

Review

Comprehending the Consumer Behavior toward Sustainable Apparel

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Abstract: This paper comprehensively reviews the extant literature on consumer behavior toward sustainable apparel as a pathway to sustainability. This literature review is based on journal articles from the Web of Science and Scopus databases. Through an in-depth systematic analysis of the existing literature, this paper provides an overview of the research topic, sustainable apparel consumption, from a consumer perspective. The systematic literature review reveals five main themes: consumer attitudes, consumer purchases, consumer knowledge, consumer preferences, and consumer influence toward sustainable apparel. Different factors leading to sustainable consumer behavior emerged from each of these themes. Consumer preferences for sustainable apparel encompass various factors, such as preferred materials, styles, designs, and sizes, influenced by personal values, psychological characteristics, cultural backgrounds, socio-demographics, and the availability of options. Factors such as perceived costs, design uniqueness, and cognitive dissonance contribute to shaping consumer preferences in sustainable fashion. By delineating the complex consumer behavior and deliberating the sustainable apparel consumption phenomenon, this study aids in developing future sustainable strategies for apparel industries, considering the driving factors and their impact on consumer behavior and sustainability.

Keywords: apparel; sustainable consumption; consumer behavior; AI-enabled consumerism



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1. Introduction

Although nature contributes to climate change gradually, human activities and the effects of their consequences on the Earth become irrecoverable [1]. Considering population growth, human activities are identified as the main problem for climate change and degradation by consuming goods and services [2]. The USGBC (U.S. Green Building Council) [3] announced that climate change has the most significant environmental impact on society [1], which is mainly caused by energy consumption [4]. Not only are some of the used resources nonrenewable or take a long time to renew, but consumption waste also contributes to substantial environmental damage [5], such as air pollution, mineral depletion, and loss of biodiversity [6].

But what is sustainability? Simply put, sustainability is defined as an avoidance of the depletion of natural resources to maintain an ecological balance [7], while the United Nations Brundtland Commission [8] defines sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. In other words, sustainability implies that the use of resources should lead to the least depletion of the Earth’s resources and ecological system. The sustainability idea is based on varied concepts related to the Earth, such as intergenerational equity, gender equity, social tolerance, poverty alleviation, environmental preservation and restoration, natural resource conservation, and building justice and peaceful societies [9].

Sustainability has been presented in two different models: (1) The Carter and Rodgers sustainability model is based on three dimensions—triple bottom line or TBL; and (2) Closs, Speier, and Meacham’s sustainability model. Carter and Rodgers’ model mainly focuses on

collaboration between different human performances [10]. This model mainly considers the TBL to expand sustainability impact. The three dimensions of people (social), profit (economic), and planet (environmental) analyze the impact of each environmental decision in three different aspects, and by integrating these three aspects, the sustainability of that phenomenon can be concluded [1]. In fact, TBL is the concept that guides people to consider not only the financial aspect of any sustainable behavior but also its impacts on people and the planet; therefore, people in different generations can benefit [11]. TBL and its sustainability concept consider any human behavior, from how you pack your lunch every day, e.g., using reusable containers or plastic ones, to many industries such as agriculture, construction, and manufacturing, including the apparel industry [12]. Connecting sustainability and the TBL concept to corporations is essential, given that their actions, such as production and waste management, impact the environment and, consequently, the availability of resources for future generations [11]. Business stakeholders, such as those in the apparel and textile industry, are increasingly acknowledging the importance of incorporating sustainability issues and corporate social responsibility (CSR) into business and marketing education globally [9].

The second model, the Closs, Speier, and Meacham model, is based on data collection and analysis [13]. In fact, by collecting information from different corporations and companies, different dimensions for sustainability were introduced as follows: economics, education, environment, and ethics [14]. Environmental sustainability focuses on responding to external regulations to address environmental issues, leading to reduced usage, resource conservation, and effective business practices. The educational aspect emphasizes continuous talent development through training, sustainable business practices, and employee relationship management. The ethical dimension addresses corporate social responsibility, encompassing employee relations, community involvement, and ethical business practices. The economic aspect highlights the need for organizations to enhance value while reducing supply chain costs. In the apparel industry, these dimensions are particularly critical, specifically education and knowledge, which plays a crucial role in both companies' behavior and consumers' behavior toward sustainable apparel.

The textile and apparel industry, identified as one of the world's most polluting sectors, is under increased scrutiny for sustainability issues, impacting the environment and social standards throughout a garment's life cycle [15]. From fiber acquisition to disposal, the industry poses threats to the planet's resources. The industry faces challenges in implementing sustainability within global production networks due to geographical complexity, lengthy supply chains, growing population, and the pressures of cost and lead time [16]. Ever since sustainability became a major concern for societies, many researchers studied different variables at different stages of this process to increase the apparel industry's sustainability. By adopting TBL in the apparel and textile industry, both companies and consumers should be involved in sustainable performance [17]. The triple bottom line approach emphasizes the consideration of social and environmental performance alongside financial performance. Figure 1 elaborately illustrates how different issues of sustainable apparel are related to the three different aspects of TBL and what solutions have been offered to control their effects. While the apparel and textile industry is divided into two segments—producing textiles from raw materials and manufacturing them—the fashion industry also has another segment: selling and engaging with the consumer [18]. Hence, if the apparel industry aims to be sustainable, not only should producing textiles and manufacturing them embrace sustainability, but the fashion selling sector and consumer engagement in purchasing and after purchasing clothes, which is affected by their attitude and knowledge, should also consider sustainability, leading to a more sustainable apparel industry [17].

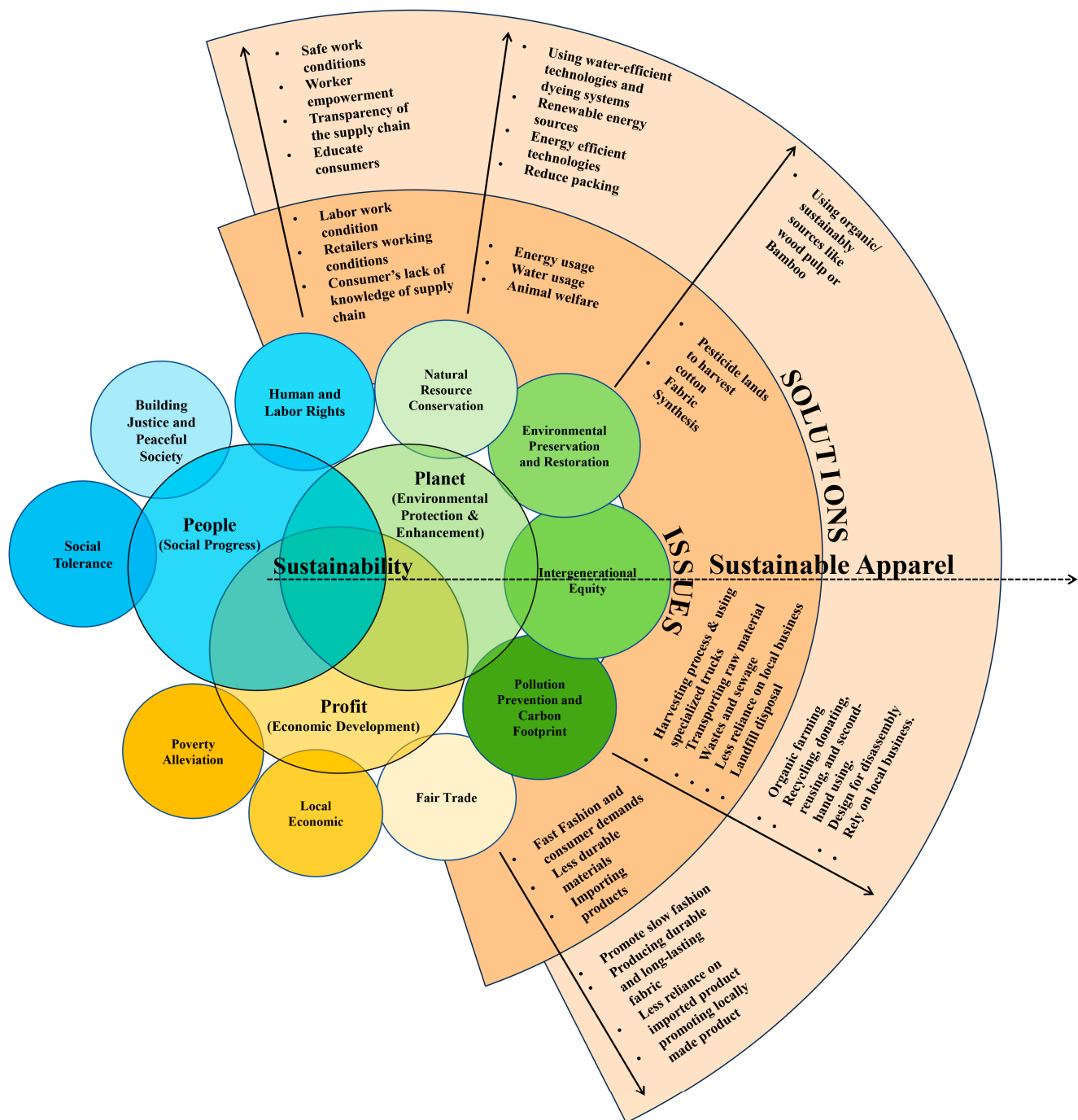


Figure 1. Issues and Solutions for the Sustainable Apparel Industry through TBL.

Converting raw materials into finished garments, from cradle to coffin, has significant environmental and social implications, including pollution and human resource exploitation [19]. Cotton cultivation holds primary responsibility for the vast amount of water use and numerous chemicals [15]. For instance, to create a sustainable cotton shirt, from harvesting the cotton and sustainable systems/machines that are being used, shipping raw materials and consequent CO₂ emissions, the manufacturing process and usage of heavy chemicals, packing, to retail and either shipping to the store or warehouse, usage and after-purchase behavior such as laundry frequency and disposal attitude, e.g., donations or recycling, are all integrated to build a sustainable system in the apparel industry. Table 1 shows the life cycle of textiles and apparel [15,16,19,20]. Needless to say, the rise in fiber consumption, discarded or unsold clothing, when not properly repurposed, recycled, or

managed through appropriate waste channels, can indirectly contribute to the accumulation of waste in landfills, contributing to the growing waste burden and environmental impact associated with the textile and clothing industry [15], leading to 92 million tons of waste, expected to rise to 134 million tons annually by the end of 2030 [21].

Table 1. Textile and apparel industry life cycle.

Stage 1: Materials	Stage 2: Textile and Apparel Production	Stage 3: Retail	Stage 4: Usage	Stage 5: Disposal
Water usage	Energy use, e.g., knitting	Packing	Water and energy used for washing clothes	Donation/selling as secondhand clothes
Pesticide lands to harvest cotton	Water use	Transporting goods	Laundry detergent and its container	Recycling
Genetic modification	Use of chemicals	Retailers working conditions	Energy usage for steaming/ironing	Landfill disposal
Animal welfare	Wastes and sewage	Maintaining goods under different circumstances		
Using chemicals in human-made fabric	Dyeing process			
Harvesting process and using specialized trucks	Labor work condition			

This table is generated based on [15,16,19,20].

Global concern has been raised by considering how much each stage impacts the TBL aspects—people, profit, and planet. Not to mention, by increasing the population, the cascade effects of this industry are inevitable [16]. Accordingly, each stage has been studied and examined precisely to decrease the environmental, economic, and social effects and to address a more sustainable industry in textile and apparel. Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) is a widely used approach standardized by ISO 14040:2006 and 14044:2006 to evaluate environmental performance throughout a product or process life cycle [22,23]. Various methodologies exist that can hopefully influence the textile and apparel system to be more sustainable.

Reusing and recycling are identified as favorable options for end-of-life textile waste management, with LCA studies showing significant environmental savings compared to landfill disposal [20]. Using organic or recycled fabric is among the highlighted strategies in this field to decrease reliance on Mother Nature to produce fabric [20,24]. In different stages, water and energy usage are significant, and appropriate strategies can be used to control it. Minimizing water and energy use in each stage or using renewable energy sources, e.g., the sun and treated water in this system, can help control water and energy usage [25]. Meanwhile, using safer and less toxic chemicals in textile processing, dyeing, and finishing minimizes environmental harm [15,20]. Encouraging consumers to shift toward a slow fashion mindset, focusing on durable and timeless pieces rather than rapidly changing trends, helps reduce the demand for disposable clothing [26]. Educating consumers about the environmental impact of their clothing choices and promoting sustainable practices empower them to make more informed decisions. In fact, consumer purchase behavior is influenced by the knowledge and attitudes that they obtain [27–29]. Studies show that increasing consumers' knowledge positively changes their purchase behavior and attitudes toward sustainability [27–31]. Lastly, transparency in well-provided information, such as tags, can be a good guide for people to trust sustainable information and make correct decisions [32].

Like the automotive, agriculture, and energy industries, the textile and apparel industry can significantly reduce its environmental impact and adopt a sustainable approach. For example, the automotive industry is reducing its carbon footprint by developing electric vehicles and using sustainable materials in manufacturing. The agriculture industry is adopting organic farming practices and reducing chemical use to be more environmen-

tally friendly. Similarly, the energy industry is shifting toward renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and lowering greenhouse gas emissions. Hence, manufacturers, retailers, and consumers in the apparel industry must take action to impact the whole system. From small steps, such as donating clothes by consumers, to more structured contributions, such as relying on organic or recycled materials to decrease chemical usage, all can reduce the environmental, economic, and social footprint of this industry to maintain a more sustainable system for all. This review aims to assess the aspects of sustainable apparel that have been addressed in relation to the consumer's effect on the sustainable apparel chain and the strategies that have been proposed. Specifically, this study aims to review studies that address consumer behavior toward sustainable apparel products, that being fabric-based wearable or usable apparel products directly by consumers, i.e., clothing. By studying the factors influencing sustainable clothing consumption and their shaping effects on consumer behavior and overall sustainable practices in the apparel industry, this systematic literature review aims to assist the apparel industry in devising future sustainability strategies and identifying additional sustainable consumer practices.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Data Sources

The research employed a systematic literature review (PRISMA) to investigate the existing evidence concerning sustainable apparel comprehensively. Two prominent databases, Scopus and Web of Science, were extensively explored for published literature using the keywords "Sustainable Fashion" and "Sustainable Apparel" in their title, abstract, and keywords in April and May 2023. Initial exploration collected 7739 relevant studies. This work aimed to review and uncover research from the past decade, focusing on articles published between 2013 and 2023. Filters were applied to the search engine to refine the results according to the study's objectives. The selection criteria were limited to journal articles published in English and related to fashion, textiles, and apparel. After collecting articles from two databases using these filters, duplicate articles were removed from the list. Figure 2 shows that after the initial screening process, 1175 articles were retained to be screened in the selection process.

2.2. Selection Process

The remaining articles underwent two subsequent screening processes following the initial screening phase. First, the titles and abstracts were evaluated to identify relevance to the study's focus. Subsequently, the entire content of the articles was screened to ensure alignment with the analysis of sustainable apparel, the primary theme of this review. This screening aimed to exclude articles that did not explicitly address sustainable apparel upon initial examination. Hence, articles not addressing sustainability AND apparel in their abstracts were withdrawn from the archive. For instance, after the abstract was assessed, the article "Prickle and handle properties of fabrics produced from specialty animal fibers" was removed from the list of articles. This article focused on material properties rather than sustainable consumption. Out of the initial pool, 154 articles proceeded to full-text screening. Among these, 39 articles were deemed unrelated to the primary focus and were consequently excluded from the dataset. The remaining 115 articles (Figure 2) were retained for thematic merging and qualitative synthesis analysis, leading to 75 articles' inclusion.

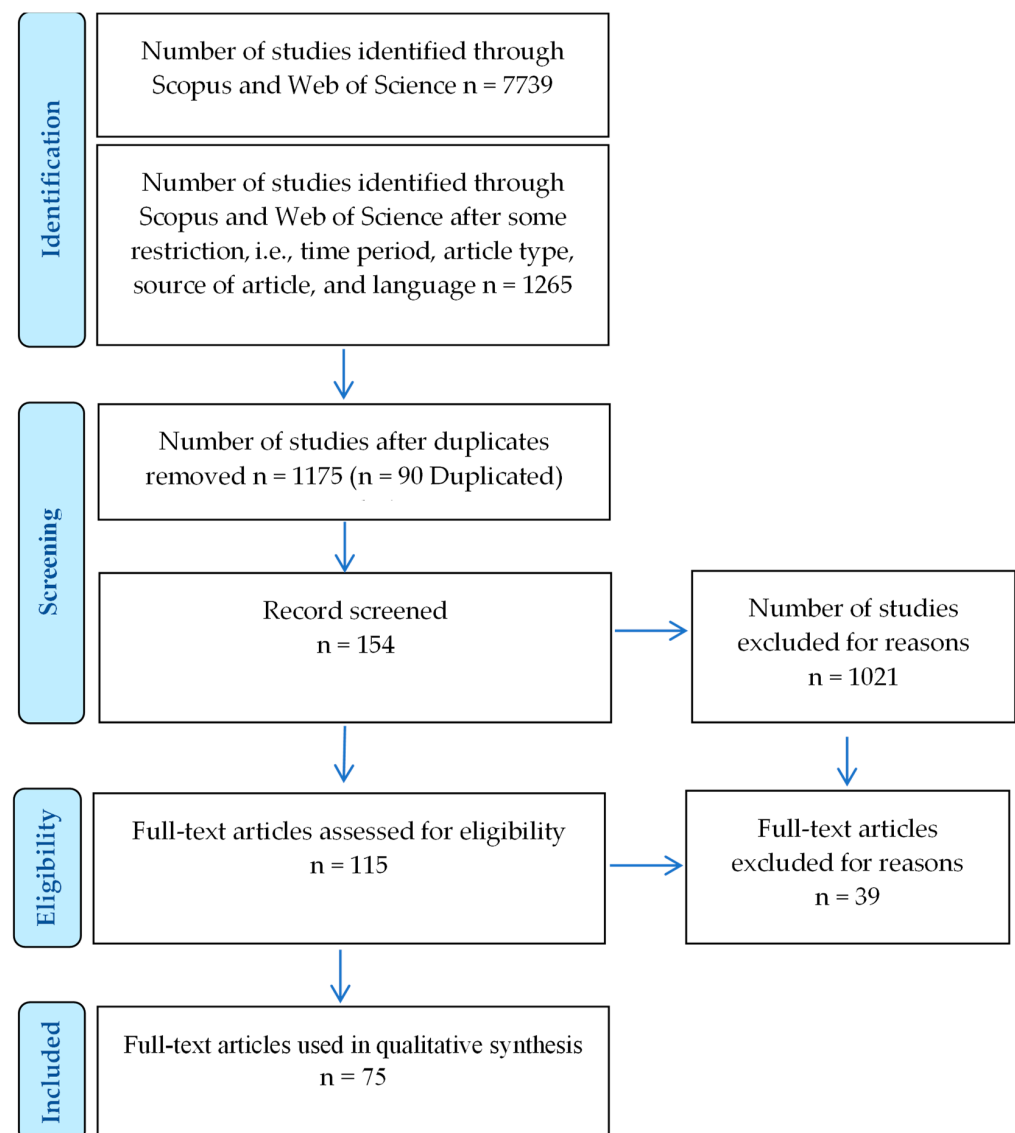


Figure 2. PRISMA flow diagram explaining screening and article selection.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The primary criteria were shaped based on two key aspects during the full-text analysis. Firstly, articles were assessed based on their emphasis on sustainable fashion products. Secondly, consideration was given to studies investigating consumer behavior in relation to sustainable fashion.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Studies focused on factors influencing sustainable apparel consumption and consumer behavior towards sustainable fashion that also:
 - a. Explored the psychological, social, or environmental drivers of sustainable fashion consumption.
 - b. Addressed technological advancements, such as AI, influencing consumer engagement with sustainable fashion.
 - c. Analyzed behavioral factors in relation to eco-friendly and ethical fashion purchasing decisions.
2. Research that specifically focused on consumer attitudes and behavior towards sustainable fashion, including studies on:
 - a. Ethical fashion choices, eco-consciousness, and sustainable clothing practices.

- b. The role of consumer education and awareness in promoting sustainable apparel consumption.
3. Studies published between the years 2013 and 2023 to ensure recent developments in sustainable fashion and consumer behavior are considered.
4. Studies published in English to maintain consistency in language comprehension and analysis.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Research aimed primarily at business models, supply chain management, or organizational behavior without a specific focus on consumer behavior related to sustainable fashion.
2. Research projects and studies focusing on general fashion trends without integrating sustainable fashion elements or consumer behavior analysis towards sustainability.
3. Non-consumer-focused studies, such as material development, addressing manufacturing processes, supply chain operations, or retail logistics, unless they directly examine their impact on consumer sustainable behavior.

The distribution of the selected articles in the considered time frame has been illustrated in Figure 3. The majority of selected articles were published in the last 5 years, from 2019 to 2022.

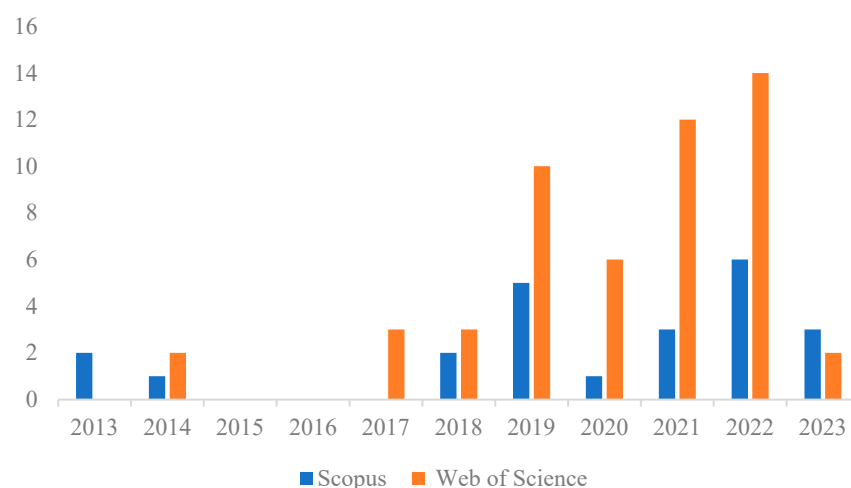


Figure 3. Distribution of selected articles in the considered time frame.

3. Review Findings and Discussion

3.1. Theoretical Analysis

Through assessing 75 articles discussing consumer behavior in sustainable apparel, 63 articles addressed theoretical framework(s), among which 17 theories have been identified (Table 2). Meanwhile, some of the articles built their study frameworks upon multiple theories; the majority of articles referred to one theoretical framework. The *Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)* was among the most used theoretical frameworks to study consumer behavior in sustainable apparel (43%), followed by the *Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)* being the second-most-used theory (23%) in this systematic literature review. Other theories, such as the *Generational Cohort theory*, *Behavioral Reasoning Theory (BRT)*, *Corporate Social Responsibility Theory*, *Theory of Perceived Value*, the *Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory*, the *Elaboration Likelihood Model Attitude-Behavior-Context (ABC) Model*, and the *Theory of Consumption Value* are other highlighted theories that each has been considered in one or two articles.

Table 2. The theoretical frameworks that are addressed in the systematic literature review.

Theory	Articles	Themes
Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	24 articles	Consumer Attitude Consumer Purchase Consumer Knowledge Consumer influence
The theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)	13 articles	Consumer Attitude Consumer Purchase Consumer Knowledge
Generational Cohort Theory	2 articles	Consumer Knowledge Consumer Purchasing Behavior—Second-hand clothing
Behavioral Reasoning Theory (BRT)	2 articles	Consumer Purchase Consumer Attitude Consumer Influence
Attitude-Behavior-Context (ABC) model	1 article	Consumer Purchase Consumer Attitude
The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)	1 article	Consumer Knowledge Consumer Influence
Corporate Social Responsibility Theory	1 article	Consumer Attitude Consumer Knowledge
The Elaboration Likelihood Model	2 articles	Consumer Purchase Consumer Influence Consumer Attitudes
The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) Model	1 article	Consumer Preference
Color Theory	1 article	Consumer Influence
Psychological Ownership Theory	1 article	Consumer Purchase
Consumer Perceived Value (CPV) Theory	1 article	Consumer Attitude
The Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory	1 article	Consumer Purchase
The Knowledge-Attitude-Behavior (KAB) Model	1 article	Consumer Purchase Consumer Attitude
Andreoni's Theory of Warm Glow	1 article	Consumer Purchase
Theory of Consumption Value	1 article	Consumer Knowledge
Theory of Perceived Value	2 articles	Consumer Knowledge Consumer Attitude

N = 75.

The identified themes have also been assessed among all the theories extracted in this systematic literature review. Consumer purchase is the most common theme across all the theories, followed by consumer attitude, consumer knowledge, consumer preference, and consumer influence. Evidently, consumer purchase (44%) was the most prevalent theme among all articles that used a theoretical framework, followed by consumer attitude (32%), consumer knowledge (16%), consumer influence (6%), and consumer preference (2%). The TBP discussed almost all the themes retrieved from the literature review, such as *consumer attitude*, *consumer purchase*, *consumer knowledge*, and *consumer influence*. The TRA, however, highlighted themes such as *consumer attitude*, *consumer purchase*, and *consumer knowledge*.

Research Type Analysis

Since each study has different emerging themes and applied theories and used different research designs to measure consumer behavior, the study type can also help gain a better perspective of the retrieved themes. Four types of studies were defined to categorize articles

as follows: literature reviews, surveys with scales, qualitative studies with interviews, and mixed methods. Among the 75 assessed articles, 87 percent of them (65 articles) applied surveys with scales, followed by qualitative studies with interviews at 7 percent (five articles), mixed methods at 4 percent (three articles), and literature reviews at 2 percent (two articles).

3.2. Content Analysis

After considering 115 articles with sustainable apparel as their main themes of this review, five main themes were extracted from the data that categorize articles accordingly. These five themes are consumer attitude, consumer purchase, consumer knowledge, consumer preference, and consumer influence.

3.2.1. Consumer Attitude

This theme is mainly about consumers' overall feelings, beliefs, and perceptions toward sustainable apparel. It encompasses their general outlook and mindset regarding sustainability in the fashion industry. Consumer attitudes can influence their behaviors, choices, and decisions when it comes to purchasing clothing and supporting sustainable practices. In addition to the provided information, consumers' attitudes can be influenced by psychological characteristics, cultural backgrounds, and many obstacles that prevent consumers from contributing to sustainable apparel.

Psychological characteristics such as empowerment and materialism shape personal values, such as emotional values and fashion innovativeness, which can play significant roles in shaping consumers' attitudes and behaviors [33–35]. Cultural backgrounds also impact consumer perceptions, with variations observed across regions such as South Korea, China, Japan, Spain, Poland, and Peru [36–38]. For instance, second-hand clothing consumption varies across cultures, with differences observed in attitudes toward purchase, reuse, and disposal [39,40]. Obstacles to sustainable apparel consumption include image concerns, pricing issues, and a lack of information [41]. Demographic features such as age, gender, and generational cohorts also influence attitudes and behaviors toward sustainable apparel [42,43]. Moreover, e-stores, social media messages, and company transparency impact consumers' attitudes and intentions toward sustainable apparel [44,45]. The COVID-19 pandemic also affects consumer attitudes, with pro-environmental attitudes positively influencing sustainable fashion consumption [46].

3.2.2. Consumer Purchase

This theme focuses on the actual buying behavior of consumers in relation to sustainable apparel. It includes aspects such as the frequency of purchases, the types of sustainable clothing items consumers buy, the factors influencing their purchasing decisions (e.g., price, quality, brand reputation), and the channels through which they make purchases (e.g., online, in-store).

Consumer purchases have been studied in various aspects, such as green apparel products, slow fashion, organic apparel, and domestically produced clothing [47–50]. Factors influencing these purchases include psychological aspects (e.g., materialism, moral philosophy), symbolic meanings of green clothing, and eco-friendly features [51–54]. Cultural differences in sustainable apparel purchases are explored, including motivations in non-Western contexts [55,56], along with demographic features such as gender, age, and socio-demographic profiles impacting consumer behaviors [57–59], i.e., how different generations perceive second-hand clothing [39].

In this era, consumers are influenced by varied types of information that they receive in different forms, impacting their purchase behaviors such as social media, brand names, cause-related marketing, environmental knowledge, and personal values, which affect intentions to purchase sustainable or transformable apparel [60–62]. Recycling behavior and willingness to pay for sustainable clothing also play significant roles, with studies

examining preferences for convertible dresses as an example of environmentally responsible consumption [63–65].

3.2.3. Consumer Knowledge

The level of understanding and awareness is indeed contributing to sustainable apparel. In fact, consumer knowledge plays a vital role in the retail sector of sustainable apparel. It is related to their knowledge of environmental and social issues related to the fashion industry and their familiarity with sustainable materials, production processes, certifications, and brands. Consumer knowledge is crucial in shaping attitudes and purchase behaviors toward sustainable fashion.

Consumer knowledge regarding eco-labeling and sustainable fashion is crucial for driving purchasing decisions. Studies indicate that while consumers are willing to pay more for eco-labeled products, their understanding of sustainable terminology remains limited [66–68]. Moreover, education and environmental knowledge significantly influence positive attitudes toward sustainable products, emphasizing the importance of raising consumer awareness [69,70].

Factors such as demographic features and social identity also significantly shape consumer knowledge and behavior [17,29,31,71]. For instance, middle-aged women, educated individuals, and those employed are more inclined to pay extra for eco-labeled products [66]. Additionally, environmental consciousness positively impacts the perceived value of second-hand apparel, indicating a growing interest in sustainable consumption practices [71]. However, barriers such as limited knowledge, economic constraints, and societal norms hinder the adoption of sustainable products [5,30]. Efforts to address these barriers include providing more precise information and enhancing sustainability literacy among consumers [5,30]. Moreover, understanding the preferences and characteristics of different consumer segments, such as Generation Z females, is essential for promoting sustainable consumption across diverse demographics [17,71].

3.2.4. Consumer Preference

This theme focuses on the specific preferences that consumers have regarding sustainable apparel. It includes factors such as preferred materials (e.g., organic cotton, recycled polyester), styles, designs, colors, and sizes. Understanding consumer preferences is vital for fashion brands and retailers to effectively tailor their offerings to meet the demands of sustainable-minded consumers.

There are various facets influencing consumer preferences in sustainable apparel. McNeill et al. scrutinized disposal behavior, revealing that highly fashion-sensitive individuals prioritized style over garment repair [72]. Xu et al. highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on cloth-sharing, noting health concerns as a deterrent [73]. Rahman et al. and Ruppert-Stroescu et al. explored demographic effects, emphasizing the roles of gender, fashion innovativeness, and generational creativity in sustainable clothing choices [74,75]. Additionally, Lundblad and Davies identified personal values such as perceived costs and design uniqueness as crucial influencers, while Cairns et al. further elaborated on factors such as availability, pricing, and cognitive dissonance in shaping consumer preferences [76,77].

3.2.5. Consumer Influence

This refers to the ability of consumers to be influenced by others, either directly or indirectly, towards adopting sustainable apparel practices. It encompasses various forms of influence, such as word-of-mouth recommendations, social media advocacy, and participation in sustainable fashion movements or communities. Consumer influence can significantly drive awareness and adoption of sustainable fashion practices across broader society.

The consumer influence category explores the intricate dynamics shaping consumer behavior within the sustainable fashion landscape. Across multiple studies, social media emerges as a pivotal platform for engaging consumers, with an emphasis on leveraging the

Paid Owned Earned Media (POEM) framework and crafting brand messages tailored to resonate with eco-conscious individuals [78,79]. The POEM framework categorizes media into three types: Paid media, which includes purchased advertising such as promoted posts and influencer collaborations; Owned media is defined as the company's own channels such as its websites and social media accounts controlled directly by companies; and Earned media, which refers to free media and publicity such as user-generated content and media coverage. With the rise of social media as a crucial communication platform, owned media has become increasingly influential, as consumers trust brand-generated content more than paid advertisements [78]. Hence, the provided information by brands and own companies can crucially influence the sustainable behavior among consumers, highlighting factors such as sustainability messaging, certification reputation, transparency, and the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic [80–85]. Furthermore, generational and demographic disparities play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors, elucidating differences between generations X and Y, gender variances, and their implications for trust in brand claims and purchasing patterns [86–89]. Moreover, economic considerations significantly influence consumer decision-making, with studies exploring sustainable approaches such as repairing and repurposing clothing, fashion renting, and adopting circular apparel to address economic concerns while promoting sustainable consumption [90–93]. Across all factors engaged in consumer influence are varied aspects of quality, design, price, durability, and beliefs, underscoring the complex nature of sustainable fashion consumption in contemporary society.

3.2.6. Overlapped Themes

Our analysis of each theme showed that some parts of the themes overlapped with others and knitted all themes together. Demographic features such as gender or age generations are among those that significantly influence consumers in different perspectives and mentioned themes. The recycling culture is also one of the other attributes that interact with many consumer themes, e.g., consumer attitude and consumer knowledge, to take an approach toward sustainable behavior. Some factors and barriers also affect holistic consumer behavior, such as economic barriers or cultural factors, that vary in different societies and can be observed in almost all themes.

4. Conclusions and Future Recommendations

The emergence of sustainability as a global concern has led to increased adoption of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) model by industries, which addresses the social, economic, and environmental aspects of sustainability. The apparel industry holds the potential for significant positive change as it impacts all three dimensions of TBL. Socially, issues such as labor practices arise, while economically, fast fashion, and short product lifespans prevail. Environmentally, fabric processing poses significant challenges, from harvesting to synthesis (see Figure 1). These aspects encompass the entire apparel lifecycle, including material processing, retail, and disposal, all of which play a crucial role in achieving sustainability. Each stage is equally important in the pursuit of sustainable apparel. For example, the production of long-lasting and durable fabric can significantly impact sustainable apparel, while promoting locally-made fabric can reduce transportation pollution and costs for consumers. Among all these stages, how consumers interact with the clothing market critically influences the sustainable outcome in the apparel industry. Consumers' attitudes and purchase behavior can define toward sustainability. A demanding consumer population inclined towards purchasing sustainably-produced apparel is expected to influence to a notable extent the manufacturers' policies towards sustainability.

This systematic literature review assessed all the possible themes of consumer behavior toward sustainable apparel. Various factors can influence consumer behavior, leading to sustainable apparel in the retail and disposal stages. The systematic literature review reveals five main themes: consumer attitudes, consumer purchases, consumer knowledge, consumer preferences, and consumer influence toward sustainable apparel. Each of these

themes demonstrated the various factors leading to sustainable consumer behavior as explained in the following:

Psychological characteristics, cultural backgrounds, and socio-demographic features all have a significant influence on consumer attitudes toward sustainable apparel. Psychological traits, such as materialism, can positively impact fast fashion consumption. Cultural variations across regions can significantly affect perceptions of second-hand clothing, highlighting the influence of societal norms on sustainable apparel consumption. Consumer purchasing behavior regarding sustainable apparel is shaped by various factors, including psychological, moral, and symbolic considerations, as well as demographic features such as gender and age. Information received through social media, brand messaging, and cause-related marketing can influence consumers' intentions and preferences for sustainable apparel. Consumer knowledge, awareness, and understanding of environmental and social issues related to the fashion industry play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and behaviors toward sustainable apparel. Limited knowledge, economic constraints, and societal norms can pose barriers to adopting sustainable products, underscoring the importance of enhancing sustainability literacy among consumers. While accepted behavior, belief, and affordability can influence consumers to perceive and interact with sustainable apparel, individuals' decisions toward sustainable apparel can be misdirected by their insufficient knowledge. Limited knowledge, in this context, refers to the gap in consumer understanding regarding the environmental and social ramifications of the apparel industry, as well as the benefits of sustainable fashion choices. Many consumers are unaware of the negative impacts associated with fast fashion, such as excessive resource consumption, pollution, and unethical labor practices. Additionally, there is often a lack of knowledge about how to identify sustainable products, including understanding labels, certifications, or the long-term advantages of choosing high-quality, eco-friendly garments over cheaper, mass-produced alternatives. This knowledge gap can prevent consumers from making informed decisions, thereby impeding the adoption of sustainable practices. Enhancing sustainability literacy among consumers is therefore critical to overcoming these barriers and promoting more responsible consumption behaviors within the apparel industry. Consumer preferences for sustainable apparel encompass various factors such as preferred materials, styles, designs, and sizes, influenced by personal values, demographic characteristics, and the availability of options. Factors such as perceived costs, design uniqueness, and cognitive dissonance contribute to shaping consumer preferences in a sustainable fashion. Consumer influence through word-of-mouth recommendations, social media advocacy, and participation in sustainable fashion movements, drives awareness and adoption of sustainable practices. Generational and demographic disparities can impact consumer perceptions and behaviors, while economic considerations can influence sustainable approaches such as clothing repair, renting, and circular fashion. Based on the covered studies, demographic features, economic barriers, and cultural differences can influence almost all these emerging themes. These three factors were identified mutually between all the highlighted themes.

Future research should prioritize exploring the impact of emerging technologies, particularly considering the rapid advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI), on consumer behavior and engagement with sustainable fashion. The unprecedented boom in AI presents unique opportunities to revolutionize consumer decision-making processes and enhance awareness of sustainable apparel. Studies should investigate how AI-driven platforms can significantly influence consumer choices and behaviors toward sustainable fashion. For instance, AI-driven platforms can enhance transparency in the supply chain, allowing consumers to make more informed choices about the sustainability of their purchases. AI can also be used for educational purposes to increase consumers' knowledge about sustainable apparel. Integrating AI into mobile applications and e-commerce platforms to deliver real-time educational interventions could further encourage sustainable practices. For example, when consumers engage with fast fashion products, AI systems could recommend more sustainable alternatives or provide data on the environmental

impact associated with their selections. Over time, these AI-driven interventions have the potential to influence consumer behavior, gradually shifting purchasing patterns toward more sustainable consumption by reinforcing awareness and promoting ethical choices. Additionally, the potential of Virtual Reality (VR) to create immersive shopping experiences that promote sustainable choices warrants thorough examination. Understanding consumers' willingness to adapt to these state-of-the-art technologies is crucial for developing strategies that effectively leverage AI and VR to foster greater engagement with sustainable fashion. This line of inquiry is essential for advancing the field and promoting more sustainable consumer practices.

Furthermore, researchers should investigate the efficacy of specific marketing tactics and communication strategies in promoting sustainable apparel consumption. This is particularly important because current literature has largely overlooked this area, despite recognizing the influence of social media and brand messaging on consumer behavior. Moreover, while the impact of education and knowledge on consumer behavior has been acknowledged, there is a notable gap in research regarding effective strategies to enhance consumer literacy and understanding of sustainability issues in the fashion industry. Novel metrics and infographics to depict "sustainable-ness" of apparel products should be included in product labels, with increased visibility. Therefore, future studies should not only aim to develop educational interventions and communication strategies but also leverage social media and branding to empower consumers to make informed and sustainable choices. Investigating how different messaging approaches and platforms affect consumer attitudes and behaviors toward sustainable fashion will be crucial for advancing these goals.

5. Study Limitation

One of the primary limitations of this study is its reliance on published peer-reviewed articles, which excludes more recent research that may exist in pre-print formats or conference proceedings. Gray literature was not included, as it typically does not undergo the same rigorous peer-review process as published articles. While this approach ensures that only validated and thoroughly evaluated literature is used, it limits the study's ability to capture the very current developments in consumer behavior and sustainable business practices.

Additionally, the bibliometric analysis offers a snapshot of the literature over a specific point in time and does not necessarily identify the gradient prevalent in sustainable apparel consumption. Consumer preferences and corporate sustainability practices are dynamic and have likely evolved over the period covered by the selected articles. Several external factors, such as the increasing demand for ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) practices by investors [94], may have raised consumer awareness and the availability of CSR-friendly apparel, thereby influencing purchasing behavior. Furthermore, large monetary expansions in developed economies [95] may have led to abnormal capital flows into emerging markets, where much of the global apparel manufacturing occurs, potentially incentivizing outsourcing at the expense of sustainability efforts. Finally, increased policy uncertainty, such as that following Brexit [96], could have impacted global apparel operations by shifting production to different regions, each with varying sustainability standards.

These broader economic and political trends, some of which are latent, underscore the fluid nature of consumer and corporate behavior, emphasizing the importance of continuous research to track and adapt to these evolving dynamics. Future studies could benefit from incorporating real-time data and emerging literature to offer a more nuanced understanding of how such macroeconomic factors shape sustainability within the apparel industry and influence consumer preferences.

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