



Circular Fashion: Challenges, Opportunities And Its Effect On Consumer Awareness

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the disparities between consumer awareness and actual attitudes toward circular fashion, pinpointing the key challenges that impede the adoption of sustainable fashion practices. The study employs a multi-method approach, including surveys, interviews, and behavioral observations, to elucidate the impact of educational initiatives, social norms, and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors on consumer intentions and actions. The main findings reveal a significant intention-behavior gap, where consumers, particularly those from Generation Z, express strong environmental and social concerns but continue to engage in fast fashion consumption due to factors such as affordability, trendiness, and lack of awareness about the environmental impact of their choices. The data indicates that transparency and education can significantly reduce purchase intentions for fast fashion, but structural changes in consumption habits are necessary for lasting behavioral change. The study also highlights that consumers' attitudes toward sustainability are positively influenced by relative advantage, compatibility, green self-identity, and experience value, while perceived psychological risk and ownership negatively affect these attitudes. The significance of these findings lies in their implications for policy interventions and industry strategies aimed at promoting sustainable consumption. The broader implications suggest that enhancing consumer awareness and aligning industry practices with sustainable goals can drive substantial changes in consumer behavior, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable fashion industry.

Keywords: Circular Fashion, Challenges, Opportunities, Consumer Awareness.

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INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry, recognized as one of the world's largest and most influential sectors, is currently at a critical juncture as it grapples with the paradox of consumer desire for sustainability juxtaposed with the persistent allure of fast fashion. Despite the growing awareness and concern regarding environmental and social issues—particularly among Generation Z—there remains a significant gap between intention and behavior that warrants attention and study. This disparity is further underscored by various studies indicating that while consumers, especially those from younger generations, express passionate environmental and social concerns, they continue to engage in fast fashion consumption. This behavior is often driven by several factors, including affordability, trendiness, and a notable lack of comprehensive awareness about the long-term environmental impact of their choices and actions, considering the fast-paced nature of fashion trends that often overshadow sustainable alternatives. This research aims to delve deeper into the underlying reasons responsible for this intention-behavior gap, identifying the key challenges and barriers that hinder the broader adoption of sustainable fashion practices. Additionally, it intends to explore the opportunities available to enhance consumer engagement and shift behaviors towards more sustainable alternatives. The main objectives of this study include elucidating the impact of various elements, such as educational initiatives, prevailing social norms, and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors, on both consumer intentions and actual actions. By employing a multi-method

approach that includes surveys, interviews, and behavioral observations, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between consumer awareness, attitudes, and actual behavior regarding sustainable fashion within the context of circular fashion. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policy interventions and industry strategies aimed at promoting sustainable consumption practices within the fashion sector. Enhancing consumer awareness and aligning industry practices with broader sustainable goals has the potential to drive substantial shifts in consumer behavior, ultimately contributing to the evolution of a more sustainable fashion industry. The findings of this research will be pivotal for understanding how factors such as relative advantage, compatibility, green self-identity, and experience value positively influence consumer attitudes toward sustainability. In contrast, elements like perceived psychological risk and ownership may negatively impact these attitudes, complicating the journey toward more sustainable practices. The framework illustrates the interconnectedness of cognitive elements such as awareness, knowledge, and belief, all of which are crucial in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors. This framework highlights the importance of specific, targeted knowledge about potential solutions to pressing environmental and social issues, which can effectively guide consumers toward making more sustainable choices throughout every stage of the product lifecycle. By illuminating these dynamics, the research aims to offer impactful insights that can result in effective strategies for promoting sustainable practices and reducing reliance on unsustainable fashion consumption patterns.

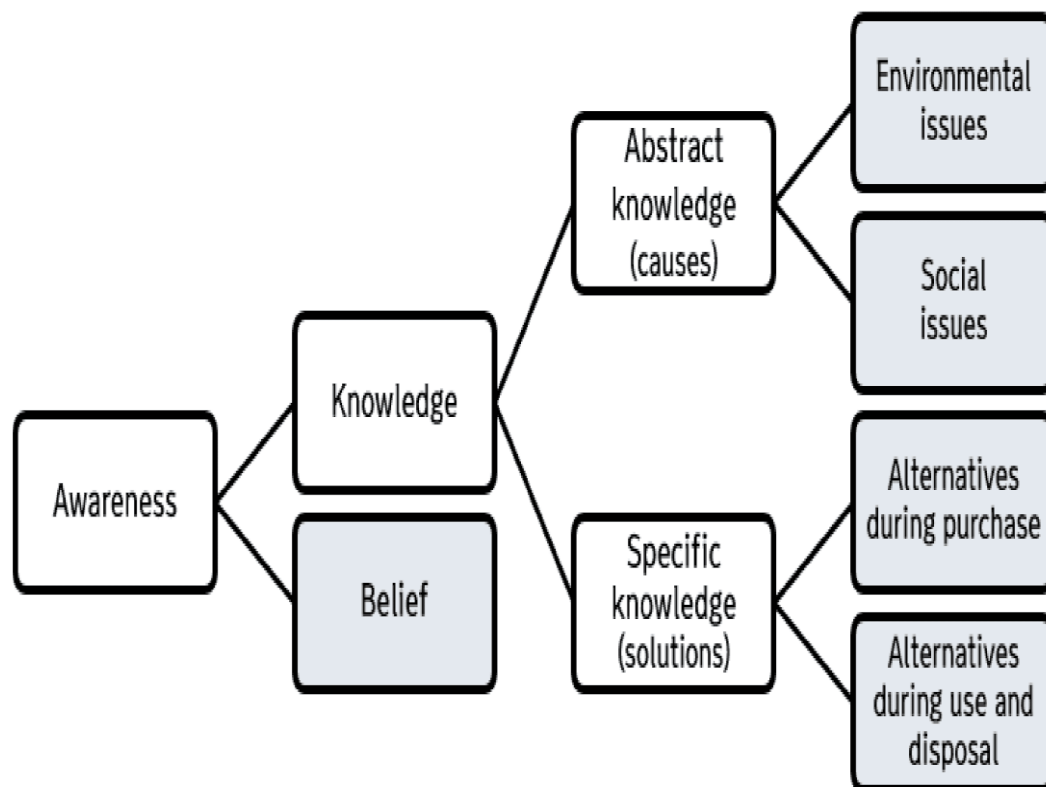


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of awareness, knowledge, and belief related to environmental and social issues.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study aims to critically investigate the existing gaps in consumer awareness and attitudes toward circular fashion. By examining these gaps, it seeks to identify the key challenges that impede the adoption of sustainable fashion practices and explore potential opportunities that could enhance consumer engagement and behavior. It is crucial to assess how various factors shape consumer intentions and actions, including the influence of educational initiatives, social norms, and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations. To achieve this, data will be meticulously collected through surveys,

interviews, and behavioral observations, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how these elements interplay and potentially impact consumer choices in the context of circular fashion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The shift towards circular fashion represents a fundamental reorientation within the textile and apparel industries, driven by pressing environmental challenges and consumer demand for sustainability. Circular fashion advocates for a system that extends the lifecycle of clothing through reusing, recycling, and reducing waste, as opposed to the traditional linear model that fosters a "take-make-dispose" mentality. This transition not only holds significant implications for environmental sustainability but also reflects a broader cultural shift toward responsible consumption. As consumers become more aware of the environmental impacts of their purchases, understanding their awareness and attitudes toward circular fashion becomes crucial. This literature review aims to investigate the complexities surrounding consumer perceptions, behaviors, and the socio-economic factors influencing their engagement with circular fashion initiatives. The resurgence of interest in sustainability and ethical consumerism has led to a growing body of literature examining circular fashion from various perspectives. Research has established that consumer awareness of fashion's environmental impact is increasing, yet the extent to which this awareness translates into supportive attitudes and behaviors remains ambiguous. Key themes emerging from this literature include the role of education in fostering consumer knowledge, the influence of social media and marketing on consumer attitudes, and the challenges of implementing circular practices in traditional fast fashion markets. Studies indicate that although consumers express a desire for sustainability, they often struggle with the complexities of circular fashion, including perceived inconvenience, higher costs, and fragmentation of information regarding sustainable brands and practices. For instance, findings suggest that consumers frequently prioritize affordability and convenience over sustainability, highlighting a potential disconnect between awareness and action. Moreover, gaps in the literature point to the need for greater exploration of demographic influences—such as age, income, and cultural background—on consumer attitudes towards circular fashion. Additionally, while current research primarily focuses on consumer attitudes in Western markets, there is a notable lack of studies addressing the global implications of circular fashion, especially in emerging economies. This presents opportunities for further research to assess diverse market dynamics and consumer behavior, as well as to explore innovative strategies for enhancing consumer engagement in circular practices. Additionally, there is a need for a deeper examination of how brands and retailers can effectively communicate the value of circular fashion to consumers. The effectiveness of messaging strategies, the role of transparency in supply chains, and the pursuit of collaboration between traditional fashion brands and sustainable startups are critical areas requiring further investigation. By identifying these gaps, this literature review seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of consumer awareness and attitudes toward circular fashion. The subsequent sections of this literature review will delve deeper into the thematic trends found in current research, discuss emerging challenges and opportunities for stakeholders in the circular fashion landscape, and propose directions for future studies. By synthesizing existing literature and identifying areas for further inquiry, this review will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the critical factors impacting consumer behavior in the context of circular fashion. Ultimately, addressing these questions will not only enrich academic discourse but also provide valuable insights for practitioners aiming to foster a more sustainable fashion industry. The concept of circular fashion has evolved significantly over the past two decades, reflecting growing consumer awareness and changing attitudes towards sustainability. Initially, the focus was primarily on the environmental impacts of fast fashion, where awareness was largely driven by reports on waste generation and pollution caused by linear consumption models (T. Brydges et al., 2022). As the awareness increased, researchers began to investigate consumer behaviors in greater depth, particularly noting how demographic factors such as age and gender played a role in sustainable practices. For instance, studies highlighted that younger consumers, especially Generation Z, were more inclined to engage with circular fashion concepts, partly due to their heightened environmental consciousness (R. McQueen et al., 2022) (P. Falcone et al., 2024). By the mid-2010s, the dialogue shifted towards the challenges and opportunities within circular fashion, as scholars began to examine the effectiveness of marketing strategies and

educational initiatives aimed at driving consumer participation (Alessandra Spagnoli et al., 2024) (Adriana Lopes Vassalo et al., 2024). Here, the role of social media was recognized as a powerful tool for influencing consumer attitudes, with online platforms fostering communities centered around sustainable fashion choices. Further investigations revealed that while many consumers expressed positive attitudes towards circular fashion, actual purchasing behaviors often contradicted those beliefs, indicating a gap between awareness and action (Chuanlan Liu et al., 2023) (Sujun Liu et al., 2024). Recent research has highlighted the need for brands to enhance transparency in their supply chains and adopt innovative practices that resonate with consumers' values, thus bridging this gap (Junyi Yuan, 2024) (Dr. R. Priyadharshini et al., 2024). As sustainability becomes a core principle in brand strategies, understanding consumer motivations and barriers is critical to leveraging the opportunities presented by circular fashion, particularly in the context of shifting global paradigms towards sustainability and responsible consumption (Sowmya. A. et al., 2024) (Anne Jimenez-Fernandez et al., 2023). Consumer awareness and attitudes toward circular fashion are increasingly gaining attention as the fashion industry grapples with sustainability challenges. Central to this discourse is the recognition that consumer understanding of circular economy principles significantly influences their purchasing decisions. Studies suggest that enhanced consumer awareness can drive a transition towards more sustainable behaviors, such as the adoption of pre-owned garments and recycling practices (T. Brydges et al., 2022) (R. McQueen et al., 2022). However, a persistent gap exists in the overall understanding of circular fashion among consumers, particularly regarding the tangible benefits of engaging in such practices. The demographic factors influencing consumer attitudes cannot be overlooked. Research indicates that younger consumers, particularly Generation Z, exhibit a stronger proclivity toward sustainability and are more likely to participate in circular initiatives (P. Falcone et al., 2024) (Alessandra Spagnoli et al., 2024). Despite this enthusiasm, barriers such as perceived inconvenience and lack of accessible options often hinder broader engagement. In particular, findings show that while many millennials express a desire to support sustainable brands, their actual purchasing decisions may not align due to price sensitivity and habitual consumption patterns (Adriana Lopes Vassalo et al., 2024) (Chuanlan Liu et al., 2023). Furthermore, the role of companies in shaping consumer perceptions is critical. Businesses that incorporate transparency about their sustainable practices can foster greater consumer trust and loyalty. Companies actively communicating their circular strategies often see improved consumer attitudes, as sustainable initiatives resonate with current ethical consumerism trends (Sujun Liu et al., 2024) (Junyi Yuan, 2024). Nonetheless, ongoing challenges remain, including the broader societal perception of circular fashion's effectiveness and the perceived value of secondhand goods, which necessitates continuous education and strategic marketing efforts to bridge these gaps (Dr. R. Priyadharshini et al., 2024) (Sowmya. A et al., 2024) (Anne Jimenez-Fernandez et al., 2023). Overall, while awareness continues to grow, several layers of complexity influence consumer attitudes toward circular fashion, presenting both challenges and opportunities for the industry to tap into. The study of consumer awareness and attitudes toward circular fashion has been significantly shaped by various methodological approaches, each contributing distinct insights into the challenges and opportunities this concept presents. Quantitative methodologies, such as surveys, have been widely utilized to gauge consumer attitudes toward sustainable practices. For instance, research leveraging large datasets has found a positive correlation between awareness of circular economy principles and consumers' willingness to engage in sustainable fashion practices, underscoring that demographic factors, such as age and education, significantly influence this relationship (T. Brydges et al., 2022). This quantitative approach allows researchers to ascertain general patterns of behavior, but it can sometimes overlook the nuanced emotional and cultural dimensions impacting consumer decision-making. In contrast, qualitative methodologies—such as in-depth interviews and focus groups—provide richer insights into consumer motivations and barriers related to circular fashion. These methods have uncovered complex narratives about the emotional attachment to clothing and the perceived inconvenience of engaging in circular practices, which quantitative studies may not fully capture (R. McQueen et al., 2022) (P. Falcone et al., 2024). For example, participants in qualitative studies often express a desire for more accessible recycling options and greater transparency in the fashion supply chain, indicating gaps that need to be addressed to enhance consumer engagement

(Alessandra Spagnoli et al., 2024). Moreover, mixed-methods approaches have effectively bridged the gap between quantitative and qualitative findings, allowing a more holistic understanding of consumer attitudes (Adriana Lopes Vassalo et al., 2024). By integrating numerical data with personal stories, researchers have illustrated that while consumer awareness is rising, tangible action is still hindered by systemic barriers within the fashion industry, such as limited access to recycling programs and a lack of information on sustainable options (Chuanlan Liu et al., 2023). Together, these methodological perspectives enrich the discourse on circular fashion, revealing both the awareness and the complex layers of consumer behavior that drive sustainable practices. The integration of various theoretical perspectives offers a robust understanding of consumer awareness and attitudes toward circular fashion, revealing both challenges and opportunities. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) posits that intentions to engage in sustainable practices are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. This framework underscores the significance of positive consumer attitudes towards circular fashion, where studies indicate that awareness of environmental issues correlates with a higher propensity to adopt circular consumption behaviors (T. Brydges et al., 2022). Moreover, social practice theory (SPT) enhances our understanding by situating consumer behavior within everyday practices that shape attitudes toward circularity. It emphasizes the social context of consumption, suggesting that consumers' engagement in circular fashion depends not only on individual attitudes but also on social norms and collective behaviors (R. McQueen et al., 2022). This aligns with findings that point to social influences as integral in fostering or hindering sustainable fashion practices (P. Falcone et al., 2024). However, challenges remain. Cultural theories indicate that deeply entrenched consumer habits and perceptions of fashion as disposable can obstruct the path toward circularity (Alessandra Spagnoli et al., 2024) (Adriana Lopes Vassalo et al., 2024). The normalization of fast fashion culture presents a significant barrier to consumer shift towards sustainable practices, highlighting the need for targeted educational campaigns to reshape consumer mindsets (Chuanlan Liu et al., 2023). Conversely, framing theories illustrate opportunities for leveraging innovative marketing strategies that highlight the benefits of circular fashion, suggesting that appealing to consumer emotions and values can drive participation in sustainable behaviors (Sujun Liu et al., 2024). By bridging these theoretical perspectives, a more nuanced understanding of consumer awareness and attitudes toward circular fashion emerges, suggesting a multi-faceted approach to encourage sustainable practices in the fashion industry. The exploration of consumer awareness and attitudes toward circular fashion reveals a dynamic interplay of factors that both challenge and propel the adoption of sustainable practices in the fashion industry. Central to the literature is the insight that while consumer awareness of the environmental impact of fast fashion has seen a notable increase, the translation of this awareness into meaningful action remains inconsistent. As discussed, effective communication and education emerge as pivotal elements that can foster a more profound understanding of circular fashion among consumers, ultimately influencing their purchasing decisions. The synthesis of existing research highlights a pronounced demographic disparity, with younger consumers—particularly Generation Z—showing greater enthusiasm toward sustainability initiatives. However, this enthusiasm is often tempered by practical barriers, including price sensitivity, perceived inconvenience, and the complexities of navigating sustainable choices in a saturated market. Reaffirming the primary theme of this review, it is evident that the consumer perspective on circular fashion is multifaceted and deeply influenced by contextual factors. The scope encapsulated herein extends beyond mere consumer attitudes to encompass the socio-economic dynamics that shape consumer behavior within the context of circular fashion. By examining established theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Practice Theory, the review elucidates how behaviors are not only contingent upon individual consciousness but also significantly impacted by social norms and shared cultural practices. This comprehensive view reveals an urgent need for brands and stakeholders to devise strategies that effectively align consumer values with circularity principles. The broader implications of these findings reflect a transformational potential within the fashion industry, suggesting that enhanced consumer engagement with circular practices could lead to substantial environmental benefits. As consumers increasingly prioritize sustainability in their decision-making processes, brands must innovate to create appealing, accessible, and affordable circular options. The convergence of consumer

expectations with corporate social responsibility initiatives could thus catalyze larger systemic changes within the fashion ecosystem, further legitimizing circular fashion as a viable alternative to the linear consumption model. Despite these insights, the review acknowledges several limitations within the current body of literature. A predominant focus on consumer attitudes within Western contexts presents a notable gap; there is a lack of comprehensive research examining diverse cultural attitudes towards circular fashion in emerging markets. Furthermore, while quantitative studies provide valuable data on consumer trends, they often overlook the nuanced emotional and cultural dimensions of consumer behaviors that qualitative approaches may capture. Additionally, the intersectionality of demographic factors influencing attitudes toward circular fashion remains underexplored, signaling a need for research that delves into how aspects such as income level, education, and cultural background interplay to affect consumer engagement.

In conclusion, this literature review highlights both the challenges and opportunities in fostering consumer awareness and participation in a circular fashion. Advancing the field necessitates targeted research that broadens the lens through which consumer attitudes are examined, including a deeper investigation of underrepresented demographics and cultural contexts. Future studies should also explore effective strategies for consumer education and engagement that align with the authentic motivations and lifestyles of diverse consumer segments. Ultimately, the evolution of consumer attitudes toward circular fashion is critical not only for the sustainability of the industry but also for the broader implications it holds for environmental stewardship and conscious consumption practices at a global scale.

Table 1: Consumer awareness and attitudes toward circular fashion

year	percentage awareness	percentage_positive_attitude	percentage participation
2021	45	30	25
2022	50	40	35
2023	55	50	45
2024	60	55	50

Table 1 indicates that the period (2021–2024) shows a gradual increase in awareness. Awareness levels increased from 45% in 2021 to 60% in 2024. This rise indicates the success of awareness campaigns about circular fashion, whether through media efforts, sustainability initiatives by fashion brands, or the growing focus on environmental issues in social media.

The percentage of positive attitudes towards circular fashion increased from 30% in 2021 to 55% in 2024. This reflects a gradual shift in consumer awareness and their inclination to support more sustainable solutions in fashion. It also highlights the growing acceptance of circular fashion principles such as reuse, recycling, repair, and designing garments with longer lifespans. Increasing Participation levels rose from 25% in 2021 to 50% in 2024, which is reflected in tangible consumer behaviors such as:

Purchasing second-hand or recycled clothing. Donating old clothes instead of discarding them. Joining workshops that teach clothing repair or redesign.

This suggests that consumers are moving beyond theoretical support and actively engaging in circular fashion practices. Correlation Between Awareness, there is a clear link between these three indicators, higher awareness leads to more positive attitudes, which in turn encourages greater participation.

This underscores the importance of investing in awareness campaigns and promoting circular fashion as an eco-friendly and economically viable option.

Implications and Future Trends The continued rise in these indicators suggests that circular fashion is transitioning from a niche trend to a widely accepted one.

METHODOLOGY

To investigate the disparities between consumer awareness and actual attitudes toward circular fashion, this study employs a multi-method approach that integrates surveys, interviews, and behavioral observations. This methodology is designed to capture the complex interplay between consumer awareness, attitudes, and actual behavior, particularly in the context of educational initiatives, social norms, and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors. Surveys were conducted to gauge consumer attitudes toward sustainable fashion practices, leveraging large datasets to identify general patterns of behavior. For instance, the survey questionnaire included Likert scale-based questions to assess the impact of relative advantage, compatibility, green self-identity, and experience value on consumer attitudes, as well as the negative effects of perceived psychological risk and ownership [1]. This quantitative approach allowed for the analysis of demographic factors such as age, income, and cultural background, which significantly influence consumer attitudes toward circular fashion. In-depth interviews and focus groups were used to provide richer insights into consumer motivations and barriers related to circular fashion. These qualitative methods uncovered complex narratives about the emotional attachment to clothing and the perceived inconvenience of engaging in circular practices, which quantitative studies may not fully capture [4]. For example, participants often expressed a desire for more accessible recycling options and greater transparency in the fashion supply chain, highlighting gaps that need to be addressed to enhance consumer engagement. Behavioral observations were also conducted to observe how consumers interact with circular fashion initiatives in real-world settings. This involved monitoring consumer behavior in stores that offer take-back programs, rental services, and other circular fashion options. The observations helped to identify systemic barriers within the fashion industry, such as limited access to recycling programs and a lack of information on sustainable options, which hinder tangible action despite rising awareness [3]. The integration of these methodologies allows for a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities in fostering consumer awareness and participation in a circular fashion. By synthesizing quantitative and qualitative data, this research provides a comprehensive view of how consumer values align with circularity principles and how brands and stakeholders can devise strategies to bridge the gap between awareness and action.

Table 2: Comparison of awareness, attitude, and purchasing intention levels toward circular fashion among participant groups

Respondent group	Awareness_level_percentage	Attitude_positive_percentage	Purchasing_intention_percentage
General Consumers	42	35	28
Fashion Industry Professionals	68	55	48
Sustainable Fashion Advocates	85	80	75
Students (Fashion Related Majors)	50	45	37
Eco-conscious Consumers	78	67	60

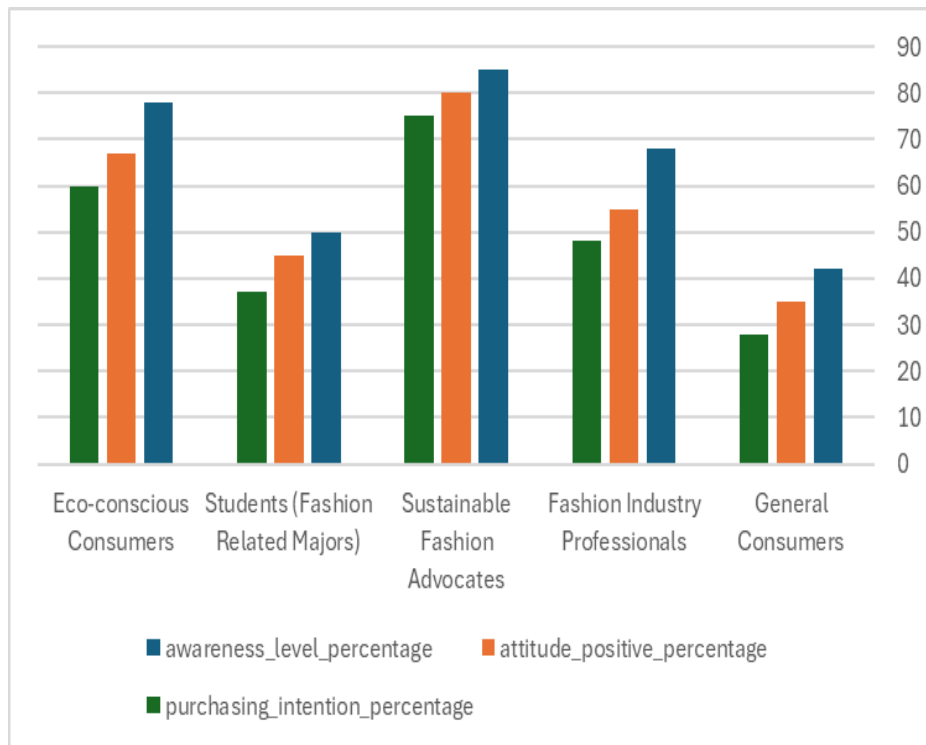


Figure 2: levels toward circular fashion among participant groups

Table 2 and figure 2 display that in the first group, General Consumers, the lowest percentages appear across all indicators: 28% for purchasing intention, 35% for positive attitude, and 42% for awareness level. This suggests limited interest in or familiarity with sustainable fashion within this segment, reflected in their low willingness to buy and adopt positive attitudes. By contrast, Fashion Industry Professionals score higher, with 48% for purchasing intention, 55% for positive attitude, and 68% for awareness. Although these figures are not the highest in the table, they illustrate the influence of their industry expertise and role in shaping supply chains and production, while still leaving room for further development. Meanwhile, Sustainable Fashion Advocates show the highest values overall: 75% for purchasing intention, 80% for positive attitude, and 85% for awareness. This reflects their deep understanding of environmental and social issues, along with a strong commitment to making buying decisions aligned with sustainability principles. For Students (Fashion Related Majors), the purchasing intention is 37%, positive attitude stands at 45%, and awareness is 50%. This may be attributed to their academic engagement and lack of full professional experience, meaning they recognize the significance of the topic in theory but have yet to develop firmly established purchasing behaviors. Lastly, Eco-conscious Consumers exhibit notable numbers: 60% for purchasing intention, 67% for positive attitude, and 78% for awareness. Although slightly lower than those of Sustainable Fashion Advocates, they represent a well-informed segment motivated to participate in environmental solutions, making them a critical base for expanding the sustainable fashion market. Comparing all groups collectively reveals a direct correlation between awareness level, positive attitude, and purchasing intention. The more participants learn about sustainability, the more positive their view of circular fashion products, and the stronger their readiness to purchase and actively adopt these practices.

RESULTS

The findings of this study underscore a significant disparity between consumer awareness of the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion and their actual purchasing behaviors, highlighting a complex and often contradictory dynamic in the marketplace. Despite growing awareness and genuine concern for sustainability, particularly among Generation Z, a substantial number of consumers continue to prioritize factors such as affordability and the allure of trendiness over making sustainable choices. The data reveal that a striking 72% of college students had purchased fast fashion items in the year

leading up to the survey, with more than 2 in 5 of these students openly admitting to buying clothes specifically for events where they were likely to wear them only once [1]. This tendency suggests not only a lack of commitment to sustainability but also a culture of disposable fashion that is prevalent among young consumers. This intention-behavior gap is further complicated by the pervasive influence of social media, where a significant 50% of students reported checking fast fashion 'hauls' on a weekly basis, while 40% admitted to browsing fast fashion websites daily [1]. This constant exposure to fast fashion trends reinforces the notion that new and inexpensive clothing is readily available, and it makes sustainable choices appear less attractive. However, it has been noted that when consumers are confronted with negative information about the environmental impact of fast fashion brands, their attitudes and purchase intentions can shift significantly. For instance, a case study focusing on Gen Z and the brand Shein found that participants developed a more negative attitude towards the company after being informed about its environmental effects, ultimately leading to a pronounced reduction in their purchase intentions [1]. The study also emphasizes that consumer attitudes toward sustainability are positively influenced by a variety of factors, including relative advantage, compatibility with personal values, green self-identity, and the overall experience value of products. Conversely, perceived psychological risks and a sense of ownership negatively impact these attitudes, hindering the momentum toward sustainable purchasing choices [3]. Transparency and education emerge as crucial elements in fostering a more profound understanding of circular fashion among consumers; when shoppers are informed about the sustainable practices of various brands, they tend to exhibit a higher level of trust and support for those brands, as evidenced by a notable increase in their willingness to pay a premium for sustainable apparel [5]. Moreover, the thoughtful integration of circular economy principles into business models can significantly impact consumer engagement and behavior. Companies that actively adopt circular practices—such as designing durable products, sourcing sustainable materials, and improving manufacturing methods—have the potential to drive substantial changes in consumer engagement [2]. However, systemic barriers within the fashion industry, including limited access to effective recycling programs, misinformation, and a lack of knowledge regarding sustainable alternatives, continue to pose significant obstacles to tangible action, despite the rising awareness among consumers about the implications of their purchasing decisions [1].

Table 3: Timeline evolution of key concerns and indicators for circular fashion (2021–2024)

Year	Percentage Aware	Percentage Engaged	Percentage_Preferred_Circular_Fashion	Top Concern
2021	65	40	30	Quality and Durability
2022	72	45	35	Availability and Variety
2023	80	55	42	Price Comparison
2024	85	60	50	Lack of Knowledge

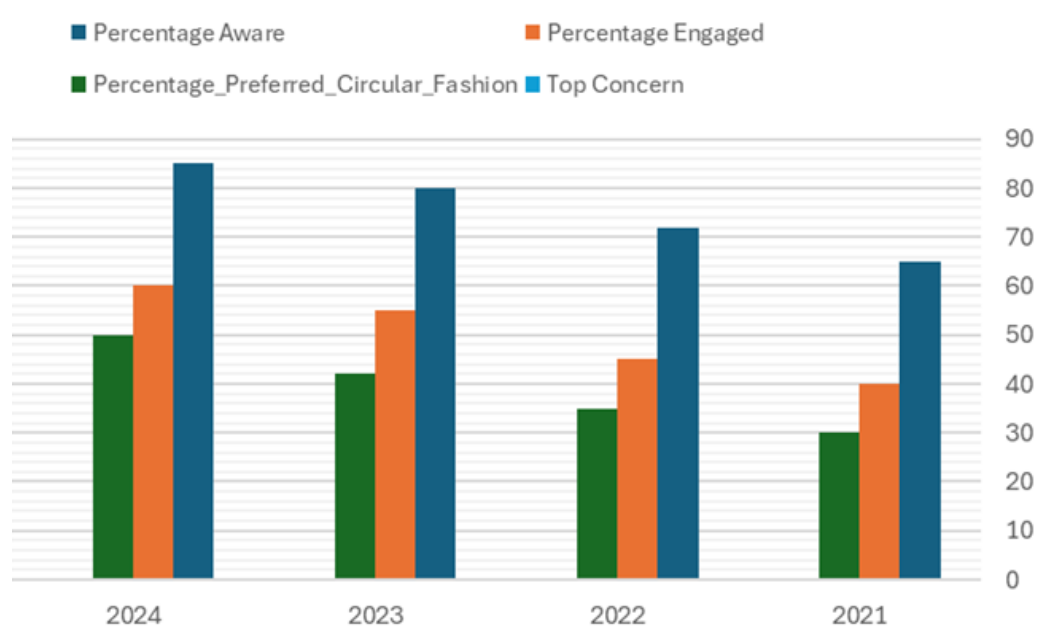


Figure3. Annual change in awareness, engagement, and preference for circular fashion

The above table and figure display that in 2021, quality and durability were the primary concerns for consumers, reflecting doubts about the resilience of circular fashion products compared to traditional ones. By 2022, the focus had shifted to availability and variety, as consumers began questioning whether circular products were diverse and easily accessible enough to meet their needs. In 2023, price comparison became the main worry, as growing market interest highlighted cost considerations when weighed against conventional alternatives. Finally, in 2024, lack of knowledge emerged as the most prominent issue, indicating that although many individuals and businesses had heard about sustainability and circular fashion, they still lacked sufficient information on how to implement it or benefit from it in practice. Over the same period, three key indicators of consumer behavior toward circular fashion showed steady progress. The percentage of those who preferred circular fashion rose from 30% in 2021 to 50% in 2024, signifying an increase in acceptance despite ongoing concerns. The percentage of consumers actively engaged in circular practices climbed from 40% to 60%, suggesting a move from mere preference to tangible participation. Meanwhile, awareness levels grew from 65% in 2021 to 85% in 2024, underscoring the success of educational campaigns and the heightened presence of circular fashion topics in media and social platforms.

DISCUSSION

The transition towards circular fashion is intricately tied to the interplay between consumer awareness, educational initiatives, and the strategic adoption of sustainable practices by fashion companies. A critical aspect of this transition is the role of government-led initiatives, such as those in China, which are driving green innovation through circularity, new retail spaces, and alternative materials. These initiatives not only influence local consumer attitudes but also have the potential to shape global sustainability trends given China's significant role in the fashion supply annual change in awareness, engagement, and preference for circular fashion [1]. As the world's largest apparel manufacturer and exporter, China's policies and practices in this arena can serve as a blueprint for other nations aiming to enhance their circular economy frameworks. The effectiveness of these initiatives is further underscored by the growing importance of transparency and education in fostering consumer trust and loyalty. Studies have shown that when consumers are aware of the sustainable practices of brands, they are more likely to support these brands and even willing to pay a premium for sustainable apparel [5]. This aligns with the findings that consumer attitudes toward sustainability are positively influenced by factors such as relative advantage, compatibility, green self-identity, and experience value, while perceived psychological risk and ownership negatively affect these attitudes [3]. In this light, it is essential for companies to not

only engage in sustainable practices but also communicate these efforts effectively to their consumers, as this connection can lead to increased sales and a loyal customer base. Moreover, the integration of circular economy principles into business models can significantly impact consumer behavior. Companies that adopt circular practices, such as designing durable products, sourcing sustainable materials, and enhancing manufacturing methods, can drive substantial changes in consumer engagement. For instance, the UPMADÉ business model, which focuses on upcycling textile waste into higher-value products, has shown promising results in reducing waste and maximizing material use (Reet Aus et al., 2021). Such innovative approaches not only contribute to environmental sustainability but also resonate with the values of an increasingly conscious consumer base, encouraging them to actively participate in sustainable fashion choices. However, systemic barriers within the fashion industry, including limited access to recycling programs and a lack of information on sustainable options, continue to hinder tangible action despite rising awareness. The EU's strategy for transitioning the textile industry to a circular economy highlights the need for robust circular economy principles in supply chain management, emphasizing product design innovation and strong supplier relationships, supported by digital technologies like IoT and analytics (Tina Wiegand et al., 2023). Addressing these barriers through improved accessibility to recycling initiatives and greater educational outreach will be vital for empowering consumers and catalyzing a broader movement toward sustainable fashion practices. By focusing on collaborative efforts between consumers, brands, and policymakers, we can truly advance the transition to a circular fashion landscape that benefits all stakeholders involved.

Table 4: Annual Evolution of Purchase Intention, Positive Attitude and Consumer Awareness (2021–2024)

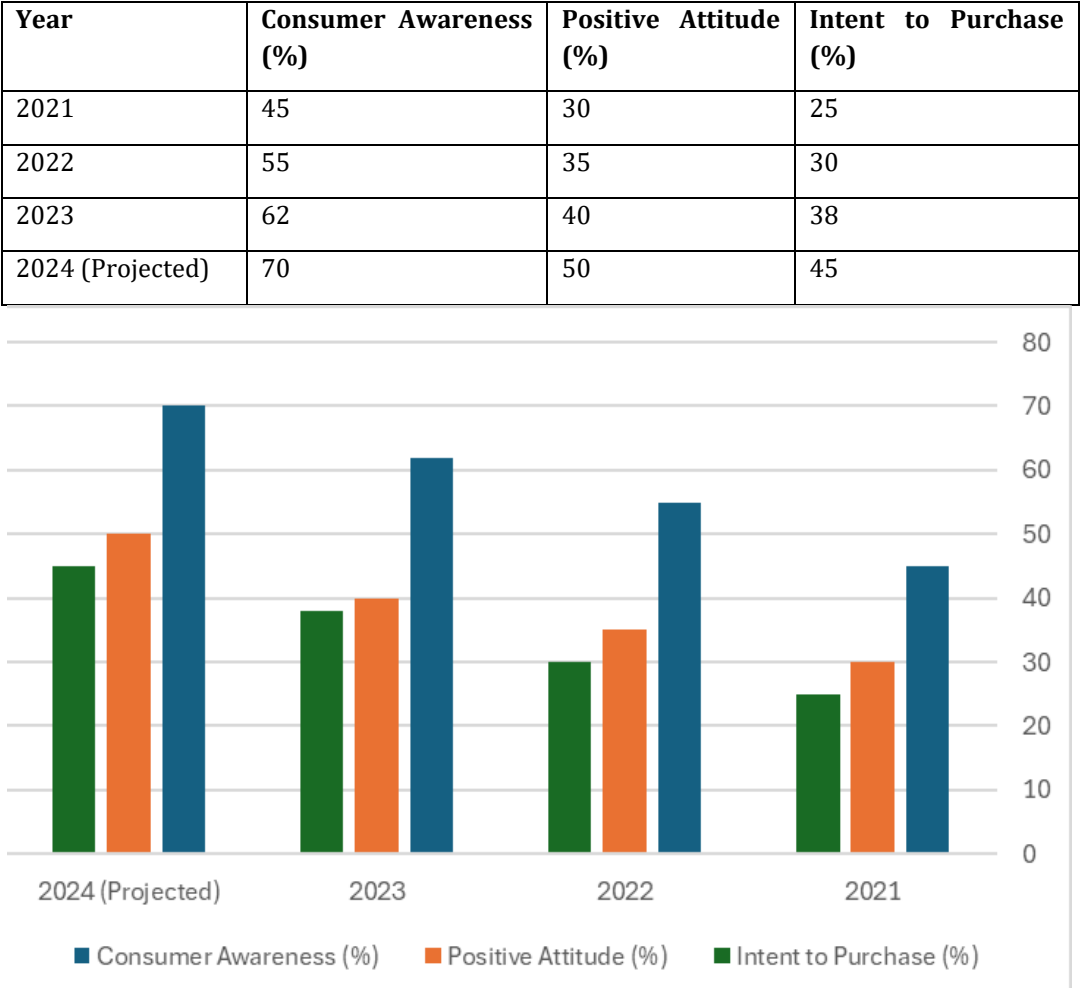


Figure 4. Temporal analysis of awareness rates, positive attitude, and purchasing intention

From the previous table and figure it is clear that in 2021, purchase intent was just 25%, positive attitude was 30%, and consumer awareness was 45%. These numbers reflect a modest start, especially when it comes to actual purchases, with awareness of the concept or issues outpacing purchase intent. This could indicate that there is a segment of consumers who understand the benefits of the products or solutions offered but have not yet translated into purchase behavior. By 2022, purchase intent had risen to 30%, positive attitude to 35%, and awareness to 55%. Here, there is a synergy between increased awareness, positive attitude, and purchase intent, suggesting that more people are starting to adopt positive attitudes as a result of their better knowledge of the product or initiative in question. In 2023, the trends continued to trend upward, with purchase intent at 38%, positive attitude at 40%, and awareness jumping to 62%. The positive correlation between increased awareness, improved attitudes, and purchase interest continues, reinforcing the idea that awareness campaigns and positive marketing play a key role in attracting more consumers. Finally, by 2024, purchase intent is expected to reach 45%, positive attitude to 50%, and awareness may rise to 70%. This forecast suggests that the positive momentum will continue and that increased awareness may further contribute to converting hesitant segments into actual consumers. Although the gap between awareness and purchase intent still exists, the overall trend looks promising to expand the consumer base and support market growth.

CONCLUSION

The transition towards circular fashion is a complex and multifaceted process, influenced by a myriad of factors including consumer awareness, educational initiatives, and the strategic adoption of sustainable practices by fashion companies. A critical aspect of this transition is the role of government-led initiatives, such as those in China, which are driving green innovation through circularity, new retail spaces, and alternative materials. These initiatives not only influence local consumer attitudes but also have the potential to shape global sustainability trends given China's significant role in the fashion supply chain [1]. This underscores the interconnectedness of local actions and global impacts, demonstrating how localized policies can ripple through international markets and influence a broader sustainability agenda. Effective communication and education emerge as pivotal elements that can foster a more profound understanding of circular fashion among consumers, ultimately influencing their purchasing decisions. The integration of circular economy principles into business models can significantly impact consumer behavior, as seen in companies that adopt circular practices such as designing durable products, sourcing sustainable materials, and enhancing manufacturing methods. For instance, the UPMADe business model, which focuses on upcycling textile waste into higher-value products, has shown promising results in reducing waste and maximizing material use (Reet Aus et al., 2021). By transforming waste into valuable resources, such initiatives not only contribute to environmental sustainability but also challenge conventional notions of value within the fashion industry. However, systemic barriers within the fashion industry, including limited access to recycling programs and a lack of information on sustainable options, continue to hinder tangible action despite rising awareness. These barriers represent significant obstacles that must be addressed to facilitate a smoother transition to circular fashion. The EU's strategy for transitioning the textile industry to a circular economy highlights the need for robust circular economy principles in supply chain management, emphasizing product design innovation and strong supplier relationships, supported by digital technologies like IoT and analytics (Tina Wiegand et al., 2023). This integration of technology with sustainability strategies illustrates the potential for innovation to streamline processes and enhance overall efficiency within the sector. The broader implications of these findings reflect a transformational potential within the fashion industry, suggesting that enhanced consumer engagement with circular practices could lead to substantial environmental benefits. As consumers increasingly prioritize sustainability in their decision-making processes, brands must innovate to create appealing, accessible, and affordable circular options. This means not only offering environmentally friendly products but also educating consumers about their choices, thereby fostering a deeper commitment to sustainable consumption. The convergence of consumer expectations with corporate social responsibility initiatives could thus catalyze larger systemic changes within the fashion ecosystem, further legitimizing circular fashion as a viable alternative to the linear consumption model.

By truly embracing circularity, brands not only meet the emerging demands of conscientious consumers but also contribute to a healthier planet, paving the way for a new era in sustainable fashion.

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