

A REVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE CLOTHING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

The paper analyzes sustainable consumer behavior in relation to clothing items, focusing on the influence that social media has on perceptions, motivations, and purchasing decisions. In the context of growing interest in responsible fashion and pressure generated by the textile industry's impact on the environment, the study aims to clarify how consumers navigate between online information, brand messages, and their own values. The methodology is based on a systematic review of the literature, carried out by selecting and analyzing relevant articles from the main academic databases, using rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria. The results highlight both the motives that favor the adoption of sustainable behavior and the barriers that limit this transition, such as lack of transparency, high prices, or greenwashing. At the same time, the analysis emphasizes the ambivalent role of social media, which can facilitate change but can also amplify superficial trends. The contribution of the paper lies in integrating these perspectives into a coherent framework that provides a nuanced understanding of consumer behavior and outlines relevant directions for future research and the development of effective communication strategies in the field of sustainable fashion.

Keywords: sustainability, fashion, consumer, second-hand, behavior

JEL Classification: M31, M37, D91

1. Introduction

The clothing manufacturing industry is increasingly affecting our daily lives through the levels of pollution it produces. According to Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, the fast fashion industry is extremely harmful to the population, creating a global waste crisis (UNEP, 2025). According to data presented by the UN, every second, the equivalent of a truck full of clothing is incinerated or thrown into a landfill. The fashion industry is responsible for 8% of greenhouse gas emissions and consumes huge amounts of water and chemicals (UNEP, 2025). The problem with fashion is not just about trends, but it is part of a global waste crisis that hits vulnerable communities the hardest. Why is this happening? Because current business models focus on rapid production, and clothes are designed to be worn only a few times before being thrown away. If we extended the lifespan of clothes, we could reduce the industry's emissions by up to 44%. In fact, the resale market is growing rapidly, and designers are beginning to experiment with recycled materials, which, together with growing consumer demand for sustainability, shows us that

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change is indeed possible (UNEP, 2025). This research aims to present in a structured way perspectives of sustainable clothing use.

2. Literature review

2.1 Consumer behavior in the context of sustainability

The study of consumer behavior is a multidimensional field that includes various aspects of human decision-making, motivation, and factors that influence purchasing decisions (Lee, 2011). Consumer behavior is a form of expression, which is particularly influenced by today's society (Balaure, 2003). Sustainability is an important issue that has attracted a lot of attention in the fashion industry in recent years. The goal of sustainable fashion is to reduce the damage that the manufacture and use of clothing causes to the environment and its residents. Sustainable clothing behavior refers to consumers' choices and actions when it comes to purchasing and using clothing in an environmentally friendly and socially responsible manner (Daukantienė, 2023). This behavior is influenced by various factors, including individual beliefs, social norms, economic considerations, and access to sustainable options (Yavari, 2019). Understanding these factors is crucial for promoting and encouraging sustainable clothing behavior (Yavari, 2019). The complexity of sustainability in clothing is not just about labels or the origin of raw materials, but includes the entire life cycle, from manufacturing and delivery to maintenance (washing) and disposal (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016). Since a product goes through numerous stages, from obtaining raw materials to assembling accessories, we cannot easily assess its impact on the environment. This means that in order to fully understand how environmentally friendly a product is, a detailed analysis of each stage in the supply chain is necessary (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016).

Based on Fraudi's (2025) analysis of the literature, it can be observed that consumers' views on sustainability in the fashion industry are divergent, being influenced by culture, but circularity is considered important given the attention paid to recycling and clothing waste management. Furthermore, Faludi (2025) points out that consumers may be suspicious of the veracity of sustainability claims made by the fashion industry, may not be very open to using/wearing second-hand clothing, and may consider sustainable clothing to be expensive. However, Faludi (2025) highlights branding strategies that companies can use to address consumer concerns when it comes to combining sustainability with fashion.

Consumer diversity and priorities:

- Consumers are mostly motivated by things like price, quality, style, and comfort. Ethical or sustainability stuff tends to be less important, since buying clothes isn't really seen as an altruistic thing to do (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016).

- Differences in personal values and ethical concerns lead to a fragmented approach: some consumers are concerned about working conditions or environmental protection, while others do not even think about these details (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016). The fast fashion industry promotes an ideology of consumption that focuses on repeated purchases of cheap, low-quality items, favoring short-lived trends and discouraging investment in durable pieces, while also creating a culture of detachment from the long-term value of clothing (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016).

After analyzing the specialized literature, it was found that there are certain barriers that we come across when making a purchase decision, these can be internal at the consumer level and external at the society and industry level (Bondarev, 2021). Internal barriers consist of a lack of information and understanding, with buyers often lacking the knowledge necessary to perceive the ecological impact of our clothing decisions, given washing practices and methods of clothing disposal (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016). This category of internal barriers also includes habits that are resistant to change, such as washing at high temperatures or impulsively purchasing new clothing items. External barriers in the field of sustainable fashion manifest themselves in the form of major external challenges: from the difficulty of tracking each stage of production, which undermines trust in labels, to stereotypes that make eco-friendly design seem too unconventional or unattractive, to the pressure to save money that causes retailers and consumers to opt for cheap clothes instead of investing in sustainable pieces (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016). Social media has been documented as an effective tool for describing actions and promoting ideas centered on fashion and sustainability. Vladimirova et al. (2023) postulated that Twitter would be an appropriate channel for communicating and obtaining feedback on fact-based topics, while Instagram would work best as a means of disseminating feelings about sustainability and fashion-related topics, with both platforms considered to have great potential to influence fashion consumption. Social marketing campaigns can be used to inform and educate the general public through campaigns aimed at reshaping cultural perceptions and highlighting the benefits of a long-term relationship with clothing, the idea of repairing, creatively transforming (upcycling), or even renting clothes as alternatives to buying new ones (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016). Vladimirova et al. (2024) state that the fashion industry must align its processes with sustainable goals. Vladimirova et al. (2024) recommend that future studies focus on exploring the potential role of social networks as a vehicle for educating and building emotions about sustainable fashion consumption behavior.

Faludi (2025) recommends that future research focus on exploring the suitability of integrating circular approaches into the fashion industry, investigating consumer eco-behavior in fashion and collaborative consumption,

particularly given the increase in the use of social media to promote such behavior (Vladimirova *et al.*, 2024). Social media platforms have transformed the way consumers distinguish and purchase clothing items. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok facilitate the promotion and creation of a social experience with brands. This is where the concept of FOMO (fear of missing out) comes in, defined as a feeling of anxiety about not participating in events that are considered essential (Bläse *et al.*, 2024). For example, the event organized by DM drogerie markt chain of stores in May 2025, when tickets for the event sold out within minutes of going on sale, is a telling example of the above. Such events directly influence purchasing behavior. Consumers are constantly influenced by the flow of information and influencers who promote the continuous purchase of new clothing products, even if they are not necessarily needed. Such behavior is not ethical from a sustainability perspective (Bläse *et al.*, 2024). Long-term thinking and awareness of the positive or negative effects of our actions are important for sustainability. It is necessary to develop environmentally friendly behavior in order to protect natural resources and ensure a more sustainable future (Rastogi *et al.*, 2025).

3. Methodology

To conduct this study on sustainable consumer behavior in the clothing industry, we searched the main academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, and Science Direct. We obtained 40 articles, from which we selected only those that met the main requirements, including language (we only analyzed papers written in English) and relevant keywords for the study. We conducted the research using combinations of keywords such as Sustainable fashion+consumer behavior, consumer awareness+sustainable fashion, circular fashion+consumer attitudes, resulting in a final number of 23 articles viable for the study.

4. Results and discussions

In analyzing the literature on sustainable consumer behavior in the clothing industry, we observe a growing interest in responsible fashion, due to concerns about the textile industry's impact on the environment. It can be seen that adopting sustainable behavior is not a linear process, where ethical and ecological motivations coexist with barriers such as high prices or a lack of transparency in processes.

The analysis revealed a set of sustainable practices that have been adopted by consumers, including purchasing second-hand items, reducing purchases, and choosing sustainable brands. These types of behaviors are influenced by factors such as education level, income, personal values, and exposure to social media.

The literature has identified several benefits of consuming second-hand clothing, including:

- o Economic benefits, which are some of the main motivations for choosing second-hand clothing items. Consumers perceive purchases of this kind as a smart financial decision, due to the savings and good value for money (Hur, 2020).

- o Self-expression benefits, which are linked to consumers' desire to express their unique style and personality through clothing. Consumers perceive second-hand clothing as a way to build an image that is different from the fast fashion trends currently on the market (Machado *et al.*, 2019).

- o Emotional satisfaction benefits, which refer to the pleasure of finding something unpredictable in a good way, a piece of clothing that is suitable in every way, such an achievement reinforcing the feeling of personal satisfaction (Hur, 2020).

- o Environmental benefits, which are related to awareness of the impact that the fashion industry has on the environment, with the use of second-hand clothing contributing to extending their life cycle. Reusing clothing reduces the amount of textile waste and the need to generate new items through polluting production processes.

The transition from a linear consumption model to a circular one is very important, as resources are continuously reused and revalued (Hur, 2020). In 2013, Joung *et al.* conducted a study showing the factors that motivate clothing disposal behavior among students. Four main behaviors of clothing disposal were identified, including: resale and donation, which are significantly influenced by environmental concerns; reuse; donation, which has a strong charitable component; and discarding, which is largely driven by convenience. Post-purchase behavior refers to how buyers manage clothing items after they have purchased them, either opting for reuse, wearing again, donating, selling, repairing, or recycling, transforming old fabric into new resources (Kemi and Zilahy, 2025). Reusing and repairing items reduces the exploitation of new raw materials and reduces excessive waste accumulation (Kemi and Zilahy, 2025).

4.1 Practices and strategies for sustainable clothing use

Sadachar *et al.* (2016) state that strategies for sustainable clothing use include promoting ecological awareness of clothing items. The article emphasizes that more detailed information about the impact of manufacturing processes (fiber processing or material recycling) contributes to the development of more responsible behavior. This knowledge can lead to more responsible choices and more sustainable consumption (Sadachar, Khare and Manchiraju, 2016). Strategies for sustainable clothing use include maintenance, repair through DIY projects to replace zippers, repairing defective seams, or reconditioning items where possible. These practices extend the life cycle of

clothing and help reduce textile waste (BBC, 2022). To encourage sustainable consumer behavior, certain strategies can be implemented, including education and information campaigns on consumption, recycling, or the transformation of clothing items. Responsible consumption is not just about choosing products, but also about understanding their long-term impact (Kim, Jung and Lee, 2021). Another important aspect is the transparency of production processes. Detailed communication on how clothing products are created, from the collection of raw materials to the finished product, providing consumers with a different perspective. This way, consumers become more informed about purchasing more environmentally friendly products (Kim, Jung and Lee, 2021). According to Laura (2009), by providing clear and credible information, consumers can identify and eliminate vague or misleading messages in green marketing, thus reducing the level of skepticism and confusion associated with ambiguous terms such as "eco-friendly" or "sustainable". In the competitive context of the eco-fashion market, simply manufacturing clothing products in an ethical manner is not enough to attract and retain consumers. Brands must differentiate themselves through innovative approaches that complement the responsible production process (Chan and Wong, 2012). Thus, it is necessary to adopt differentiation strategies in several main directions: Brands must create marketing campaigns that are not limited to highlighting the aesthetics of eco-products, but also inform the public about the social and environmental benefits of sustainable consumption. These campaigns detail the positive impact of choosing eco-fashion products and help consumers understand that increased commitment translates directly into a real contribution to protecting the environment. In this way, the purchasing process becomes a conscious and responsible buying decision, strengthening the emotional connection between the brand and the consumer (Chan and Wong, 2012).

In today's technological era, the use of digital channels is becoming essential for building a strong community around a brand. Through social media, newsletters, and other online platforms, companies can constantly distribute information about authentic sustainability initiatives and interact directly with their audience. Thus, communication helps create a sense of belonging to a community of engaged consumers, which increases loyalty and continued support for the brand (Chan and Wong, 2012). The adoption of circular economy principles is achieved by promoting a model that encourages the repeated use of resources through collection, reconditioning, and reuse processes, contributing to the creation of a sustainable brand image. This approach not only reduces environmental impact but also supports a long-term relationship with sustainability-conscious consumers (Yoo, Jung and Oh, 2021). Certain retailers stand out for their affordable prices and excellent value for money. They offer second-hand products at competitive prices, while ensuring superior value for money. In this way, they attract a segment of customers who

want to save money without compromising on quality standards, clearly differentiating themselves from traditional fast fashion offerings. Through this strategy, brands not only respond to a real economic need, but also strengthen their competitive position in the market (Machado *et al.*, 2019). Constant monitoring of customer feedback is an essential strategy for remaining relevant in a market that is constantly evolving. Periodically evaluating the shopping experience and collecting customer opinions allows brands to identify any shortcomings or opportunities for improvement. By actively listening to customers, brands are able to adapt their communication and marketing strategies to meet their expectations and needs. This is a results-oriented approach that not only optimizes the in-store experience but also contributes to the continuous adaptation of the offer, ensuring competitiveness in a dynamic consumer environment (Chan and Wong, 2012). Success in the eco-fashion market depends not only on ethical production, but also on brands' ability to educate, engage, and listen to consumers. By combining marketing education and effective communication, companies can create an authentic and powerful brand image that responds to both the emotional and functional needs of consumers in an ever-changing market environment. With the adoption of new production strategies, such as the switch to recycled materials or technologies that reduce water consumption, consumer interest in reuse, repair, and recycling has also increased. This change is supported by the principles of the circular economy promoted by the European Union and the UN (Kemi and Zilahy, 2025).

4.2 Sustainable fashion and circular economy

In 2019, Hatef and Shahrudin conducted research on clothing recycling behavior and intentions to purchase clothing made from recycled materials. The results of the study showed that consumers who have a positive attitude toward eco-fashion clothing, who believe that it is high quality, attractive, and beneficial to the environment, are much more likely to want to buy it. The same authors show that when people feel they have the ability and resources to purchase such products, their intention to buy increases significantly. In addition, the study shows that social influences such as pressure and expectations from family or friends also play a role, but their impact is smaller compared to personal attitude and sense of control. Hatef and Shahrudin (2019) also concluded that there is a strong relationship between how consumers manage the disposal of their clothes (through recycling, donation, or reuse) and their actual decision to buy eco-fashion clothing. The results suggest that reinforcing a positive attitude towards eco-fashion, combined with strategies that promote sustainable clothing disposal behavior, can stimulate the purchase of clothing made from recycled materials (Hatef and Shahrudin, 2019). According to Niinimäki (2009), the concept of eco-fashion is defined as

a clothing concept characterized by sustainability, ethical production methods that have a lower impact on the environment, and the use of eco-friendly or recycled materials in the manufacture of clothing items. This approach is proposed as an alternative to fast fashion, emphasizing sustainability and quality (Niinimäki, 2009). Transparency in the food production chain is much more evident than in the fashion industry, this lack of clarity making it difficult to assess sustainability and ethics in an integrated manner, with the assessment of eco-fashion products often being reduced to eco-friendly materials or less environmentally harmful production methods, without considering the entire life cycle of the product (Niinimäki, 2009). Niinimäki (2009) highlights a phenomenon known as the attitude-behavior gap in eco-fashion consumption, emphasizing a gap between what consumers say about the ethics and sustainability of clothing products and the actual choices they make. Even if these values attract their attention, buyers actually make purchasing decisions that are more influenced by factors such as price, material, design, and how well the items fit into their wardrobe (Niinimäki, 2009). Several barriers to purchasing sustainable products have been identified, such as price; lack of availability: a limited range of sustainable products and difficulty in identifying brands that offer such a range; perception, where sustainable clothing is often perceived as unfashionable or unattractive; consumption habits: loyalty to certain brands and inertia in changing consumption habits contribute to maintaining a gap (Wiederhold and Martinez, 2018). Nowadays, there is a phenomenon known as "cheap chic," which refers to the purchase of inexpensive clothing items that are worn a few times and then thrown away (Philippa Crommentuijn-Marsh, 2017). Subramanian (2016) presents in his book a case study of a small textile company in Argentina, Curbreme, founded by designer Alejandra Gottely to promote the use of natural materials and organic fibers. The company uses local raw materials, such as sheep and camel hair/fur, as well as plant fibers such as cultivated cotton, in accordance with the agro-ecological principles of the provinces of Argentina (Subramanian, 2016).

Curbreme uses traditional methods in its production process, such as manual looms and tailoring workshops, but also modern technology. This combination of production methods results in high-quality tailoring and a reduced production line, which contributes to reducing pollution and using resources more efficiently. This company produces seasonal clothing, thus contributing to the reduction of overproduction and unnecessary waste (Subramanian, 2016). For reference, major fast fashion brands change their collections at least once every six weeks (BBC, 2022). Textile waste can be reduced through certain approaches, such as wool, which can be turned into a resource through composting. Waste turned into compost can be used to optimize agricultural soils, closing the textile life cycle (Subramanian, 2016). In the circular economy, consumers actively contribute by purchasing

second-hand clothing. Consumers buy second-hand clothes for several reasons, including the desire to be unique, treasure hunting, or nostalgia, which leads to a reduction in demand for new clothes (Machado *et al.*, 2019). The fashion industry needs to adopt a circular model, as this model can help reduce waste through reuse, repair, or recycling of materials, thus leading to a more sustainable textile industry (Kim, Jung and Lee, 2021).

Table no.1 Comparison between the linear economic model and circular economic model

Linear economic model	Circular economic model
Traditional approach that leads to the disposal of clothing items as textile waste (Ta, Aarikka-Stenroos and Litovuo, 2022).	In a different approach, products are reintroduced into the cycle through reuse processes. Extending the life cycle and reducing environmental impact (Ta, Aarikka-Stenroos and Litovuo, 2022)
Mass production of new products is highlighted, with an focus on increased sales (Faludi, 2025).	The circular model is integrated into certain business models. The main focus is on making the most of materials that have already been used, by reusing them or turning them into new stuff (Kim, Jung and Lee, 2021).
The consumer experience focuses on classic product attributes, such as a new look or innovation, without focusing on sustainability aspects (Ta, Aarikka-Stenroos and Litovuo, 2022).	Here, the consumer experience focuses not only on classic attributes but also on awareness of the sustainable value of products (Ta, Aarikka-Stenroos and Litovuo, 2022).

5. Conclusion

This paper analyzed the specialized literature, which highlights the fact that sustainability in the fashion industry is no longer just a passing trend but a broad process of transforming the way consumers purchase and use clothing items. The literature reviewed shows that ethical and environmental motivations are gaining ground, but actual behaviors are heavily influenced by price and the lack of transparency offered by brands. At the same time, social media plays a central role in shaping consumer behavior, as it showcases certain sustainable practices. However, it can also create confusion among consumers by promoting superficial trends or through greenwashing.

The conclusions of the research indicate that although interest in sustainable fashion is growing, the transformation of this interest consists of a combination of factors such as access to real information, brand transparency, and consumers' availability to adapt their habits.

In this sense, the paper provides a starting point for the development of more effective communication strategies that support consumers in making truly sustainable clothing choices. Through this approach, the research

contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon and opens relevant directions for future research.

Future directions in the literature point to the need for new empirical studies to further explore the impact of social media on purchasing decisions, generational differences, and how post-purchase behavior is managed. The results show that sustainable fashion is constantly evolving and there are numerous opportunities for research. In this context, it becomes clear that mechanisms such as social and psychological ones underlie consumer behavior and are necessary for the formulation of effective strategies to promote sustainability.

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