

# A review on Sustainability in Fashion Trade

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## ABSTRACT

While sustainability has gained prominence in the fashion industry as a result of business practises and academic research, retailing, a critical component of the supply chain, has not been adequately explored in academia. The interest in this area has increased lately, mainly due to the growing complexity within this dynamic context. As a result, conducting a systematic review of the pertinent published literature in this field is worthwhile. The purpose of this study is to identify the primary research perspectives on sustainable retailing in the fashion industry. According to the content analysis, the most prominent areas in the field are sustainable retailing in disposable fashion, fast fashion, slow fashion, green branding, and eco-labeling; secondhand fashion retailing; reverse logistics in fashion retailing; and emerging retailing opportunities in e-commerce. Additionally, the findings of this review indicate a dearth of research on sustainable retailing in the fashion industry in the developing world.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Fashion, Industry, Review.

## INTRODUCTION

The International Institute for Sustainable Development [1] (p. 11) defines sustainable development as "adopting business strategies and activities that meet the enterprise's and stakeholders' current needs while safeguarding, sustaining, and enhancing the human and natural resources that will be required in the future." Sustainability has gained prominence in a variety of business sectors. Sustainable supply chain research, as a result of modern business operations' extended supply chains, is one of several areas that have garnered attention from both scholars and practitioners in recent years. The practical implementation of a sustainable supply chain has prompted academic examinations. Fashion is one of the industries in which scholars frequently conduct research on topics such as sustainable supply chains.

In 2015, the apparel market in the United States was valued at approximately \$343 billion US dollars, with retail accounting for \$199.79 billion US dollars (approximately 58.2 percent of the total market) [2]. Because consumers of fashion products are becoming more conscious of environmental protection, social responsibility, and economic sustainability, the massive sales volume has raised serious concerns about the fashion retail industry's sustainable development. Retailers serve as the intermediary between suppliers and consumers. They could act as "ecological gatekeepers" [3,4] by assisting relevant supply chain partners in incorporating sustainability into their operations. For example, retailers can influence manufacturers' production processes and consumer consumption patterns by providing information about the supply chain's social and environmental impacts [5,6]. Retailers' business activities can have a positive or negative impact on social and environmental sustainability in a variety of ways. They can

enhance the sustainability of their products and services, such as delivery, packaging, and assortment, for example.

## FASHION INDUSTRY

For many years, the fashion industry drew the attention of researchers. Interest in this area has grown primarily as a result of the increasing complexity inherent in this dynamic environment. Markets change rapidly in the fashion industry, requiring players to be more adaptable and responsive [7]. As pioneers, retailers are critical to the supply chain's flexibility and responsiveness. Thus, in the fashion industry, the retail end is far more critical to sustainability than it is in the majority of other industries.

While both business practises and academic research have drawn attention to sustainability in the fashion industry, the majority of relevant studies focus on supply chain logistics. Retailing, as a critical component of the supply chain, has received scant academic attention. Sustainable retailing practises are those in which "retailers minimise emissions, effluents, and waste through continuous improvement in their internal operations" [8]. Sustainable retailing entails two critical practises: green transportation, which refers to the movement of environmentally friendly products, and green store operations, which refer to retailing practises that promote energy conservation, waste reduction, and recycling. Similarly, Lee et al. [9] demonstrate that sustainable retailing entails selling green products and managing non-product aspects (e.g., retail supply chain, customer-facing initiatives, and facilities management).

Fashion is a complicated industry with extensive and varied supply chains that include production, raw materials, textile manufacturing, clothing construction, shipping, retail, and the use and eventual disposal of the garment. Retailing, as a component of the supply chain, is undergoing dramatic changes in consumer behaviour. Consumption has become a defining characteristic of modern societies in many ways [9], while sustainability has become a major issue arousing global social concerns. In modern times, shopping has shifted from a necessity to a luxury activity [10-11]. Such consumerism is diametrically opposed to sustainability.

Consumers are inundated with opportunities to spend their money through shopping malls, fashion magazines, catalogues, and online advertisements. This rampant consumerism was aided by the "fast fashion" trend. Fast fashion is typically based on the most recent fashion trends presented twice a year in Fashion Week magazine [12]. The rapid cycle of fashion trends from catwalk to market requires optimising certain aspects of the supply chain, including clothing collection design and manufacturing [13]. The goal of supply chain optimization is to enable mainstream consumers to purchase the latest fashion trends at a lower price. Additionally, fast fashion's supply chain produces new styles more frequently, accelerating fashion cycles faster than ever. Consumers are enticed to purchase and discard garments more frequently by faster cycling fashions at significantly lower prices. As a result, fast fashion has become synonymous with disposable fashion [14]. Fast fashion is now setting the standard for truly disposable clothing. However, it is particularly concerning for sustainable development because it

generates a demand for affordable clothing and then produces and continuously churns out a massive amount of textile waste, thereby accelerating carbon emissions and global warming [15].

## CONSUMER REACTION

Researchers from various countries have examined consumers' reactions to the paradoxical feature of "sustainable fashion" in a variety of markets in the existing research. According to Bly et al [16-17] 's research, consumers view fast fashion as the polar opposite of sustainability. Consistently, Joung [18] discovered that, while fast fashion consumers were concerned about the environment, they did not recycle. However, as Thomas [19] indicates, the pioneers of sustainable fashion consumption appear sceptical of the major fashion retailers' sustainability efforts. Similarly, Faurschou [20] asserts that, despite the fact that fashion producers and retailers offer one-off sustainable options, they continue to rely on excessive consumption and low prices to achieve their business objectives.

To address the issue of disposable fashion and fast fashion's lack of sustainability, several well-known fast fashion brands launched sustainability programmes. For instance, the well-known Swedish brand H&M—a typical fast fashion brand that is actively involved in eco-fashion—has piqued researchers' interest (e.g., Shen [21]). As a pioneer of sustainable fast fashion, H&M produces a 'Conscious Collection' line made entirely of eco-friendly and recycled materials, runs glossy advertising campaigns to promote garment recycling, and offers vouchers to customers who donate their old clothes to its stores [22]. Apart from the Conscious Collection, which accounts for a small portion of H&M's total collection, H&M is incorporating sustainability principles into a growing number of its products [23]. Though H&M's eco-friendly efforts have raised questions about the company's true effectiveness in mitigating the massive and growing environmental pollution caused by its fast fashion business, the investment in eco-friendly programmes demonstrates H&M's commitment to sustainability.

## CONCLUSION

Slow fashion is an antidote to fast fashion. Slow fashion's goal is not to slow down the textile and apparel supply chain, but to place a greater emphasis on holistic sustainability. Slow fashion, Clark asserts, enables more sustainable and ethical modes of dressing. In contrast to fast fashion's greedy consumption, bargain prices, and labour exploitation, slow fashion values quality and long-term thinking. Slow fashion products are typically made of durable, recycled, or organic materials and feature timeless designs that can be worn year round and do not quickly go out of style, allowing consumers to keep an item of clothing longer than one season if they have an emotional or cultural connection to it. This logic implies that both the manufacturing process and the final product should be sustainable. Slow fashion items, on the other hand, are typically more expensive than fast fashion items, which discourages the majority of consumers from purchasing them.

In short, it is a challenge for the fashion industry to enable the mass market to sustainably enjoy fashion, particularly in developing markets where consumers are more price sensitive. Existing research on sustainable fashion (which includes disposable fashion, fast fashion, and slow fashion) reveals a

consumption–sustainability paradox. Consumers prefer the term "sustainable fashion," but believe that sustainability and fashion are incompatible, resulting in mistrust and confusion. Additionally, consumers' perceptions and assessments of the sustainability of fashion retailing vary between developed and developing markets.

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