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Review

Clothing Brands' Sustainability Practices: A Bibliometric Approach

Md Abu Hasan [1,*], Saurav Chandra Talukder [1,2], Zoltán Lakner [3,4] and Ágoston Temesi [3]

[1] Doctoral School of Economic and Regional Sciences, Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Pater Karoly Street 1, 2100 Godollo, Hungary; talukder.saurav.chandra@phd.uni-mate.hu
[2] Department of Accounting and Information Systems, Jashore University of Science and Technology, Jashore 7408, Bangladesh
[3] Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics, Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Villányi Str. 29-43, 1118 Budapest, Hungary; lakner.zoltan.karoly@uni-mate.hu (Z.L.); temesi.agoston@uni-mate.hu (Á.T.)
[4] Tashkent State Agrarian University, Kichik Halqa Road, 1, Tashkent 100110, Uzbekistan
* Correspondence: hasan.md.abu@phd.uni-mate.hu

Abstract: The clothing industry greatly impacts the global economy by producing billions of pieces of clothing and employing millions. However, it negatively impacts the environment, as it is one of the most polluting sectors in the world. This bibliometric review aims to identify influential authors and affiliations, journals, productive and cited countries, emerging and recent themes, and future research directions focusing on the dynamics of clothing brands' sustainability practices. A comprehensive dataset from Scopus and the Web of Science contains 612 articles, and Biblioshiny and VOSviewer were used to analyze the data. Findings reveal that sustainability is not just a concern for developed countries but is also gaining attention in emerging economies like India. This bibliometric analysis presents its relationship with sustainable development goals (SDGs), combines performance analysis and science mapping of clothing brands' sustainability practices, and evaluates thematic clusters to highlight future research scopes to fill the literature gap for further concentration on behavioral aspects, advanced supply chains, effective communication, and promoting the usage of sustainable technologies, which can help to align with business models for sustainability and resilience. Therefore, clothing brands' sustainability practices should focus on smart and functional clothing through eco-friendly manufacturing and designing long-lasting clothes to enrich clothing performance. They should adopt innovative technologies for resource utilization, recycling, waste management, supply chain, and also emphasize communication with the consumers to encourage them to purchase eco-friendly and long-lasting clothes.

Keywords: brand; fashion; sustainability; sustainable clothing; apparel; sustainable development goals (SDGs); bibliometric analysis

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1. Introduction

The clothing market is worth USD 1.3 trillion and employs over 300 million people globally (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). It has a substantial economic impact on business but also causes great environmental and social suffering (Öndoğan et al., 2022). A total of 15%, or 60 billion m^2 (10% Ukraine's total area), of the 400 billion m^2 of fabric produced in the apparel sector in 2015 was wasted (Rissanen, 2013). A total of 20% of the worldwide wastewater comes from the apparel and textile industry (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). The industry uses 20% of global water consumption and emits 1.7 billion tons of CO_2, contributing 10% of the global emissions (Abbate et al., 2023a). Despite many

obstacles, the apparel business offers innovative opportunities that can drive change and create a significant financial impact. This field promotes constructive transformation, shapes business practices, and fosters a more ethical and sustainable textile industry (Olson, 2022). Concerns about social justice and environmental issues have emerged due to the rapid growth of fast fashion. Therefore, the industry has implemented various sustainability measures to address environmental, social, and economic concerns (Fuxman et al., 2022). The extensive supply chain of the garment industry, along with its high labor and energy demands, has turned sustainability into a buzzword (Thomas, 2020). It can be defined as resource-efficient development that conserves resources for future generations. According to Öndoğan et al. (2022), sustainability highlights the sensible use of natural resources because they are available in limited quantities. Amed et al. found that most generation Z consumers believe clothing brands are responsible for environmental and social causes (Amed et al., 2019). However, lack of information, accessibility, and perception of fashion hinder the adoption of sustainable clothing (Di Benedetto, 2017). Implementing sustainable practices, such as using environmentally friendly materials and efficient production methods, can significantly reduce negative environmental impacts (Gálvez-Sánchez et al., 2024). Sustainable practices in fashion encompass social dimensions, including fair labor practices and community engagement. By adopting sustainability principles, fashion brands can enhance their social responsibility, leading to improved brand reputation and consumer trust (Pero et al., 2020).

However, due to lack of resources, businesses find it more and more challenging to cut expenses, lessen their environmental impact, and maintain their position in a cutthroat industry (Thomas, 2020). Employing demarketing techniques and incorporating eco-friendly products are two ways businesses show their dedication to environmental sustainability. Businesses engage in various sustainability-focused initiatives to maintain steady growth (Jung et al., 2020). However, sustainability practices impact consumers (Sun & Ko, 2016); for example, some clothing brands use their websites to share information about their sustainability initiatives. Because clothing brands that promote their sustainability policies disclose that they have implemented approaches that align with their principles, consumers concerned about sustainability issues may experience a sense of affiliation or kinship with these companies. As someone who values sustainability, for example, an individual might decide to stay away from specific clothing companies and the brands that go with them if the people who make decisions for these brands decide to use fibers that are difficult to biodegrade. However, consumers might identify with and decide to buy from other clothing brands that sell clothing produced from biodegradable natural fibers (Noh & Johnson, 2019). The demand for eco-friendly products across several industries has surged due to consumers' growing knowledge of sustainability challenges. The apparel sector participates significantly in this development (Rausch et al., 2021). Several definitions of sustainable fashion have been proposed in the literature on its characterization. According to Papadopoulou et al., "Sustainable fashion is defined as clothing that encompasses fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labor conditions; that is not harmful to the environment or workers through the use of biodegradable and organic cotton and designed for long-term use; that is produced in an ethical production system, if possible, locally; that causes little or no environmental impact and makes use of eco-labeled or recycled materials"(Papadopoulou et al., 2022).

According to Radzymińska and Garbowska (2023), clothing brands' social involvement influences their products' positive image and popularity. Wulff mentioned that clothing brands strive to attain transparency, which has become a desirable goal (Wulff, 2019). To secure business legitimacy and brand trust, clothing brands reveal their transparency reports (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). Additionally, brands frequently associate

themselves with sustainable behavior in brand content marketing to increase consumer familiarity. However, other than the sustainable behavior of materials, consumers cannot react to any other sustainable practices of clothing businesses. Clothing companies need to build strong, viable relationships with their consumers (Zhang et al., 2023). They should identify other consumer concerns (e.g., quality, durability, affordability, etc.) and modify their advertising strategy to meet these needs. Clothing brands' adoption of sustainability practices is also important to enhance consumer knowledge of sustainable consumption and influence their purchasing behavior (Mandarić et al., 2022). However, research on clothing brands' sustainability practices needs to expand and evaluate clothing brands' interventions to achieve sustainable development goals (SGDs) (Sinha et al., 2023). It is also important for marketers to explore how marketing variables reduce sustainability gaps and greatly influence consumer behavior to move towards a sustainable future (Mandarić et al., 2022). This research explores influential authors and affiliations, journals, productive and cited countries, emerging and recent themes, and future research directions, focusing on the dynamics of clothing brands' sustainability practices. Therefore, we employed a bibliometric approach to identify the research trends in different aspects to fill the literature gap and provide future directions for researchers and marketers for policy implications. Additionally, it will help marketers and policymakers formulate the brand's strategy for sustainability and resilience. On the other hand, this study suggests that researchers explore deeper knowledge to meet the future research demand. The following sections will discuss the review of the literature, methods and workflow of the study, and results and findings. Finally, the conclusion chapter incorporates the research implications and future scopes, limitations of the study, and a brief overview of the study with practical applications.

2. Review of Literature

The literature on sustainable clothing is diverse and takes different directions. It addresses a vast research area and generates unique ideas over time. Table 1 summarizes the relevant literature in recent years.

Table 1. Summary of recent literature in the field of sustainable clothing and our research.

Source	Scope of the Review	Sample Articles	Time Period	Type of Study
Abbate et al. (2023b)	This study examines consumer behavior regarding sustainable clothing, circular economy initiatives, and sustainability challenges throughout the supply chain. It also identifies the drivers and barriers to implementing corporate social responsibility (CSR) and circular economy practices.	178	2000–2020	Systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis
Adamkiewicz et al. (2022)	This review identifies the challenges of implementing a more sustainable circular economy in design aimed at recycling, minimizing by-products, reducing energy consumption, and encouraging responsible purchasing habits. The findings inform fashion brands about the risks and benefits associated with greenwashing practices and sustainable fashion industry.	38	2019–2022	Systematic literature review
Cui and Shaari (2023)	This research analyzes the current situation and development direction between consumers and the sustainable behavior of the textile industry.	1010	2014–2023	Scientometric review

Table 1. *Cont.*

Source	Scope of the Review	Sample Articles	Time Period	Type of Study
Islam et al. (2021)	The diversity and complexity of environmental practices across different manufacturing processes are demonstrated in this review, which also develops a conceptual framework that directs the environmental analysis of sustainable practices in the textile, apparel, and fashion (TAF) industries. According to the study, few studies have been conducted in developing countries where most TAF production occurs, and a few studies have been discussed on the upstream steps of clothing washing and dyeing, as well as the production of trims, accessories, and packaging.	91	January 2010–June 2020	Systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis
Karaosman et al. (2016)	This article shows variation in the distribution of social and environmental sustainability practices found in earlier studies.	38	2006–2016	Systematic literature review
Kemi and Zilahy (2023)	The study gives an overview of the literature on consumer behavior toward green fashion goods, which also identifies the most important obstacles and spotlights important motivators.	104	2011–2021	Systematic literature review
Luo et al. (2021)	This study examines methods for quantifying environmental sustainability, such as life cycle assessment, environmental footprint, eco-efficiency, and the Higg Index. It discusses the methodological limitations in the particular setting of the clothing and textiles sector.	56	2016–2020	Systematic literature review
Nascimento and Loureiro (2024)	Finding influential authors and journals, as well as current and developing issues, theories, methodologies, contexts, and future research directions, are all part of the bibliometric review's description of the intellectual framework and dynamics of the sustainable branding discipline. Corporate branding and reputation, sustainable company development, ethical consumerism and sustainable branding, CSR, brand equity and green marketing, and sustainability branding in hotel tourism are the six clusters identified by the study.	1509	January 2001 and May 2023	Bibliometric analysis
Prado et al. (2022)	This article explores recent scientific advancements in sustainability within the fashion retail sector. In addition to identifying the primary obstacles, advantages, and new trends for this industry in the near future, it covers a wide range of topics pertaining to fashion retail, such as slow fashion, fast fashion, supply chain sustainability, and the sustainable production and consumption of textile products.	93	2009–2021	Bibliometric analysis
Ruslan et al. (2023)	This study highlights the knowledge structure, development, and research trends in this area while illuminating the intricate dynamics that characterize sustainable consumer behavior within this particular setting.	90	2015–2023	Bibliometric analysis

Table 1. *Cont.*

Source	Scope of the Review	Sample Articles	Time Period	Type of Study
Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2020)	The impact of CSR on sustainability in the fashion sector is assessed in this review. With commitments made for the economy, environment, and/or society, the CSR strategy is centered on sustainability, business models, and/or supply chain innovation. The manufacturing of eco-friendly products and worker safety are prioritized.	209	2003–2019	Systematic literature review
Vesterinen and Syrjälä (2022)	This study aims to develop a relational framework for the ideas surrounding the consumption cycle and anti-consumption of apparel from the environmental sustainability standpoint. It gives consumers more precise instructions on how to change their behavior and helps businesses create business models that detach usage from the negative implications of consuming.	58	No limit until June 2020	Systematic literature review
C. L. White et al. (2017)	This study investigates the "discursive polyphony" and uncertainty among consumers that may be addressed by strategic communication management, even in the face of mounting stakeholder demand on clothing companies to embrace CSR and engage with stakeholders over CSR.	73	No limit–2015	Bibliometric analysis
Wu et al. (2022)	This bibliometric review offers a knowledge roadmap for the textile and apparel sector's sustainable growth, evaluating its present practices and research while offering useful references for academics and those outside the business.	863	1987–2019	Scientometric analysis
Yang et al. (2017)	The primary viewpoints of this study emphasize sustainable retailing in the fashion industry, emphasizing that the most important areas of the field include eco-labeling, green branding, fast fashion, slow fashion, disposable fashion, reverse logistics in fashion retailing, and new retail opportunities in e-commerce.	48	2000–2016	Systematic literature review
Our paper	This bibliometric review explores to identify influential authors and affiliations, journals, productive and cited countries, emerging and recent themes, and future research directions focusing on the dynamics of clothing brands' sustainability practices. Our study expands the literature on clothing brands' sustainability practices and evaluates clothing brands' interventions to achieve sustainable development goals (SGDs).	612	2001–2024	Bibliometric literature review

Source: Authors' work.

Abbate et al. conducted a systematic and bibliometric review over the past two decades investigating consumer behavior towards sustainable clothing, circular economy initiatives, and sustainability challenges across the supply chain (Abbate et al., 2023b). However, Adamkiewicz et al. (2022) emphasized the challenges of implementing a more sustainable circular economy in design with the intention of recycling, reducing by-products, lowering energy consumption, and promoting wise purchasing habits. They stated that the fashion industry, known for its significant environmental impact, often employs greenwashing

tactics to appeal to the growing consumer demand for sustainable products. This deceptive marketing misguides consumers and hampers genuine sustainability efforts by creating a false sense of progress. It highlighted the risks and benefits of greenwashing practices and the sustainable fashion industry. According to Becker-Olsen and Potucek (2013), greenwashing refers to the practice where companies mislead consumers by falsely portraying their products or practices as environmentally friendly. Therefore, Adamkiewicz et al. (2022) recommended transparent and trustable certification to prevent misleading marketing strategies, thereby aiding consumers in making responsible choices. It also underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach to a product's life cycle, focusing on sustainable practices from design to disposal to mitigate the adverse effects of greenwashing and promote true sustainability in the fashion industry.

Cui and Shaari (2023) evaluated the current state and future directions of consumer-related sustainable practices in textiles published from 2014 to 2023. They identified eight primary research areas, encompassing themes such as sustainable consumption behavior, eco-friendly materials, and the influence of consumer education on sustainable choices. However, the diversity of sustainable practices employed at different manufacturing stages in the textile, apparel, and fashion (TAF) industries highlights the complexity of achieving environmental sustainability (Islam et al., 2021). In response, Karaosman et al. found that important environmental issues like biodiversity receive little attention at the supply chain level, while social issues like human rights are not fully addressed in manufacturing processes (Karaosman et al., 2016). Despite growing pressure from stakeholders for apparel businesses to adopt CSR practices and engage in transparent communication, a "discursive polyphony", or a diversity of discourses, leads to consumer confusion (H. D. White & Griffith, 1981). Additionally, Kemi & Zilahy found that higher costs, limited availability, and a lack of information regarding sustainable options are significant barriers to sustainable fashion consumption (Kemi & Zilahy, 2023). Furthermore, sustainable anti-consumption explicitly aims to reduce acquisition and disposal while increasing the usage phase rather than opposing all stages of consumption. By offering more precise guidelines for consumers to modify their behavior and for businesses to create business models that detach usage from the negative connotations of consumption, this research advances sustainability in the fashion industry conceptually and socially (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022).

Research conducted by Nascimento and Loureiro (2024) explored trends in sustainability branding. The foundational phase emphasized corporate image, philanthropy, and stakeholder pressures. Later, the focus shifted to sustainable development goals and global supply chains. Ultimately, they identified recent trends, including the rise in green marketing, circularity paradigms, ethical consumerism, and dynamics within hyperconnected societies. Prado et al. (2022) pointed out key themes in the literature, such as slow fashion, fast fashion, supply chain sustainability, and sustainable production and textiles consumption. They also highlighted the necessity for further research to enhance sustainable practices, and perform comparative studies across various regions to comprehend better diverse consumer perspectives (Ruslan et al., 2023). The literature review finds that deceptive marketing (Adamkiewicz et al., 2022), the complexity of achieving environmental sustainability due to different manufacturing stages (Islam et al., 2021), lack of attention to the supply chain, and social issues like human rights are not fully addressed (Karaosman et al., 2016). Therefore, the evaluation could help clothing brands and researchers to take further interventions.

3. Methods and Workflow of the Study

3.1. Data Retrieval Procedure by Using PRISMA Protocol

Researchers systematically conducted the study by using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol (See Figure 1). The approach has extensive use in several fields such as social science literature (Silva, 2024) and management and leadership (Talukder & Miah, 2023). According to (Boaye Belle & Zhao, 2023), PRISMA provides a consistently formatted way to describe research identification, screening, and inclusion. In addition to ensuring the review's overall quality and transparency, the PRISMA approach also guarantees the review's methodological soundness and reproducibility (Moher et al., 2016). The literature collection framework of PRISMA started with the identification phase (Moher et al., 2009), which entailed a thorough search of peer-reviewed articles from the databases. The Web of Science and Scopus databases were selected due to their capacity to identify studies published in reputable journals, ensuring that the research quality and results have undergone rigorous evaluation (Norris & Oppenheim, 2007; Pranckutė, 2021). Moreover, the Web of Science and Scopus are widely used for bibliometric analysis because of their extensive and selective journal coverage, detailed metadata, reliable citation counts, user-friendly interfaces, and consistent data quality (Singh et al., 2021). Bibliometric research can utilize various databases, including PubMed and Google Scholar; however, PubMed covers especially medical sciences and was unsuitable in this case (Gusenbauer, 2019; Martín-Martín et al., 2018), while Google scholar contains gray literature in addition to the accepted, peer-reviewed, high-quality literature, so it requires extra effort for researchers to ensure considering only the reliable sources (Haddaway et al., 2015).

Thus, we employed the Web of Science and Scopus databases, utilizing various truncation, wildcard, and Boolean operators in the advanced search function. We also assessed several keywords combinations to identify the optimal set that encompasses all the relevant articles regarding the research field while avoiding extraneous topics unnecessary for this study. The data was collected on 7 January 2025. Researchers considered the period up to the full calendar year of 2024.

During the identification phase, the search terms ("brand*") AND ("sustainab*") AND ("cloth*" OR "clothing*" OR "apparel*" OR "garment" OR "fashion*") AND ("environment*" OR "economic*" OR "social") were employed to identify relevant titles, abstracts, and keywords, thereby encompassing the extensive scope of the study. The goal of the search approach was to find and obtain as few publications as possible that were very relevant. The Web of Science database initially yielded 512 documents, while Scopus yielded 774 documents, encompassing all possible combinations of keywords in abstracts, titles, or keywords.

Following the identification phase, the screening phase follows. In this phase, only papers written in English were considered because English is the main language used for academic writing, which makes it easier to reach people around the world and communicate with academic professionals. Only articles published between 2001 and 2024 were considered. Exclusion criteria were set up to select only peer-reviewed articles, thereby ensuring the quality of the publications. These publications undergo a strict peer-review process and are defined by scientific methodologies and empirical studies, frequently providing high-quality and dependable research findings. Therefore, books, book chapters, and conference proceedings were not included in the study. Utilizing all exclusion and inclusion criteria (see Table 2), we obtained metadata from Web of Science (449) and Scopus (457). Initially, we imported the two distinct datasets into R Studio (Version 2024. 12.0+467) and converted them into the R data format using various codes. There was no risk of data loss because we transformed the Web of Science and Scopus databases into the R data

format prior to merging. We merged the two datasets in R Studio with the bibliometrix and xlsx packages. We eliminated 294 duplicate documents from two databases and ultimately identified 612 articles included in our bibliometric analysis study.

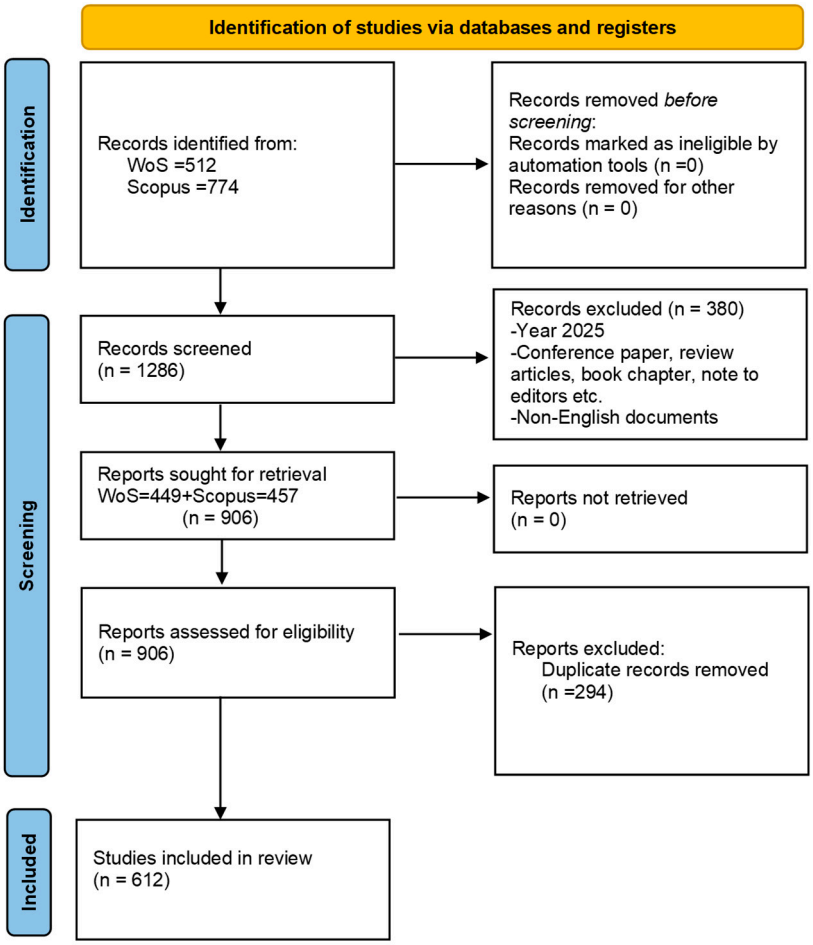

Figure 1. Data retrieval procedure by using PRISMA protocol.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Keywords	**(“brand*”) AND (“sustainab*”) AND (“cloth*” OR “clothing*” OR “apparel*” OR “garment” OR “fashion*”) AND (“environment*” OR “economic*” OR “social”)**	
Database	Web of Science	Scopus
Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Years	Up to 2024	Year 2025
Types of documents	Articles only	Conference paper, review articles, book chapter, note to editors etc.
Language	English only	Non-English documents

Source: authors’ work.

3.2. Methods

Bibliometric analysis is extensively utilized when handling large volumes of scientific data owing to its thoroughness and prevalence. In doing so, it explains not only the historical development of a field but also its promising future paths (Donthu et al., 2021; Talukder et al., 2024). Bibliometrics, a part of informatics, employ various statistical methods to assess the significance of academic publications and the prevalence of their findings (Cuccurullo et al., 2016). Literature reviews are essential in academic research as they enable scholars to evaluate the existing state of knowledge within a specific field

(Linnenluecke et al., 2020). Accordingly, we conducted a bibliometric review of the literature alongside a detailed bibliometric evaluation for this research. This analytical method was devised to address the exponential proliferation of published knowledge and comprises three primary components: the quantification of a particular scientific activity, its effects as indicated by the aggregate number of article citations, and the connections that exist within articles (Narin et al., 1994; Talukder & Miah, 2023). Researchers employed VOSviewer and Biblioshiny to analyze the most prominent journals, academic fields, authors, institutions, and research domains and their underlying publication patterns.

Along with examining pivotal studies, we employed co-authorship analysis to identify the co-authorship network by countries from 2001 to 31 December 2024. Co-authorship analysis, first proposed by Melvin M. Kessler in 1963, is a widely utilized bibliometric method for examining collaborative patterns among authors based on shared publications (Kessler, 1963).

Using the technique in VOSviewer software (1.6.20 version), researchers were able to identify the major collaboration among countries that have guided research over the last two decades. In connection with the bibliometric study, we performed a comprehensive literature assessment to evaluate the current state of the field and to pinpoint emerging themes and prospective research needs through content analysis of each cluster. Moreover, content analysis is an extremely powerful technique for shedding light on the development of research themes over time, identifying previously unexplored patterns in the field of study, and proposing cutting-edge direction for future research (Talukder & Lakner, 2023). Hence, extensive content analysis was performed on articles that had identical network connections. We employed VOSviewer to analyze a dataset of 612 articles for the purpose of creating bibliometric maps through the visualization of similarities between methods. Researchers employed Biblioshiny for bibliometric analysis to investigate publication patterns, identify prominent authors and affiliations, explore top productive and most cited countries, evaluate the most relevant sources, thematic mapping and thematic evaluation.

4. Result and Discussion

We used descriptive statistical analysis to achieve a broad overview of the most significant traits of the available literature on sustainable apparel. The most significant findings from this study period are compiled in Table 3. Only 80 articles have single-authored publications, indicating that most of the research is carried out in collaborations, even though 1357 unique authors indicate a sizable research community contributing to this research domain. Additionally, the discipline trends toward co-authorship, as evidenced by the 126 single-authored papers and the 2.77 average number of co-authors in each document. With an international co-authorship percentage of 18.95%, cross-border partnerships are involved in almost one-fifth of the study. This enhances the publications' diversity and reach by reflecting an international research perspective.

The dataset, which spans 2001–2024, shows more than 20 years of publication activity with an annual growth rate of 23.4%. This suggests that research output has increased rapidly over time, which indicates expanding interest and contributions in the subject. According to the study, 612 documents have been published, presenting moderate research contributions, dispersed throughout 264 academic journals. With an average of 16.39 citations per document, the research outputs appear to have a comparatively strong academic influence and are well-referenced within the academic community. The dataset's inclusion of new and older publications presents a balanced perspective of research trends, as indicated by the document's average age of 4.72 years. A total of 22,670 references have been cited, reflecting the extensive literature review and engagement with previous research. In addition, the dataset contains 1220 Keywords Plus (ID) and 1773 Author's Keywords (DE),

indicating a broad thematic scope and diverse research interests. Author's Keywords (DE) are the specific terms or phrases that the authors of an article select to describe the main themes, topics, or subjects of their research. However, Keywords Plus (ID) is a term used by databases to describe an automated system of generating additional keywords for an article based on the references it cites.

Table 3. Primary information.

Description	Results
Timespan	2001:2024
Sources (Journals)	264
Documents	612
Annual Growth Rate %	23.4
Document Average Age	4.72
Average citations per doc	16.39
References	22,670
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	1220
Author's Keywords (DE)	1773
AUTHORS	
Authors	1357
Authors of single-authored document	80
AUTHOR COLLABORATION	
Single-authored document	126
Co-Authors per document	2.77
International co-authorships %	18.95

Source: Authors' work.

According to Figure 2, the annual scientific production of articles and articles published in this field began in 2001 and advanced slowly until 2016, indicating that the topic was an emerging concern. The fact that there have been many more publications since 2017 suggests that the 2015 United Nations (UN) sustainable development goals have significantly impacted and attracted attention from academics. The publication trend in 2024 indicates that there will be more research articles in the future.

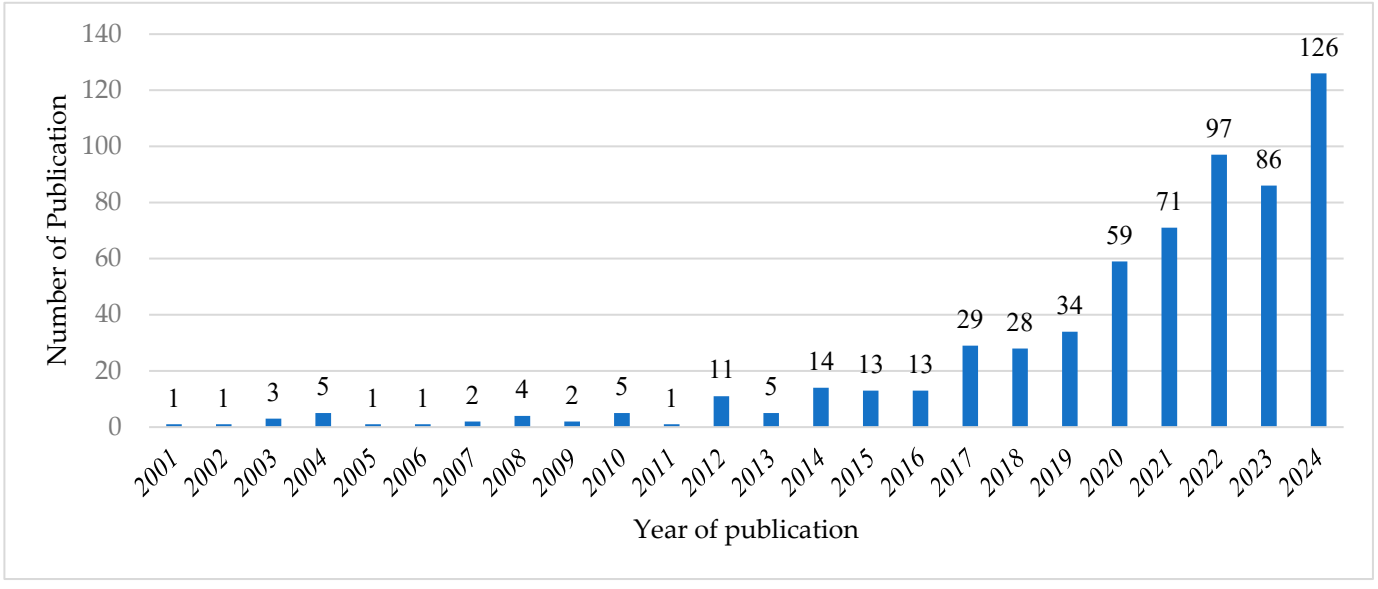

Figure 2. Annual scientific production (2001–2024). Source: authors' work.

Table 4 lists the ten most productive journals on clothing brands' sustainable practices. We provide the journal's impact factor from the journal's website and its ranking from Scimago. A total of 216 papers, or 35.29% of the 612 articles chosen, were published by the top ten journals. With 77 articles, *Sustainability* tops the list, followed by *the Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, which has 25 articles. Third, with 22 articles, is the *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, closely followed by *Textile Outlook International*, which has 21. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *Journal of Performance Apparel Markets*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, and *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics* comprise the remaining periodicals. The publications' content distribution is centered on brand management, fashion or clothing marketing, and environmental sustainability. The other research fields of logistics, customer service, and product management are also included. Nonetheless, these publications demonstrate the breadth of research on the multidisciplinary perspectives and sustainable practices of apparel manufacturers across various disciplines of science.

Table 4. Top 10 journals in the research domain.

Journal	Scimago Ranking	Impact Factor	Publisher	Articles
Sustainability	Q1 (0.67)	3.3	MDPI, Basel, Switzerland	77
Journal of Global Fashion Marketing	Q1 (0.89)	3.3	Taylor and Francis Ltd., London, United Kingdom	25
Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management	Q1 (0.91)	3.2	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd., Leeds, United Kingdom	22
Textile Outlook International	Q4 (0.1)	0.02	Textiles Intelligence Ltd., Cheshire, United Kingdom	21
Journal of Cleaner Production	Q1 (2.06)	9.8	Elsevier Ltd., London, United Kingdom	18
Performance Apparel Markets	Q4 (0.1)	0.13	Textiles Intelligence Ltd.	14
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	Q1 (2.99)	11	Elsevier Ltd., London, United Kingdom	12
Journal of Business Research	Q1 (3.13)	10.5	Elsevier Inc., New York City, United States	10
Journal of Product and Brand Management	Q1 (1.69)	5.2	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd., Leeds, United Kingdom	10
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	Q1 (0.96)	3.9	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd., Leeds, United Kingdom	7

Source: authors' work.

Table 5 and Figure 3 indicate that the United States of America (USA) is in first place with 164 publications and 27% of the total contributions. This demonstrates the nation's leadership in academic productivity and research. With 110 articles (18%), China comes in second, demonstrating its growing influence in international research and its strong emphasis on scientific breakthroughs. With 94 articles (15%), the United Kingdom (UK) comes in third, demonstrating Europe's substantial contribution to research output. North America is well-represented in the region, as evidenced by the USA's (27%) and Canada's (4%) combined 31% contribution to the total output. Asia's increasing dominance in research is demonstrated by the combined 42% contributions from China (18%), South Korea (13%), and India (11%). Additionally, the UK (15%), Italy (14%), Spain (9%), and Portugal (6%) all contribute 44%, highlighting Europe's dominance in academic output. This table demonstrates the United States' dominance in academic publications, with China and the United Kingdom collectively contributing 60% of the total research output.

Asia's increasing sway and Europe's consistent contributions point to a globally dispersed scientific endeavor.

Table 5. Top 10 most productive countries.

Country	Publication	Contribution (%)	Continent
United States of America	164	27	North America
China	110	18	Asia
United Kingdom	94	15	Europe
Italy	83	14	Europe
South Korea	81	13	Asia
India	66	11	Asia
Spain	55	9	Europe
Australia	44	7	Oceania
Portugal	38	6	Europe
Canada	24	4	North America

Source: authors' work.

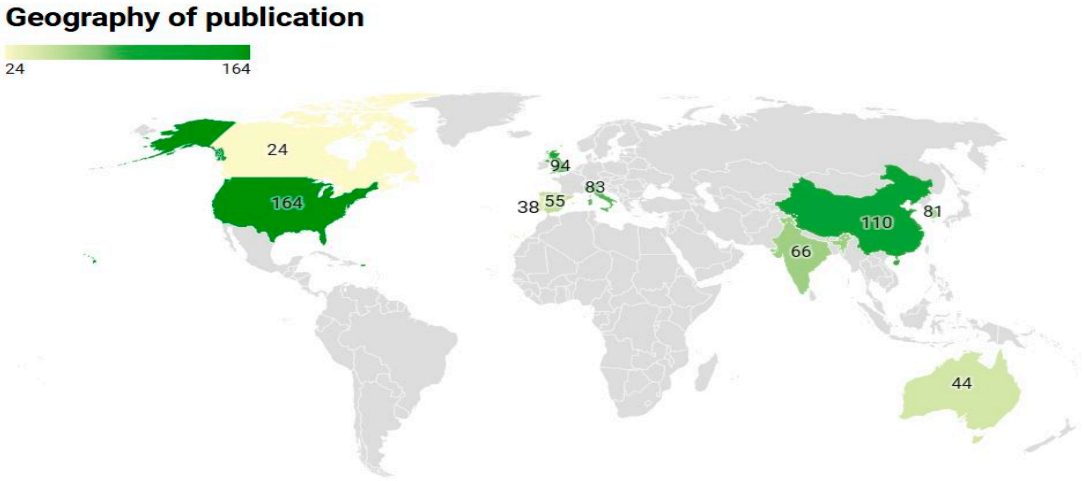

Figure 3. Top 10 countries based on publication numbers. Source: Authors' work.

Figure 4 illustrates the most cited countries in the research field of clothing brands' sustainability. The USA ranks highest on the list with 1425 citations and an average article citation of 17. The UK follows in second place with 1352 citations and an average article citation of 30, while Italy is third with 1108 citations and an average citation of 24.6. South Korea, China, and India follow with 1002, 737, and 608 citations, respectively.

Authors and their contributions are shown in Table 6, along with the number of articles they have written and their fractionalized count. Kim Y (3.00) and Lee S (2.87) have the highest fractionalized scores, indicating a relatively higher independent contribution or fewer co-authors with six and eight articles, respectively. With 10 articles and an equivalent of 2.75 fractionalized articles, Ko E is the most prolific author, indicating either solitary authorship or minimal collaboration. With eight publications but a somewhat lower fractionalized count of 2.33, Kim K is the second most important contributor, suggesting a high level of collaboration. With fractionalized counts of 2.33 and 2.25, respectively. Kim K and Kim J demonstrate moderate degrees of co-authorship and published seven articles each. Henninger C contributed six articles with a 1.23 article fractionalization count. A significant level of co-authorship is also shown by the fact that Choi T, De A M, and Kim N published five articles each and had fractionalized counts of 1.62, 1.50, and 2.17. Table 5 also shows a notable contribution by authors of Asian origin.

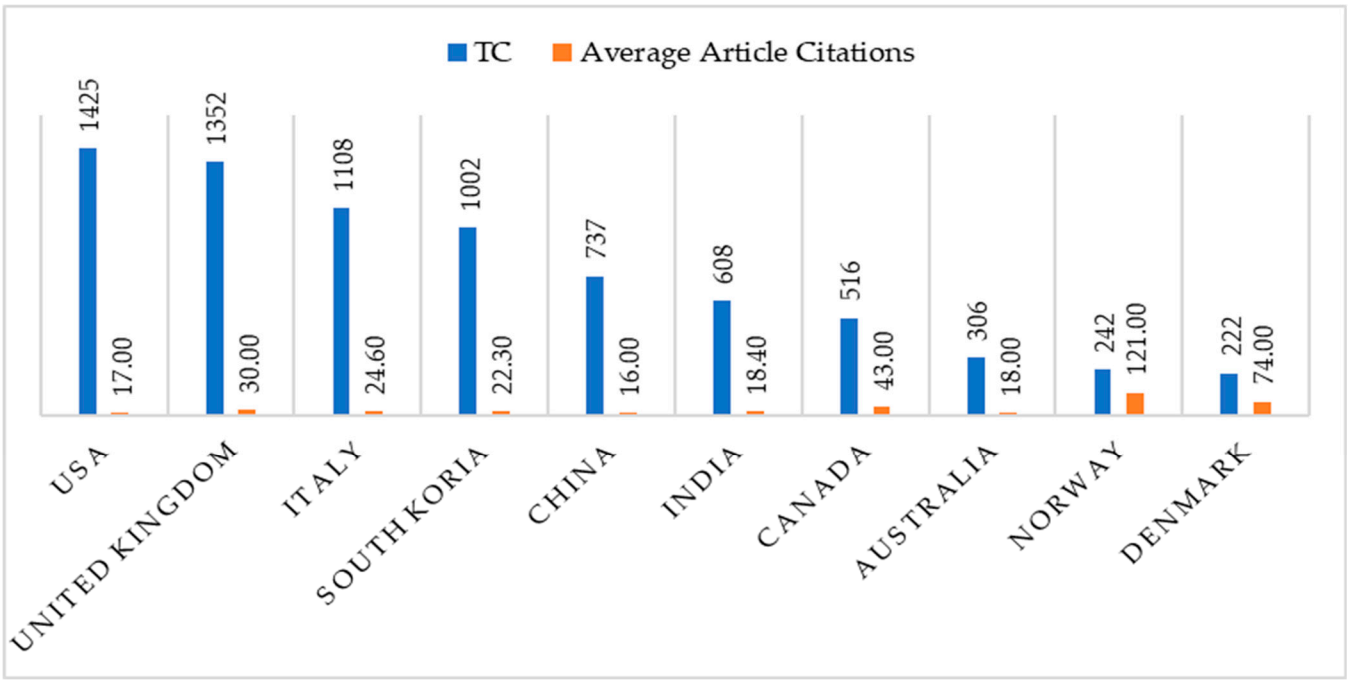

Figure 4. Top 10 most cited countries. Source: authors' work.

Table 6. Most relevant authors.

Authors	Articles	Articles Fractionalized
Ko E	10	2.75
Kim K	8	2.33
Lee S	8	2.87
Kim J	7	2.33
Kim S	7	2.25
Henninger C	6	1.23
Kim Y	6	3.00
Choi T	5	1.62
De A M	5	1.50
Kim N	5	2.17

Source: author's work.

Figure 5 displays the top 15 university affiliations based on publications. The most influential university with the most publications is Hong Kong Polytechnic University (17), followed closely by Yonsei University (16) and Donghua University (11), showing a strong institutional involvement. The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (9), Texas Tech University (9), and University of North Texas (8) hold a moderate presence but significant contribution. The finding demonstrates the dominance of Asian universities at the top, with strong representation from North American and European institutions. However, compared to Table 5, Figure 5 presents the top 4 universities outside the United States of America, which represent the contribution of individual institutions in this research domain.

Thematic mapping helps track the evolution of research topics over time by visualizing how themes grow, merge, or disappear. This bibliometric review finds four themes and categorizes the key topics. Motor themes represent "consumption, impact, behavior", which are well-developed and highly relevant, thus driving research in the field. These core topics significantly influence other areas. Sustainability, along with performance and industry represent foundational research topics that are essential to the field but are not yet highly specialized or mature; these are likely areas of growing attention to how sustainability and product performance interconnect. While important in specific contexts,

manufacturing, marketing, and company information are specialized, niche themes that are not central to the broader research field and have less overall influence. Lastly, textiles and clothing are still emerging fields with limited impact in the broader discipline; they may be losing relevance or are in early developmental stages. However, central themes like sustainable development, the textile industry, and textiles are at the center of the map, indicating a bridge between the different research areas (see Figure 6).

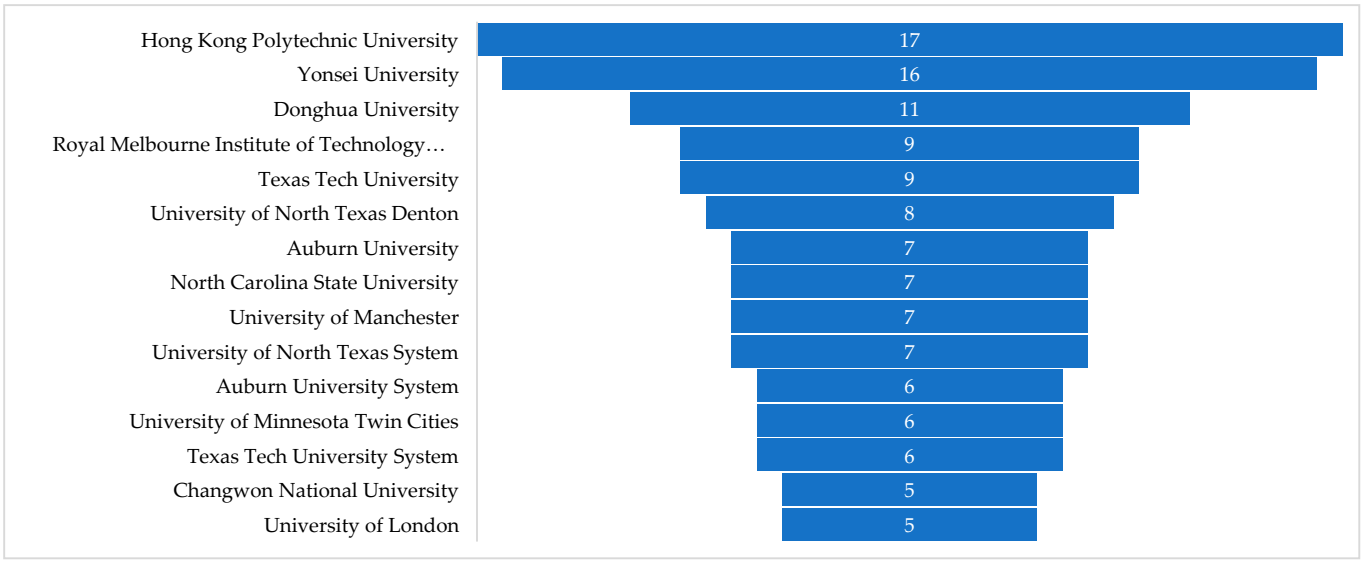

Figure 5. Most relevant affiliations according to the number of publications. Source: authors' work.

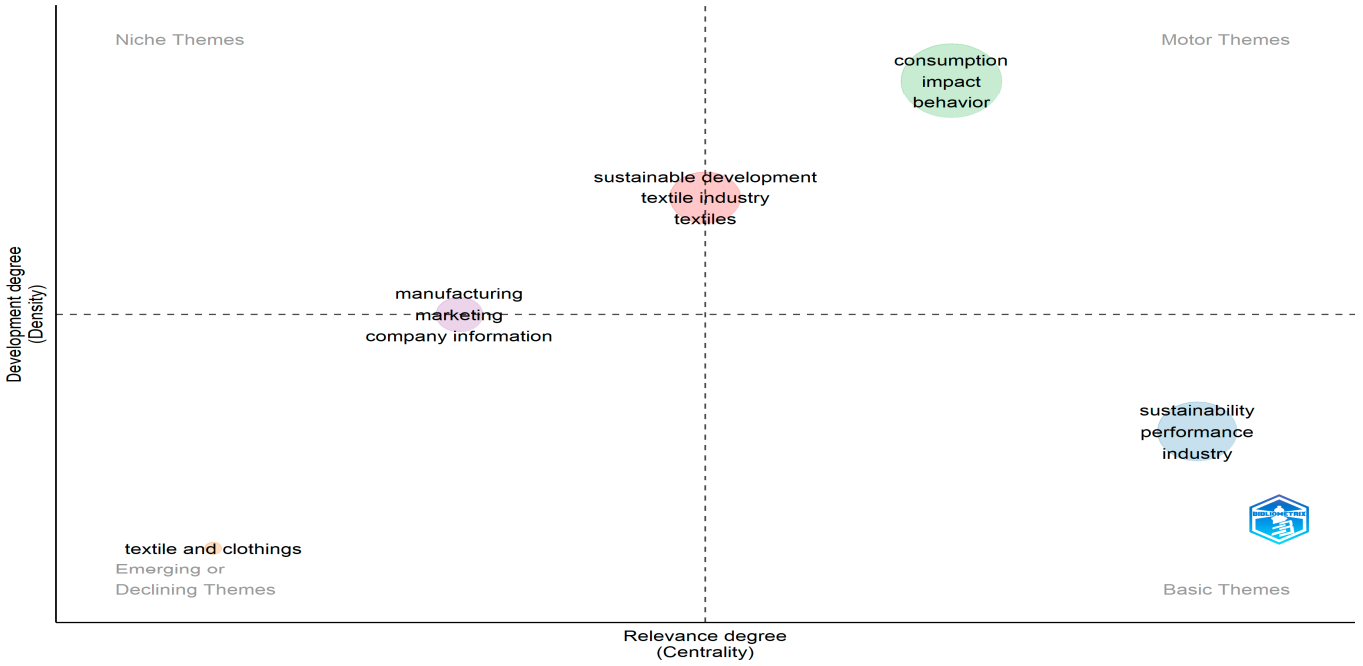

Figure 6. Thematic map. Source: authors' work.

A Sankey diagram illustrating the thematic evolution of subjects over four time periods—2001–2015, 2016–2020, 2021–2023, and 2024—is presented in Figure 7. During the first phase (2001–2015), the primary areas of focus were consumers, management, products, sustainability, consumption, CSR, production, finishing, the textile sector, and sales. Notably, sustainability and CSR reflect an early concern for ethical business practices. The emphasis on manufacturing and the textile sector suggests a focus on production-

related factors. In the second period (2016–2020), there is a shift toward behavior and sustainability, with product design, performance, sustainable development, and consumption becoming the main themes. The decline in CSR during this timeframe implies that sustainability has been absorbed into broader concepts. The focus of the third period (2021–2023) centers around social media and brands. With an emphasis on brands, supply chains, social media, research and development, sustainability, and impact, the themes continue to evolve. The increasing prominence of brands and social media indicates a shift towards consumer engagement and digital influence. Finally, the current and upcoming trends are discussed in the fourth period (2024). The most prominent themes of this cluster include consumption, supply chains, behavior, sustainability, sustainable development, technologies, and capabilities. The recurrence of actions and behaviors signifies a heightened awareness of shifts in company and consumer behavior. However, the capabilities and technologies reveal a transition toward advancements in supply chain management and sustainability technologies.

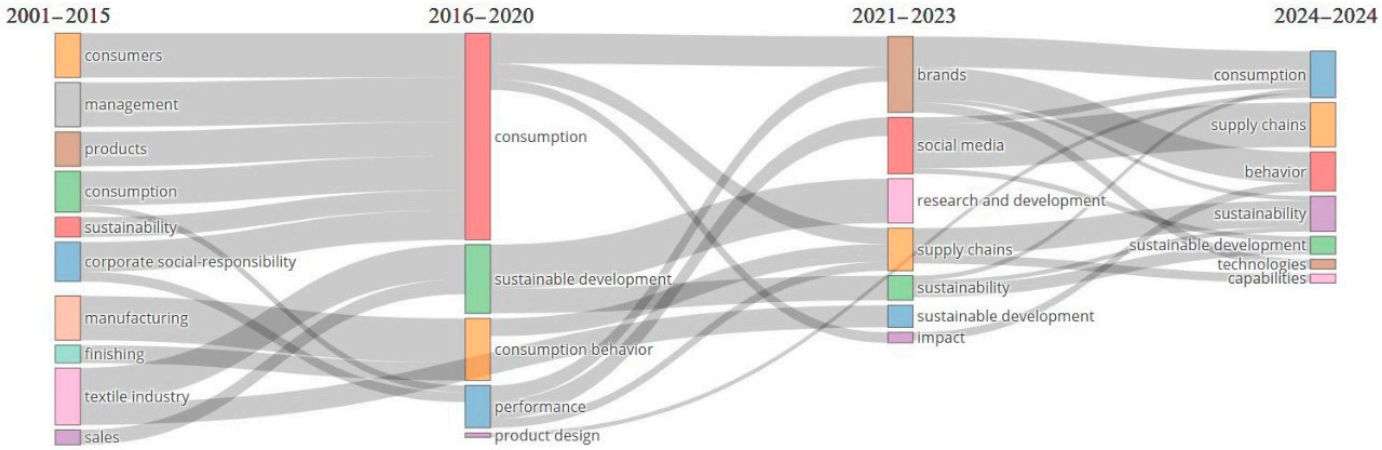

Figure 7. Thematic evaluation. Source: authors' work.

This thematic evolution indicates a shift from traditional business and production priorities to a focus on consumers, sustainability, and technology-driven research.

The relationships between important terms in the field of sustainable fashion are represented by the co-occurrence network visualization created with VOSviewer. The visualization aids in identifying key topics and research clusters by using nodes and edges to show the frequency and intensity of connections between various phrases. Figure 8 shows that "sustainability" has the largest and most central node, meaning it is the most commonly used term and has a high degree of interconnectedness with other terms. It has connections to several subdomains, indicating that clothing studies on sustainability are multidisciplinary. The colors represent four clusters. Keywords like "consumption", "behavior", "perceptions", "purchase intention", "attitude", "green products", and "trust" denoted in red color emphasize consumer attitudes, motivations, and behaviors related to sustainability in fashion. They also suggest that consumers' perceptions and trust in sustainable fashion impact their purchase intentions and ethical consumption. The green cluster represents "circular economy", "fashion industry", "apparel", "performance", "framework", and "management", which indicate sustainable production methods, circular economy principles, and sustainable business models in the fashion industry. Another blue cluster includes phrases such as "fashion", "luxury", "social media", "brand", "antecedents", and "communication." This cluster implies how fashion brands use corporate social responsibility (CSR), communication, and social media to promote sustainability. The final cluster, which is yellow and contains phrases like "sustainable fashion", "fast fashion",

"impact", "model", and "information", focuses on the negative impact of fast fashion and explores alternative models, such as slow fashion, ethical production, and sustainable materials. Nonetheless, the intricate details suggest a close relationship among various research topics. Additionally, sustainability in fashion is deeply interconnected, encompassing consumer behavior, supply chain dynamics, and branding strategies, along with social media, communication, trust, and purchase intention, highlighting the increasing importance of digital engagement and brand transparency in driving sustainable fashion adoption.

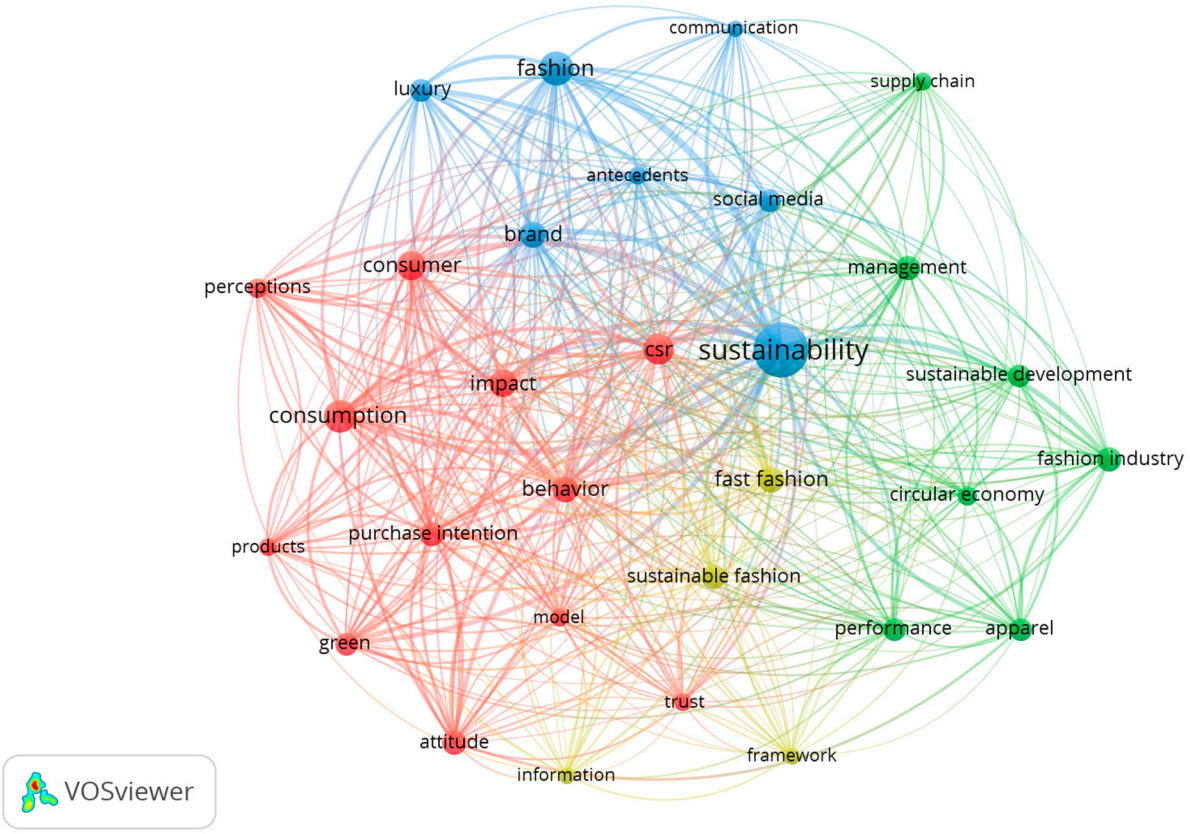

Figure 8. Co-occurrence of keywords network. Source: authors' work.

Figure 9 illustrates a visualization of co-authorship networks created with VOSviewer. Each node in the visualization represents a country, with the node size typically indicating the number of co-authorship instances associated with that country. The People's Republic of China is a major hub, boasting strong connections to multiple countries, including the USA, South Korea, Canada, Australia, and Malaysia, suggesting that China is central to global research collaborations in the analyzed field. The USA and South Korea maintain a direct and significant link, indicating frequent academic partnerships. However, regional clusters, such as the Asian cluster, encompass China, South Korea, Malaysia, and Australia, forming a tightly connected network. Additionally, the European cluster, consisting of Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, and the United Kingdom, demonstrates robust intra-regional collaboration. India strongly connects with the United Kingdom and France, highlighting significant research collaborations. The USA, China, and India play pivotal roles in the network, indicating their substantial global research footprint.

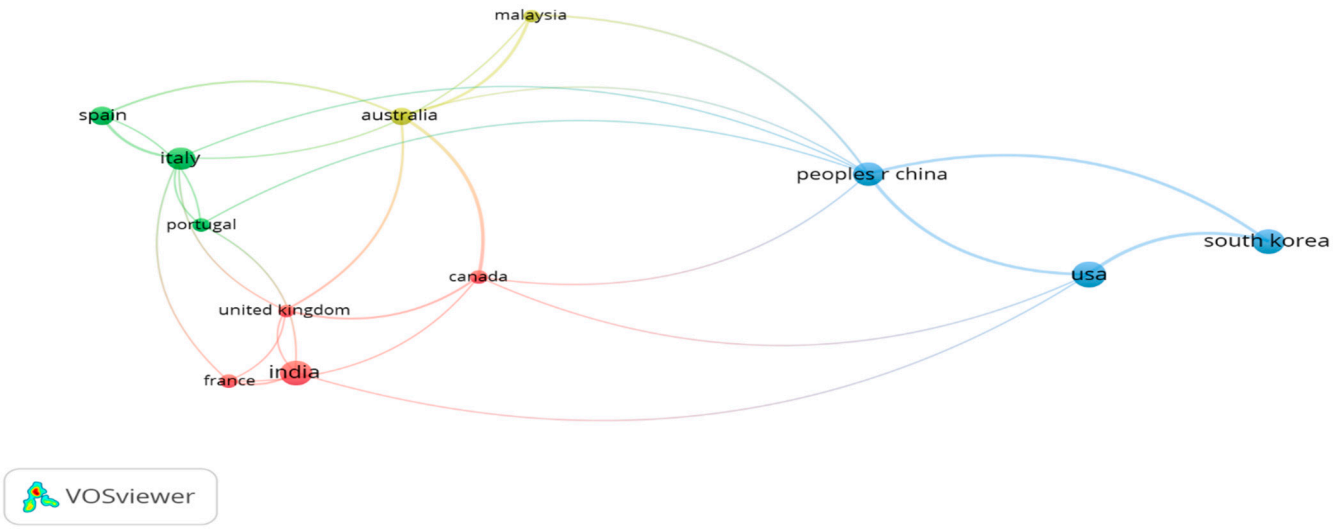

Figure 9. Co-authorship analysis. Source: authors' work.

5. Implications and Future Scope

This bibliometric literature review analyzes primary information to identify the most influential countries, journals, authors, and affiliations shaping the academic discourse around fashion brands' sustainability practices. Clothing studies on sustainability are multidisciplinary and have a significant influence on the UN's sustainable development goals (SDGs). It is also observed that developing and emerging economic countries, like India, contribute significantly to this research domain, showing that sustainability is not only a concern of the developed world but also shifting towards developing countries. This review explores motor themes, providing relevant and well-developed research themes that significantly influence diverse areas. The thematic shift from brands and social media towards supply chain sustainability and behavioral aspects indicates a research transition towards systemic and policy-driven solutions. Future research trends also emphasize technologies and capabilities, suggesting an emerging focus on innovation and digital transformation in sustainable practices. Furthermore, the co-authorship trend needs to be widespread beyond regional collaboration. Our research findings offer various insights for academics and policymakers while laying the groundwork for future research and synthesizing current information in a sustainable manner. It seeks to stimulate more research and advancements in the crucial areas of sustainable fashion, such as consumption, supply chain, consumer behavior, advanced technological usages, and capabilities. Figure 10 provides policy recommendations to the marketers for clothing brands driving toward sustainability. However, Figure 11 represents the research topics that emerged over the period, which provides direction for future research.

According to Figure 10, clothing brands need to emphasize several issues, such as long-lasting product design, eco-friendly manufacturing processes, more advanced and sustainable supply chain management, effective communication with consumers, usage of advanced technologies for resource utilization, recycling, waste management, and improved capacity building for resilience to ensure their sustainability practices. They also need to highlight smart and functional clothing through technology-based manufacturing and designing long-lasting clothes to enrich clothing performance, which provides practical benefits to consumers. They should adopt innovative technologies to optimize resource use, recycle, improve waste management, and streamline their supply chain to reduce environmental degradation. Additionally, they need to emphasize communication with the consumers by showing them their accountability and commitment to the environment and the society to encourage them to purchase eco-friendly and long-lasting

clothes. We can compare this research model with Porter's value chain model. The value chain model is profit-driven, seeking competitive advantage through efficiency, while the sustainability model is impact-driven and emphasizes sustainable transformation. It creates value through ethical consumer interaction and eco-friendly innovation, highlights the importance of communication and consumer trust, and reflects the increasing demand for ethical consumption. However, the value chain model provides cost advantages and operational excellence. It considers consumers in marketing and sales but does not prioritize sustainability. Both models significantly highlight technological advancements in various ways. The sustainability model focuses on sustainable manufacturing and effective supply chain management through technological innovation. Conversely, Porter's model leverages technology for efficiency and product differentiation. Businesses can effectively integrate both models for long-term resilience and sustainability.

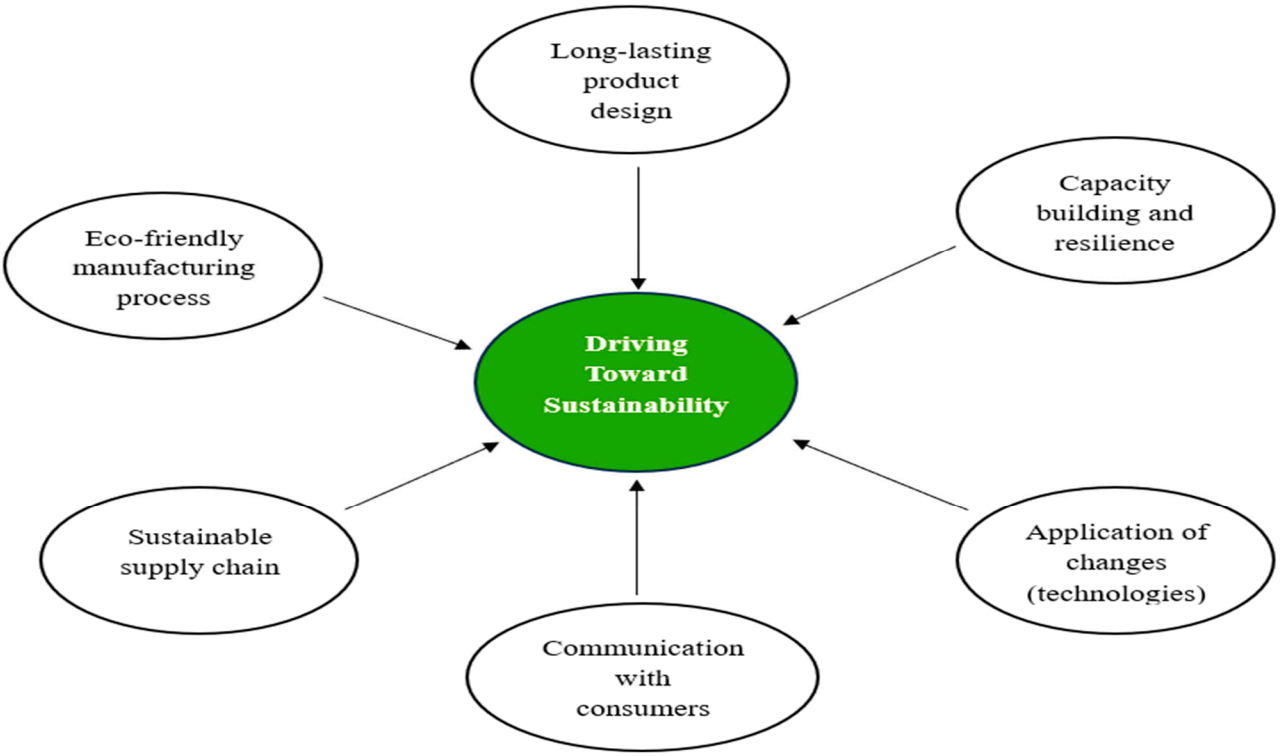

Figure 10. Clothing brands' initiatives for sustainability. Source: authors' work.



Figure 11. Research topics emerging over time. Source: authors' work.

Figure 11 showcases the research topics that have evolved over time and shows the development and shifting trends. Product-related factors and CSR were studied in the early stages. At this time, product design and performance, manufacturing process, consumption behavior, and CSR were significant research interests. Brands' consumer engagement and digital influence were evaluated in the transitional period. However, the current and future trends are related to consumer behavior, advanced supply chain management, usage of

sustainability technologies, and capabilities, demonstrating that the research focuses are shifting toward behavioral aspects, innovation, technologies, and adaptivity for enhancing clothing performance and promoting smart and functional clothing.

6. Limitations

This research finds sustainability as a multidisciplinary field that has always been studied. It presents an understanding of sustainable fashion and fashion brands' sustainability practices and shows the flow of academic works. Beyond that, this bibliometric review has some limitations in methods, tools, and analyses used. The initial drawback is the reliability of the bibliometric tools, like VOSviewer and Bibliometrix. It may differ in analytical rigor, data compatibility, and visualization. Moreover, preset thresholds, clustering methods, and parameter configurations may impact their outcomes, leading to varying interpretations. However, regarding compatibility and visualization, other bibliometric tools, like CiteSpace, Gephi, etc., and a single dataset can provide different findings. Researchers can use a single dataset to present an additional analysis, and other bibliometric tools can be introduced to obtain more insightful information. Furthermore, we utilized R Studio, employing the bibliometrix and xlsx packages to combine the dataset from Scopus and the Web of Science. While these technologies offer adaptable and reproducible workflows, the integration process is susceptible to discrepancies in field labeling, metadata formatting, and encoding variations between the two databases. Errors may arise during the parsing or matching phases, resulting in data loss or duplication despite the implementation of deduplication scripts (Lim et al., 2024). Future research should concentrate on utilizing persistent identifiers (e.g., DOIs), creating improved deduplication techniques, and imp 15lementing cross-validation tests to boost the trustworthiness of bibliometric data integration methods.

7. Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive bibliometric and content analysis of clothing brands' sustainability practices over two decades. By analyzing 612 articles from Scopus and the Web of Science, we traced the intellectual landscape, thematic evolution, and research trends related to sustainable practices in the fashion and apparel industry. Our findings confirm that the topic is not only expanding in the direction of academics but is also undergoing a significant shift from supply chain-focused discussions to consumer behavior-, technological capability-, and policy-oriented approaches.

This study addresses a significant gap in the literature by offering a structured understanding of the multidimensional aspects of clothing brands' sustainability. Unlike prior fragmented or consumer-focused reviews, this paper synthesizes influential research clusters and thematic transitions. It reinforces the importance of bibliometric approaches to uncover the dynamics of academic productivity, country-level contributions, and author/institution-level collaborations. Importantly, it identifies emerging themes such as the rise in technology-enabled sustainable supply chains, consumer trust and behavior, and integrating SDGs into brand strategies.

Companies should invest in eco-friendly innovation across their value chains prioritizing product durability, innovative clothing technologies, and circular design. Transparent communication should be aligned with sustainability goals to build trust and brand loyalty, especially via digital platforms and social media. Adopting data-driven practices to monitor material use, waste management, and consumer feedback can improve adaptive capacity and reduce sustainability gaps.

Governments and regulatory bodies should facilitate collaborations between brands and sustainability certification entities to combat greenwashing. Developing global or regional guidelines for sustainable apparel manufacturing and consumption can create

a more uniform policy landscape. Furthermore, funding support for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the apparel industry to adopt sustainable technologies can drive inclusive growth.

Future research should explore the behavioral–economic mechanisms behind sustainable consumption and the efficacy of sustainability-oriented brand messaging. Comparative studies across regions, especially in underrepresented developing economies, are needed to contextualize global findings. There is also an urgent need for interdisciplinary research that connects fashion with AI, blockchain, and IoT to foster traceability and transparency in supply chains.

In conclusion, this study not only maps the trajectory of sustainability research in the fashion industry but also bridges the gap between academic and practical application. It offers a blueprint for future inquiry, policy formation, and corporate strategy, empowering stakeholders across sectors to contribute meaningfully to a more sustainable and ethical global fashion ecosystem.

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