compare gender differences in consumption patterns. The statistical software SPSS was used to process the data.

Results

Demographic Profile

The respondents' demographic profile is shown below:

- **Age Distribution:** The majority of respondents (54%) were aged 18–30, followed by 31–45 years (29%), 46–60 years (12%), and 60+ years (5%).
- **Gender Distribution:** There was an equal distribution of males (50%) and females (50%).
- **Income Levels:** 60% of respondents reported a monthly disposable income below NPR 10,000, while 30% earned between NPR 10,000–20,000, and 10% earned above NPR 20,000.

Consumption Habits by Gender

Table 1

Frequency of Purchasing Non-Essential Luxury Goods

Gender	Never	Occasionally	Monthly	Weekly	Frequently
Male	15%	35%	25%	12%	13%
Female	10%	40%	30%	12%	8%

Observation: Both males and females purchase non-essential goods on a regular basis, but females tend to purchase luxury items more frequently than males, especially in categories such as clothing and cosmetics.

Table 2

Primary Reasons for Purchasing Luxury Goods

Gender	Quality	Social Status	Personal Satisfaction	Peer Pressure	Influencer Trends
Male	40%	30%	15%	10%	5%
Female	35%	40%	10%	5%	10%

Observation: Females were more likely to cite social status (40%) and influencer trends (10%) as primary motivations for purchasing luxury goods, while males were more focused on quality (40%) and social status (30%).

Environmental Awareness

Environmental Awareness: Only 22% of males and 18% of females reported being "aware" of the environmental impacts of disposable consumption. 30% of both genders reported “never” considering environmental impacts when purchasing luxury goods.

Sustainability Preferences

Support for Local Products: 55% of males and 60% of females expressed a preference for local, handmade products over branded luxury goods. However, only 12% of respondents reported actively reducing waste or choosing eco-friendly alternatives.

Discussion

The findings from this study provide compelling insights into the gendered dimensions of disposable consumption in Koshi Province, Nepal, revealing significant patterns and implications for sustainability, local economies, and policy development. This discussion unpacks these findings in relation to existing literature and broader socio-economic contexts, emphasizing the critical need for gender-sensitive approaches to consumption and sustainability.

Gendered Consumption Patterns and Their Drivers

The study confirms that females in Koshi Province exhibit a greater propensity for consumption related to fashion and beauty products, aligning with global trends documented in consumer psychology literature (Easwaran & Khanduja, 2020; Dittmar et al., 2014). This inclination is often influenced by deeply ingrained social and cultural norms that associate femininity with appearance, grooming, and social belonging. Women’s consumption behaviors are frequently motivated by the desire for self-expression and social inclusion, which luxury and fast-fashion goods readily facilitate (Bhattarai, 2018; Khadka, 2018).

Conversely, males in Koshi Province prioritize electronics and automobiles, reflecting traditional masculine values related to power, status, and functionality (Acharya & Upadhyay, 2019; Shrestha, 2021). This gender differentiation in product preference is consistent with findings in other developing and developed contexts, suggesting that consumption choices serve as symbolic markers of identity and social standing.

However, the key contribution of this research lies in demonstrating that despite differences in product preference, both males and females engage extensively in disposable

consumption practices, characterized by frequent replacement, rapid obsolescence, and low regard for product longevity. This finding resonates with Bauman's (2007) concept of "liquid consumption," where the transient nature of goods becomes normalized, fostering a culture of disposability that is increasingly problematic in sustainability terms.

Environmental Awareness and Its Deficit

One of the most striking findings of the study is the limited environmental awareness among consumers of both genders regarding the consequences of disposable consumption. This deficit exacerbates the challenges faced by Koshi Province in managing growing volumes of consumer waste and environmental degradation. Despite increasing global attention on sustainability, the local population's understanding of the ecological impacts of their consumption habits remains superficial.

This situation echoes the observations of Fletcher (2013) and Jackson (2016), who emphasize that sustainable consumption requires not only access to eco-friendly products but also a fundamental shift in consumer attitudes and behaviors. The lack of environmental consciousness identified in Koshi Province suggests that such attitudinal change is yet to take root, likely due to a combination of limited education, insufficient policy messaging, and economic priorities that prioritize immediate utility and status over long-term ecological considerations.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Implications

The pervasiveness of disposable consumption among both genders has significant socio-economic implications. Traditional economic activities such as agriculture, handicrafts, and small trade are vulnerable to being overshadowed by imported, mass-produced disposable goods that undercut local industries. This trend threatens the economic sustainability of rural and semi-urban communities in Koshi Province, undermining livelihoods dependent on craftsmanship and agriculture (Poudel & Basnet, 2019).

Culturally, the rise of a disposable economy may erode communal values and traditions that emphasize resource conservation, sharing, and sustainability (Lama, 2016). Gender-specific consumption patterns also influence social dynamics; women's increasing participation in fashion and beauty consumption can simultaneously empower and constrain them by reinforcing global beauty standards and consumerist pressures (Khadka, 2018). Men's engagement with luxury electronics and automobiles, meanwhile, often reinforces patriarchal hierarchies by emphasizing status and material success (Shrestha, 2021).

Policy Implications and Gender-Sensitive Strategies

The gendered nature of consumption identified in this research underscores the necessity for policymakers to develop gender-specific interventions to promote sustainable consumption. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to address the unique motivations and social contexts that drive male and female consumption behaviors.

For women, sustainability campaigns could focus on promoting awareness around the environmental impacts of fashion and beauty products, encouraging slow fashion, reuse, and support for local artisans who produce sustainable goods. Integrating these messages with empowerment initiatives can help align consumption with broader goals of gender equality and cultural preservation (Bhattarai, 2018).

For men, policies might emphasize the benefits of eco-friendly technology and sustainable mobility solutions, encouraging investment in durable goods and repair rather than rapid replacement. Educational programs that challenge traditional notions of masculinity linked to material possessions could also contribute to reducing the environmental footprint of male consumers (Acharya & Upadhyay, 2019).

Moreover, the limited environmental awareness found in both genders points to the need for comprehensive educational initiatives that build knowledge on the ecological and social costs of disposable consumption. These efforts should be embedded within broader development policies that promote sustainable economic alternatives, such as supporting local industries in adopting eco-friendly production methods and strengthening waste management infrastructure (Fletcher, 2013, Sachs, 2015).

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights, some limitations must be acknowledged. The quantitative approach, while effective in identifying patterns, may not fully capture the nuanced motivations and socio-cultural dynamics underlying consumption behaviors. Future research could benefit from mixed-methods approaches incorporating qualitative interviews to deepen understanding.

Additionally, the focus on Koshi Province means findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions of Nepal with different socio-economic or cultural contexts. Comparative studies across provinces could elucidate regional variations and inform more targeted interventions.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the pervasive influence of the disposable economy in Koshi Province, Nepal, revealing significant gendered consumption patterns and their implications for sustainability and local economies. Despite clear differences in product preferences—females favoring fashion and beauty, males prioritizing electronics and automobiles—both genders participate extensively in disposable consumption practices. This convergence highlights a shared challenge: the normalization of rapid product turnover without sufficient regard for environmental consequences.

The limited environmental awareness identified across the population exacerbates this challenge, signaling an urgent need for educational initiatives to foster sustainable consumption attitudes. This is critical not only for environmental preservation but also for protecting local economies and cultural traditions that are threatened by the encroachment of global disposable consumer culture.

Policy Recommendations

In light of these findings, several policy recommendations emerge:

- Launch gender-sensitive campaigns promoting sustainable consumption. Tailored messaging that addresses the specific motivations and consumption patterns of men and women can more effectively encourage behavior change.
- Encourage local industries to adopt eco-friendly production methods. Supporting sustainable livelihoods in agriculture, handicrafts, and local manufacturing can provide viable alternatives to imported disposable goods.
- Strengthen waste management systems. Improving infrastructure and community-level waste handling is essential to managing the environmental impact of increased consumer waste.
- Incentivize the purchase of sustainable products. Financial incentives such as tax breaks or subsidies can make eco-friendly goods more accessible and attractive to consumers.

Final Remarks

The findings of this research contribute to a growing body of knowledge on the intersections of gender, globalization, and consumption in developing regions. By emphasizing the gendered nature of disposable consumption and its socio-economic and environmental consequences, the study advocates for nuanced, context-specific approaches to fostering sustainability. Only through such tailored strategies can Koshi Province—and similar regions—navigate the complex challenges posed by the disposable economy,

ensuring a balance between modernization and the preservation of cultural and environmental integrity.

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