

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

An Empirical Study on Bridging Intention-Behaviour Gap in Sustainable Fashion Consumption: A Circular Economy Perspective



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Abstract

The fashion industry initially embraced a linear growth strategy, characterized by the "take-make-use-throwaway" approach, aiming for boundless expansion. This strategy, fostering fast fashion adoption, contributed to the exacerbation of the climate crisis. However, this model has surpassed its sustainable trajectory, resulting in increased waste generation and environmental unsustainability. The lack of end-of-life cycle recycling further poses risks of contamination and the dissemination of hazardous particle waste.

The fashion industry is widely acknowledged as one of the most environmentally taxing sectors. This harsh reality is underscored by the astonishing fact that the production of a single t-shirt requires a staggering 2,700 liters of water—equivalent to the quantity of drinking water needed for one person over 2.5 years. The intricate process of apparel production, encompassing the cultivation of raw materials, spinning fibers, weaving, and dyeing, is inherently resource-intensive, consuming substantial amounts of energy. Compounded by chemical emissions and the use of pesticides in the cultivation of raw materials like cotton, the industry grapples with a myriad of environmental challenges.

To address the adverse consequences of this linear approach, a revised system has emerged, advocating for a "take-make-use-reuse" paradigm. This updated strategy is currently endorsed by business leaders, climate activists, scholars, and notably, governments in policy formulation and dialogues. At the heart of this transformation are consumers who express an intention to purchase, yet the corresponding behavior is lacking.

The Circular Economy (CE) serves as a fundamental solution to challenges in implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It introduces an economic model designed to exclude waste and pollution, emphasizing the continuous use and regeneration of materials and products within natural systems. This concept holds promise for accelerating progress toward the 2030 Agenda and contributes to achieving multiple SDGs, including SDG 6 (energy), SDG 8 (economic growth), SDG 11 (sustainable cities), SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production), SDG 13 (climate change), SDG 14 (oceans), and SDG 15 (life on land). The implementation of CE begins with SDG 12, focusing on sustainable consumption and production.

Circular fashion, a subset of the Circular Economy, significantly helps SDG 12. It plays a crucial role in addressing the root causes of unsustainable practices within the fashion industry. Particularly in emerging markets, the adoption of a circular economy model is pivotal. These markets exhibit increasing per capita income, human development index, and disposable income. As consumers in these markets aspire to attain living standards akin to developed nations, countries like India hold particular significance due to their substantial population and the potential for a surge in consumption with rising purchasing power.

The prevailing objective of companies today is centered on selling clothing in large quantities at affordable prices. Unfortunately, this pursuit not only plays a role in environmental degradation but also perpetuates a cycle of excessive consumption. In our examination of the intricate relationship between fashion and sustainability, our focus is on identifying new stimuli and mechanisms for transformative change, particularly in increasing repurchase intention for sustainable apparel, using the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB) stimulus organism response (S-O-R) framework.

Within the realm of fashion and sustainability, the manufacturing processes of clothing are notably non-eco-friendly, primarily due to the fast fashion cycle and the overwhelming demand from consumers. The incessant desire for new designs and trends in fast fashion leads to extensive production and subsequent waste. The unsustainable production practices in the fashion industry can be traced back to the fast fashion cycle and the substantial demand from consumers.

Consumer behavior emerges as a pivotal factor driving the fast fashion phenomenon, influenced by various elements such as global population growth, higher incomes, and improved living standards. The intricate interplay of multiple factors contributing to consumers' wasteful behavior is aptly termed as the 'spaghetti soup'. The proclivity towards fast fashion within consumer behavior is undeniably the primary catalyst for increased production and the subsequent formation of waste. Consequently, it can be inferred that consumer behavior stands as the central driving force behind the fast fashion cycle.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals aimed at fostering a circular economy in the fashion industry, we examine the disparity between consumers' intentions and behaviors. Despite the crucial role of this intention-behavior connection, the matter has been less explored in the broader literature. Until there is alignment between consumers' intent to purchase and their actual buying behavior for environmentally friendly products, the effective positioning

and branding of such products in the market may incur significant costs. This study establishes a connection between consumers' intentions and behaviors regarding sustainability, utilizing a hybrid approach that incorporates elements from both the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behavior under the broader umbrella of stimulus organism response theory.

The following are research objective of the study:

- To find factors influencing purchase intention of sustainable apparels in India.
- To assess the existing literature in sustainable fashion and consumption and find strategies and challenges in implementing circular economy concept.
- To bridge intention behaviour gap in sustainable fashion literature.

A sample of 357 respondents was collected using purposive sampling technique from young consumers belonging to Generation Y (millennials) and Generation Z. Data was analysed using partial least square- structural equation modelling technique using Smart PLS 4 software. Subsequently, measurement model and structural model were tested to generate results.

The sustainable fashion choice motive of consumer is a important specially in the context of sustainable fashion. Eco anxiety sometimes leads to more favourable sustainable consumption behaviour especially among young consumers. This is also true for environmentally conscious consumers. A new construct of circular economy sustainable development goals awareness was included in the study to evaluate the recent awareness of SDG goals and circular economy on young consumers. Further the constructs like behavioural control, attitude, purchase intention and purchase behaviour were adopted from theory of planned behavior. Minimalism has been incorporated in the study to see if minimalistic values influence the consumption behaviour of consumers especially among the younger consumers. Greenwashing is believed to be an unethical practice by companies to increase their sustainability perception. The consumers sometimes exhibit loyalty to brands aligning with their sustainable values, therefore we included the construct of green brand loyalty. Consumers identify the sustainability of the apparels using the labels presented at the display and becomes an important characteristics in buying behaviour. Therefore, we included the construct of sustainable label awareness to better the explain the sustainable fashion purchase intention.

Results of our study found that attitude, behavioural control, environmental consciousness, green brand loyalty, and greenwashing influence purchase intention. They also help to bridge the intention behaviour gap with purchase intention significantly influencing purchase

behaviour. Circular economy sustainable development goal awareness did not influence purchase intention, along with eco anxiety, sustainable label awareness and sustainable fashion choice motive. Further minimalism did not influence the purchase intention significantly. Results of the study imply that management should focus on increasing green brand loyalty, greenwashing, attitude, behavioral control and environmental consciousness of consumers. Intention behaviour gap is bridged in this study and therefore all constructs present in the study must be explored in future studies to develop a new theory for sustainable fashion consumption. A collaborative action from all stakeholders including companies, government, international organisation is needed to increase the consumption of sustainable apparels.

Keywords: Sustainable consumption, Circular economy, Theory of Planned Behavior, Purchase Intention, Purchase Behavior.