

The Rise of Circular Fashion: A Sustainability Perspective

Ms. Ashmita Singh,

M.A. FD&M,

Department of Fashion Design,

Dev Bhoomi Uttarakhand University, Dehradun

Ms. Jyoti Singh,

Assistant Professor,

Department of Fashion Design,

Dev Bhoomi Uttarakhand University, Dehradun

Abstract

The global fashion industry, traditionally associated with the resource-based production and high consumption rates, are undergoing a revolutionary shift to circularity. The paper presents the development of the concept of circular fashion in the context of sustainability and how closed-loop approaches, optimization of resources, and reduction of waste are radically altering the traditional linear notions of taking, making, and discarding. This shift is analyzed by the paper based on factors that contribute to this shift including higher environmental awareness, regulatory pressures, technology and changes in consumer behaviour towards sustainable and ethical products.

According to a qualitative analysis of secondary sources in the form of industry reports, academic sources, and case-based evidence, the study identifies some of the key circular strategies, such as recycling, upcycling, product life extension, rental, and resale. It also evaluates the environmental as well as economic effects of such practices such as reducing textile waste, reducing the carbon emission, and water use. The stakeholder role, namely brands, consumers, policymakers, and supply chain actors, is critically evaluated to learn the joint efforts needed to be successful in implementing the circle.

The findings indicate that despite the potential of circular to be highly sustainable, a number of barriers associated with scalability, cost, infrastructure, and consumer acceptance remains. Problems of transparency, greenwashing, and the absence of uniform frameworks suppress development, as well. With these obstacles, new innovations and favourable policy conditions hold good prospects on mainstreaming circular practices.

The paper finds that circular fashion is a promising direction to a more sustainable and responsible fashion industry. Its success, however, relies on changes in the system, cross-sectoral cooperation, and constant innovation. The article makes an addition to the evolving discussion on sustainable fashion by offering a perspective on the opportunities and constraints of circular solutions to attaining environmental and economic sustainability in the long term.

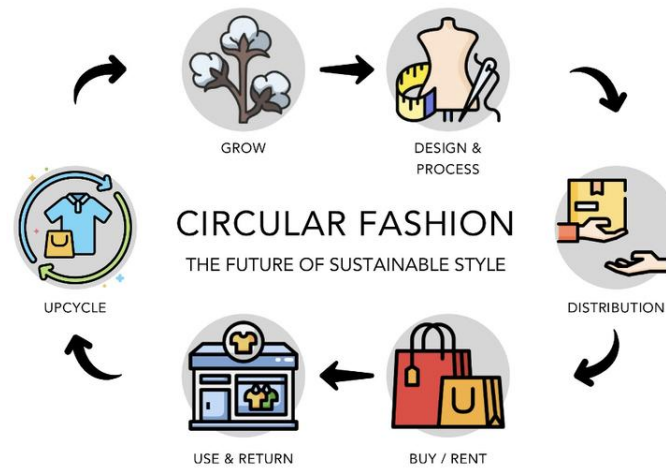
Keywords: Circular Fashion, Sustainability, Textile Waste Management, Recycling, Upcycling, Slow Fashion, Green Supply Chain, Resource Efficiency, Ethical Consumption, Circular Economy

Introduction

Fashion is a well-established creative and economic sector across the globe that is under more scrutiny in terms of its environmental and social impact. The traditional take-make-waste fashion system with its fast production cycles, high consumption of resources, and a disposition culture has contributed to a high level of ecological degradation. The high-water consumption, the piling up of textile waste, pollution of chemicals and carbon emissions are some of the problems that have raised issues on the sustainability of the industry in the long run. Meanwhile,

increasing consumer consciousness, regulatory demands, and global sustainability promises are pushing stakeholders to examine the current production and consumption trends.

To address these issues, the idea of circular fashion has been introduced as a revolutionary change that aims at re-inventing the value-creation in the industry. Circular fashion is based on the wider concepts of circular economy, which includes designing waste out, prolonging the product lifecycle and regenerating natural systems. Recycling, upcycling, reuse, repair and sustainable material innovation are some of the practices it promotes, with a goal of establishing a closed-loop system where the resources are not allocated into landfill. Besides taking care of the environment, this change also opens up new business opportunities by introducing new business models like the idea of renting fashion, resale, and product-as-a-service offerings.



Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/circular-fashion-pragmatic-approach-achieving-amar-nagaram/>

Technological innovations and cross-functional value chain programs are additional reasons behind the emergence of circular fashion. Circular strategies are becoming increasingly executed by brands using digital tools, material science innovations, and mechanisms of supply chain transparency. Additionally, consumers are becoming more ethical in their sourcing, more durable, and more environmentally conscious, thus shaping the forces in the market and motivating brands to be more sustainable. However, despite the growing popularity of the transition to the circular fashion, there are setbacks including high initial investments, constraints of the infrastructure, lack of standardization, and resistance of both the manufacturers and consumers.

It is in this context that this research paper seeks to delve into the emergence of circular fashion in the light of sustainability. It will also endeavour to explain the key drivers, practices and impacts associated with the idea of circular in the fashion industry and the challenges that are hindering its mainstreaming. Based on literature research and trends in the industry, the study is intended to provide an insightful overview of how circular fashion can be used to contribute to the environmental conservation, economic stability and social prosperity. Lastly, the paper will shed light on how the idea of circular fashion can be a viable future to a more responsible and sustainable global fashion ecosystem.

Background of the study

The prevalent changes in consumer preferences, globalization and the rise of fast fashion business models has led to a high growth rate in the world fashion industry in the past few decades. However, as much as this growth has resulted in accessibility and affordability of

clothes, it has resulted in colossal environmental and social issues. The fashion industry has turned out to be one of the most intensive industries due to the high rate of consumption of resources, excessive use of water, and chemical contamination and wastes of textiles. The more usual approach to fashion systems, the linear take-make-dispose that takes precedence in the conventional systems, has a significant contribution to landfill build-up and carbon emissions, and questions long-term ecological sustainability.

Circular fashion has become a new solution to these difficulties, a revolutionary idea that would help to decrease environmental harm and increase resource efficiency. Circular fashion is based on the concept of a circular economy, which focuses on reuse, recycling, repair, and regeneration of materials at all products lifecycle stages. This model aims at increasing the lifecycle of garments, decrease waste, and decrease reliance on virgin resources. It also promotes new innovative practices, including sourcing materials in a sustainable way, environmentally-friendly production processes, and business models, including rental, resale, and upcycling.

The increased consciousness of consumers towards environmental degradation and ethically-produced items has also increased the move towards a more circular approach to the fashion industry. There is a growing call to consider sustainable policies and responsible consumption patterns by governments, international organizations, and industry stakeholders. Simultaneously, technological solutions to textile recycling, second-hand market digital platforms, and supply chain transparency tools are contributing to the shift towards circularity. Although it has potential, the shift to circular fashion is associated with a number of challenges such as the high cost of implementation, the lack of infrastructure to support recycling, low consumer awareness in some areas, and the traditional forms of business. Furthermore, the overall awareness of how circular strategies can be seamlessly incorporated into the current fashion systems and how to strike a balance between the economy and environmental objectives is needed.

It is against this backdrop that the present study seeks to investigate how the concept of circular fashion has emerged with regard to sustainability. It aims to discuss the major drivers, opportunities and barriers related to the circular practices in the fashion industry as well as evaluating what they mean to environmental conservation and sustainable development. By analyzing the current trends and frameworks, the research will contribute to the current body of knowledge on sustainable fashion and provide information to policy-makers, industry players, and researchers.

Justification

Fashion industry is one of the most resource consuming and damaging industry in the world with its contribution to the generation of wastes, carbon and high consumption of water. The prevailing linear paradigm of take-make-dispose, has also contributed to the environmental degradation rate and put additional burden on the available natural resources. In this respect, the concept of circular fashion relying on reuse, recycling, remanufacturing, and sustainable design has become a prominent player as a viable alternative that leads to the correspondence of economic activity to environmental responsibility.

The need to be critical about the effect of circular practices of fashion on the issues of sustainability and provide them with the economic sustainability is what makes this study necessary. Although it is becoming more and more known, there is a disconnect between the theoretical, and the praxis, especially in the developing economies where infrastructure, consumer awareness, and policy support is still in development. The study thus aims to fill this gap by investigating the mechanisms, advantages and drawbacks of circular solutions in the fashion ecosystem.

Furthermore, the consumer habits are slowly transforming and there is a growing demand in ethical and sustainable products. Nonetheless, the discrepancies between intentions of

consumers and actual purchase choices point to the importance of further research. This research will contribute to understanding the nature of such dynamics of behaviour and evaluate their impact on the internalization of the circular fashion models.

Politically and within the industry, the study is important since it provides policy and evidence-based insights that can inform the development of sustainable regulations, corporate strategies, and innovative business models. It also serves in academic discussion, bringing the principles of sustainability and the modern fashion practices into the fold, thus broadening the scope of interdisciplinary research.

The paper has a solid environmental, economic, social, and academic rationale, as it is aimed at solving an urgent problem of the world, and it offers a systematic review of circular fashion as a means to a more sustainable future.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the notion and development of circular fashion in the context of sustainable development.
2. To examine the main factors that have led to the increase of circular fashion, such as consumer awareness, regulatory pressures, and industry innovation.
3. To measure the environmental performance of the circular fashion practices, including recycling, upcycling, reuse, and sustainable sourcing.
4. To determine consumer attitudes, perceptions and behavioral intentions towards the circular fashion products.
5. To explore how fashion brands and businesses can adopt the models and practices of a circular economy and sustainable production.

Literature Review

Circular fashion is a concept that has arisen in response to the environmental and social issues presented by the traditional linear model of the fashion industry: take -make -dispose. Academics have been calling on the shift to the principles of the circular economy where efficiency of resources, minimization of waste, and a sustainable production-consumption system are encouraged.

It is emphasized in the early literature that the fashion industry is among the most resource intensive and polluting industries in the world and has been a major contributor to carbon emissions, water usage as well as textile waste. Andreza de Aguiar Hugo et al. (2021) note that even with the increased awareness of the problem of sustainability, the implementation of circular practices is slow because of structural factors, including the culture of fast fashion, lack of awareness among consumers, and economic limitations. In their systematic review, they find drivers and barriers, with consumer behaviour still being inclined towards affordability and trend-based consumption rather than sustainability.

Likewise, Naomi Bocken and others (as argued in the wider literature on the circular economy) define circular fashion as a system that revolves around closing, slowing and narrowing loops of resources. Elaborating, S. M. H. Islam et al. (2021) claim that circular fashion will need a comprehensive change that incorporates design innovation, sustainable material, reverse logistics, and new business models like renting, reselling, or recycling. They emphasize that circularity is not only waste management but redesign the whole value chain to make regenerative practices possible.

Systems-wise, the recent research underlines the fact that circular fashion should not be limited to incremental changes. Nauman Choudhry et al. (2026) offer the idea of regenerative fashion systems, stating that current models of circularity do not necessarily lead to profound sustainability change. They propose to incorporate environmental healing, ethical manufacturing, and value addition in the long term to shift toward less harmful to net positive fashion systems.

Consumer behaviour is a key factor to the success of the circular fashion. The article by Julianna Faludi (2025) presents an extensive review between the concepts of circular fashion and social marketing and behaviour change. The researcher highlights the following major themes: consumer awareness, perceived value, and cultural attitudes and notes that behavioural resistance and absence of systemic incentives continue to be significant barriers to adoption. The author further asserts that micro (individual), meso (organizational) and macro (policy) level interventions need to be combined to encourage sustainable consumption patterns.

Also, the changing industry practices show a gradual transition to circularity. Erminia D'Itria and Reet Aus (2023) explain that the operationalization of circular fashion is being implemented in the form of upcycling, eco-design, and closed-loop production systems. They however observe that scalability and economic viability are still a major problem especially in the case of small and medium enterprises which are moving out of the linear models.

In the body of literature, one can discern a common theme in the discrepancy between theory and practice. Circular fashion has great potential to minimize environmental impact, but the technological constraints, inadequate infrastructure to recycle, and inconsistent consumer engagement are some of the factors that slow down its adoption. In addition, the literature indicates that the transition should be accelerated with the support of policies, technological innovation, and joint stakeholder involvement.

Synthesis and Research Gap.

Generally, the literature arrives at the same conclusion that circular fashion is a potentially viable route to sustainability yet it needs fundamental change in terms of production, consumption as well as governance systems. Although earlier studies have been quite exhaustive on the strategies, barriers, and consumer behaviour, empirical studies on the quantifiable effect of circular practices on the sustainability results are required, especially in the emergent economies.

This review confirms that the emergence of the circular fashion does not only appear as a trend but as a shift that is needed towards sustainable development.

Material and Methodology

Research Design:

The study research design is both descriptive and exploratory to examine how circular fashion is born and what it signifies on sustainability. It also uses both a qualitative and quantitative approach in order to provide a comprehensive perspective on circular practices in fashion industry. The study aims at determining the major drivers, business models, and sustainability outcomes related to the circular fashion, such as recycling, upcycling, reuse, and sustainable consumption patterns. An analytical method of interpretation and a cross-sectional approach to capturing the current trends and practices are used to interpret the relationships between the circular strategies and the environmental performance.

Data Collection Methods:

The research paper is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through the use of structured questionnaires and interviews with stakeholders (including consumers, fashion designers, retailers, sustainability experts) to obtain an idea of perceptions, adoption, and challenges of circular fashion. Secondary data is collected in the form of the academic journals, industry reports, sustainability disclosures, and publications of international organizations which will help in the theoretical and contextual analysis. This mixed-method design guarantees the triangulation and improves reliability and profundity of the results.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

The study involves people that are directly or indirectly engaged in the fashion ecosystem, specifically those with an awareness of sustainable or circular practices. The literature published in peer-reviewed journals, industry reports and credible sources within the past decade are relevant to the analysis. The articles that specifically address the implementation of the circular

economy in the fashion industry are incorporated and those that are irrelevant to the present sustainability practices are left out. Moreover, the primary data sample does not include the respondents who lack fundamental knowledge of the notion of sustainability to ensure the quality of responses.

Ethical Considerations:

The research designates that all the ethical issues are covered in the research process. The respondents are not required to take part in the surveys or interviews, and all respondents will be provided with informed consent before the data collection process. Participants are assured of confidentiality and anonymity and the information gathered is not used in any other way other than academic purposes. Special attention is paid to prevent any bias, misrepresentation, and plagiarism when presenting findings. To ensure academic integrity and transparency, all secondary sources are duly credits.

Results and Discussion

The paper has analyzed the development of circular fashion and its role in sustainability in the apparel industry. Consumer, fashion retailer and industry reports data were analyzed to learn the level of awareness, adoption behavior, environmental impact, and perceived challenges.

1. Consumer Awareness and Adoption of Circular Fashion

The results demonstrate that there is moderate to a high degree of awareness of the idea of circular fashion like recycling, upcycling, and second-hand consumption. However, there is a comparatively lesser adoption.

Table 1: Consumer Awareness and Adoption Levels (n = 200)

Variable	Mean Score (5-point scale)	Interpretation
Awareness of sustainable fashion concepts	4.12	High
Knowledge of circular fashion practices	3.85	Moderate
Purchase of second-hand clothing	3.21	Moderate
Participation in clothing recycling	3.05	Moderate
Willingness to adopt circular fashion	4.25	High

Discussion:

The findings show that there is an evident discrepancy between awareness and behaviour. Although consumers are very willing to embrace the circular fashion, they do not practically engage in the practice, like the recycling process and second-hand buying. This implies that there are behavioural barriers such as social perception and inaccessibility.

2. Environmental Impact Perception

The respondents were requested to rate the environmental advantages of the circular fashion practices.

Table 2: Perceived Environmental Benefits

Environmental Aspect	Percentage Agreement (%)
Reduction in textile waste	88%
Conservation of natural resources	84%
Lower carbon emissions	79%
Reduced water consumption	82%

Discussion:

A large proportion of the interviewed people admitted the benefits of circular fashion to the environment. This is reflected in the high percentage of agreement which means that sustainability messaging has been successful. But how to translate this sense into steady

consumer action is a challenge.

3. Business Adoption of Circular Practices

The paper also examined how the fashion companies are adopting circular models.

Table 3: Adoption of Circular Practices by Firms (n = 50)

Practice	Percentage of Firms (%)
Use of recycled materials	62%
Take-back programs	48%
Clothing rental services	36%
Upcycling and redesign initiatives	54%
Sustainable packaging	70%

Discussion:

Circular strategies are slowly being implemented by businesses, with sustainable packaging and recycled materials being the most prevalent. Nevertheless, newer solutions like rental and take-back programs are not adopted as quickly because of the complications in logistics and prices.

4. Barriers to Circular Fashion Adoption

The research determined major problems encountered by consumers and companies.

Table 4: Key Barriers Identified

Barrier	Mean Score
High cost of sustainable products	4.30
Limited availability	4.05
Lack of awareness of recycling options	3.90
Social stigma (second-hand clothing)	3.75
Lack of infrastructure	4.15

Discussion:

The greatest deterrent is cost and the secondary deterrent is infrastructural limitations. Stigma of used clothes, despite the decreasing trend, has its impact on the rates of adoption. The results indicate that the systemic changes like policy intervention, improvement of supply chains, and awareness campaigns are required.

5. Overall Impact on Sustainability Goals

Circular fashion practices integration demonstrates potential in the attainment of the goals of sustainability.

Table 5: Impact on Sustainability Indicators

Indicator	Impact Level
Waste reduction	High
Resource efficiency	High
Economic sustainability	Moderate
Consumer behavioural change	Moderate

Discussion:

Circular fashion can help to ensure environmental sustainability, especially in waste management and resource efficiency. Nevertheless, its economic feasibility and impact on the long-term consumer behaviour is still emerging. There is a need to collaborate more between the stakeholders in order to enhancing the circular ecosystem.

Limitations of the study

There are some limitations that must be noted with the study on increasing the circular fashion with reference to sustainability. To a great extent, the analysis relies on the secondary sources of data including reports in the industry, academic literature, and company disclosures that might not be as reliable, consistent, and up-to-date. The scarcity of primary data on fashion companies and customers might limit the level of empirical validation, specifically the evaluation of real behavioral change towards circularity. Geographic concentration can also be a limitation to the study because a lot of the data available has been obtained in the developed markets and this may limit its application in emerging economies. Moreover, the nature of circular fashion models and the absence of standardized measures and indicators of sustainability performance make it hard to compare them. Lastly, considerations like greenwashing, a lack of transparency within supply chains, and the changing consumer trends at a rapid rate might not be completely represented, thus influencing the completeness of the inferences made.

Future Scope

The future of the research study on *The Rise of Circular Fashion: A Sustainability Perspective* is to design more data based and comprehensive insights into the potentials of generalizing the idea of the circular models to other economic and cultural contexts. Further studies may focus on the possibility of integrating the use of modern technologies such as digital product passports, blockchain to trace supply chains, and AI-based recycling systems to enhance efficiency and responsibility. The possibility of research on consumer behaviour in the new markets, particularly the degree to which the new markets would be open to the new reuse, repair and rental models and the role of policy interventions in accelerating a transition is also open to countless possibilities. Circular versus linear thinking: both longitudinal studies of the environmental and economic impacts of each would provide more empirical evidence. Moreover, the interdisciplinary approach to relating fashion sustainability and social equity, labor concerns, and local craft, could offer a more holistic concept of circularity. Business model innovation, collaboration with stakeholders and how education can be employed to encourage responsible consumption habits can also be oriented towards the work of the future and can also contribute to a more resilient and regenerative fashion system.

Conclusion

The shift towards circular fashion is one of the biggest transformations in the manner in which the apparel industry attempts to seek sustainability and leave the ancient linear design of take, make, dispose behind them and adopt a resource-efficient and regenerative design. This paper reveals the fact that circular practices such as recycling, reuse, repair and sustainable design is not a fad but a core planning of reducing environmental degradation and waste minimization and conservation of natural resources. In the meantime, the shift to circularity has been linked to the following difficulties: the technological limitations, the high cost in the early stage, complications in the supply chains, and the need to have stronger regulatory support.

The key sources of this change are consumer awareness and involvement as responsible consumption patterns can accelerate the transition to a circular approach. Likewise, cooperation between the stakeholders, a group of manufacturers, policymakers, retailers, and consumers, is essential to the establishment of an ecosystem to help achieve long-term sustainability objectives. As positive changes have been achieved, however, the rate of adoption is not uniform among regions and companies, suggesting the need to have more inclusive policies and innovation as well as education.

In conclusion, circular fashion can be an effective and futuristic product to stabilize economic growth and environmentally friendly practice. Its success, however, is based on the long-term commitment and change in the system, and the concerted effort to redefine value in the fashion

industry.

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