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# Circular Fashion in India: Nurturing Understanding for a Sustainable Future

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**ABSTRACT:** The fashion industry is one of the largest contributors to environmental degradation, making the transition to a circular economy essential for sustainability. Consumer behavior, industry impediments and potential solutions are the main topics of this study, which examines the prospects and challenges of promoting circular fashion in India. Using a mixed method approach, the study analyzes consumer survey primary data as well as secondary data from the body of literature on circular economy practices in the fashion industry. Although there is a growing awareness of circular fashion, the results show that major barriers to wider adoption include high prices, brand availability issues, legal restrictions and the social stigma associated with secondhand apparel. The transition is further complicated by inefficient supply chains and a lack of financial incentives. Despite these obstacles, the study shows that consumers are quite interested in sustainable alternatives, especially when it comes to rental and resale models, as long as they are made more accessible and reasonably priced. The study emphasizes the value of working with stakeholders, including how consumers, legislators and fashion brands can promote the adoption of circular fashion. Developing financial structures to promote investment in circular practices, boosting regulatory support, increasing the reach of sustainable brands and improving consumer education are some of the main proposals. By removing these obstacles, India may become a pioneer in circular fashion, cutting waste, lessening its negative effects on the environment and building a more sustainable fashion industry.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry stands as a leading polluter while simultaneously serving as a predominant source of waste generation and carbon emissions. Circular fashion presents an unnatural yet sophisticated solution to address this problem. The initiative seeks to reduce waste through prolonged clothing durability and sustainable materials. This method promotes recycling, upcycling, and clothing reuse to mitigate its detrimental environmental effects.

It is an enormous opportunity for an economy, employment and growth in India- the apparel and textile industry. However, the industry faces challenges such as depletion of resources, wastage with textiles, and a fast, destructive fashion cycle, which makes it less sustainable. Circular fashion is transformed in many ways-view policy-making, view technology, increased consumer awareness and consider new business models. Although many startups and brands are working on recycling, resale platforms, or rental fashion solutions, scaling these solutions is challenging due to costs, regulations and infrastructure gaps.

The research discussed here highlights the numerous opportunities and difficulties facing India's expanding circular fashion industry. The complexity of supply chains driven by market demand, governmental regulations, and consumer behaviour is just a few of the topics covered. Based on research on cases and new trends, this study attempts to create the sustainable business models required to mainstream circular fashion. For companies, legislators, and consumers alike, a more sustainable Indian fashion industry depends on a greater understanding of these factors.

### 1.1 Scope and Limitations

The adoption of circular fashion in India is examined in this study, with a focus on consumer awareness, purchase patterns, and the main obstacles impeding its expansion. It looks at how different stakeholders, such as customers, legislators, and fashion brands, might support eco-friendly behaviors, including renting, reusing and recycling textiles. The study also looks at possible tactics to promote the use of circular fashion in the Indian market. However, the study has certain limitations. The survey responses may be subject to bias, as participants' views might





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not fully reflect broader consumer behavior. The research primarily focuses on urban consumers, potentially overlooking rural perspectives and market dynamics. Furthermore, while it examines the challenges of circular fashion adoption, it does not conduct an in-depth financial feasibility analysis. External influences, such as evolving regulations and global fashion trends, are considered in a general context rather than being analyzed in detail.

### II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- 1) Chandra and Zaidi (2024) this study examines the obstacles to applying the concepts of the circular economy in the retail clothing industry in India. They identify major obstacles such as supply chain complexity, strategic constraints and regulatory concerns through a Delphi analysis with industry experts. To get over these challenges, the report recommends tactics including improved supply chain coordination and senior management support.
- 2) Bedarkar and Dhiwar (2024) The authors examine the difficulties in implementing circular economy techniques to control textile waste in the fashion sector of India. They identify political, technological, and economic hurdles by conducting qualitative study with 22 stakeholders. Building capability, establishing clear guidelines, innovating, advancing technology and collaborating with multiple stakeholders are among the suggestions.
- 3) Thinakaran et al. (2023) This study looks at the obstacles to the fashion industry's adoption of the circular economy in India. 21 difficulties in areas such as industrial management, labor, materials, legislation, knowledge, collaboration and infrastructure are identified by the researchers through a survey of the literature and expert consultations. The study highlights how important it is to remove these obstacles in order to encourage sustainable habits.
- 4) Gill & Verma (2021) present a comprehensive examination of circular economic models being implemented across various industries, with particular attention to India's evolving approach. Their research reveals that while Indian manufacturers demonstrate theoretical commitment to sustainability, practical adoption faces hurdles from inconsistent policy frameworks. The study particularly notes the absence of financial mechanisms to support small scale producers in transitioning to circular operations, suggesting this as a critical area for governmental intervention.
- 5) Mishra et al. (2021) develop an innovative analytical framework for understanding the fashion industry's gradual shift toward circularity. Their research underscores how traditional linear production models continue to dominate due to entrenched supply chain relationships. The authors propose that breakthrough innovations in textile recycling technology could catalyze broader systemic change, though they acknowledge current limitations in scaling these solutions economically.
- 6) Le Monde (2024) provides an in-depth case study of the "I Was A Sari" initiative, documenting its unique approach to combining social welfare with environmental sustainability. The article details how the project has developed novel techniques for repurposing traditional garments while simultaneously addressing urban poverty. This model demonstrates the potential for circular economy principles to create multidimensional value beyond simple waste reduction.
- 7) Vogue Business (2025) offers a critical analysis of the Indian fashion industry's ambitious growth targets juxtaposed with its environmental commitments. The investigation reveals significant discrepancies between public sustainability pledges and actual manufacturing practices, particularly in water usage and energy consumption patterns. The reporting suggests that without substantial investments in clean production technologies, the sector risks either missing its growth targets or exacerbating ecological damage.
- 8) Vogue Business (2024) examines the practical challenges of implementing regenerative agricultural practices in cotton farming. The analysis highlights how short term economic pressures often discourage farmers from adopting sustainable methods, despite long term benefits. The article proposes innovative financing structures that could align immediate profitability with ecological restoration.



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- 9) Vogue Business (2024) conducts a thorough investigation into the funding landscape for sustainable fashion initiatives. The research uncovers a significant mismatch between the capital requirements for meaningful transformation and currently available financing options. Several alternative funding models are evaluated, with particular emphasis on the potential of impact investment vehicles to bridge this critical gap.
- 10) The Guardian (2025) profiles emerging design philosophies that challenge conventional fashion production paradigms. The featured designers demonstrate how radical material innovation and digital fabrication technologies can dramatically reduce waste generation. These case studies illustrate the creative potential of viewing sustainability constraints as opportunities for aesthetic and functional innovation.
- 11) Sandin & Peters (2020) systematically categorize the technical and market barriers inhibiting broader adoption of circular practices in textiles. Their meta analysis reveals surprising inconsistencies in how different regions approach textile recycling, suggesting opportunities for cross border knowledge transfer. The study particularly emphasizes the need for standardized material recovery processes to improve the economics of recycling operations.
- 12) Abraham (2011) provides rare empirical data on the operational realities of India's informal secondhand clothing markets. The research documents sophisticated but unregulated networks that have developed organically to handle textile waste. These findings suggest that formalizing and scaling these existing systems might prove more effective than attempting to impose entirely new logistical frameworks.

### 2.1 Research Gap

1. Limited Attention Paid to the Indian Market.: Although a number of studies examine circular economy techniques worldwide, not many of them expressly address the opportunities and challenges facing the Indian fashion industry.
2. Consumer Behavior and Awareness: While supply chain, legal, and economic restrictions are the main topics of the literature now in publication, consumer purchasing behavior, awareness and decision-making in the adoption of circular fashion are not adequately explored.
3. The viability of models for circular fashion. It is challenging to evaluate the likelihood of resale, rental and upcycling models becoming widely accepted in India due to the paucity of research on these topics.
4. Social and Economic Factors' Effects: Not enough research has been done on how social stigma, concerns about affordability, and stakeholder accountability affect consumers' adoption of circular fashion.
5. Lack of Collaboration Insights: Not much research has been done on how Indian companies and legislators may work together to create a robust environment that encourages the growth of circular fashion.
6. The majority of studies concentrate on theoretical frameworks, leaving actual insights into consumer attitudes and workable implementation tactics largely unexplored.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the obstacles and possibilities for promoting circular fashion in India. A combination of primary data obtained through a structured survey and secondary data obtained from literature reviews, industry reports and academic sources was used in a mixed method approach to accomplish this.

The approach is intended to:

- Recognize the attitudes, behaviors and awareness of consumers about cyclical fashion.
- Determine adoption obstacles and viable fixes for long term company expansion.
- Examine current studies and industry trends to compare results with actual customer insights.

To ensure a wide audience and a varied sample of respondents, the primary data was gathered using an online survey. To give a thorough overview of cyclic fashion trends, secondary data was gathered from reliable sources. The data collection procedure and analytical methodology used for this study are described in depth in the sections that follow.



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### 3.1 Primary data

#### 3.1.1 Primary Information Collection

To ensure a quantitative and objective analysis, primary data has been collected using random sampling techniques. A total of 126 respondents participated in the study, comprising a diverse demographic group of consumers, retailers, and industry experts. The survey method was chosen to capture real-time insights into consumer attitudes, brand engagement and purchasing behavior regarding circular fashion.

A Google Forms survey was created and distributed to a wide range of participants, including professionals, students, business owners and regular customers. This approach guaranteed accessibility and a broad reach, allowing responses from people of a variety of ages, professions and buying habits.

#### 3.1.2 Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To assess the level of awareness and knowledge among consumers and businesses regarding circular fashion principles and sustainable alternatives.
2. To analyze consumer perception and purchasing behavior toward circular fashion in India.
3. To identify key challenges that hinder the adoption of circular fashion, including economic, regulatory, and infrastructural barriers.
4. To explore the potential role of technology and innovation in facilitating circular economy practices within the Indian fashion industry.
5. To evaluate the impact of policy interventions and corporate sustainability initiatives on promoting circular fashion models.

#### 3.1.3 Design and Structure of the Survey

There were 24 questions in the poll, all of which were thoughtfully designed to support the goals of the study. These inquiries were divided into four main categories:

#### 3.1.4 Data on Demographics

In order to examine how customer preferences and behaviors differ among various categories, this part sought to collect basic respondent information. Among the questions were:

1. Age group - to comprehend how knowledge of sustainable fashion varies by generation.
2. Gender to determine whether male and female consumers have different preferences for circular fashion.
3. Occupation - to determine whether students, working professionals or entrepreneurs have a stronger preference for sustainable fashion.
4. Frequency of shopping - to find out how frequently respondents buy new clothes.

#### 3.1.5 Circular Fashion Awareness and Perception

The respondent's knowledge of circular fashion and opinions on sustainability in the fashion industry were evaluated in this area. Among them were:

- knowledge of the principles of circular fashion, such as recycling, upcycling and rental models
- awareness of how rapid fashion affects the environment
- Sustainability is crucial while making selections about what to buy
- availability of eco friendly apparel options in India

A brief description of circular fashion with examples from the actual world (such as how companies like Levi's employ recycled textiles) was added in the survey to improve clarity. This made it possible for responders who were not familiar with the word to give well informed responses.

#### 3.1.6 Consumer Behavior and Circular Fashion Adoption

Consumer behavior and openness to interacting with circular fashion models were the main topics of this part. The following questions should be investigated:

- Previous purchases of apparel that has been recycled, thrifted or secondhand
- Degree of comfort wearing used clothing
- Willingness to spend more for eco friendly apparel
- Variables that affect decisions to buy
- Interest in fashion buyback, exchange and rental models



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These inquiries helped determine whether cost, practicality or awareness were the main determinants of the real world adoption of circular fashion.

### 3.1.7 Opportunities and Difficulties in Circular Fashion

The third portion looked at possible ways to increase circular fashion's adoption in India as well as obstacles that keep consumers from embracing it. Questions centered on:

- Main barriers to the adoption of sustainable fashion, such as price, accessibility and social stigma
- What might promote increased involvement
- Present day clothes disposal practices, such as donation, resale and disposal
- support for laws regarding to sustainability
- Forecasts for India's circular fashion industry

### 3.1.8 Data Collection Process

- 1) To ensure increased participation rates and ease of access, the survey was shared online using Google Forms.
- 2) In order to ensure objective data gathering, respondents were urged to provide truthful and anonymous answers.
- 3) To enable a wide range of people to contribute, the survey was left available for a certain amount of time.
- 4) After that, the information was gathered and examined to determine the main patterns, obstacles and new prospects in the Indian circular fashion industry.

### 3.1.9 Justification for the Primary Data Method

For the following reasons, using primary data from a structured survey was crucial to this study:

- 1) Real time insights: The most pertinent information comes from first hand accounts, as circular fashion is a developing trend in India.
- 2) Consumer specific analysis: Direct input is required since current consumer mindsets may not be adequately captured by the literature currently in publication.
- 3) Comparative analysis: To find trends and gaps, survey results can be compared to secondary data from literature research.

## IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The primary data gathered from the study is thoroughly examined in this section, with an emphasis on Indian consumer's awareness, attitudes and actions regarding circular fashion. The study emphasizes important developments, obstacles and chances for the adoption of sustainable fashion. The objective of this study is to offer practical insights for companies and policymakers seeking to promote circular fashion in India by assessing elements like demographic insights, purchasing preferences, adoption barriers and the role of stakeholders.

### 4.1 Demographic Insights

An understanding of the respondent's demographics offers important background information for examining the adoption of circular fashion in India.

**Age Distribution:** Young adults appear to be the most interested group in sustainable fashion talks, as the bulk of participants (80.3%) are between the ages of 18 and 24. 16.4% of the sample is composed of people aged 25 to 35, whereas senior people make up a substantially lower percentage. According to these findings, the next generation is mostly responsible for the growth of circular fashion.

**Gender Representation:** Of the participants, 44.3% were female and 55.7% were male. Both genders are concerned about sustainability in fashion, as evidenced by this balanced distribution, fortunately firms may need to modify their strategies to accommodate gender specific tastes.

### 4.2 Awareness and Perception of Circular Fashion

**Circular Fashion Familiarity:** Although 50.8% of respondents have heard of the concept, only 23.8% really get what round fashion is. This suggests a reasonable level of knowledge, highlighting the necessity of educating consumers about sustainable fashion processes. Fast fashion's effects on the environment are viewed as moderately bad by 52.5% of respondents. Some consumers are quite concerned about the environment, as evidenced by the 27% who think it is



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extremely harmful. There is a need for greater awareness initiatives because 18% of people are still uncertain about the negative impacts of fast fashion.

Have you heard of the term “circular fashion” before?

126 responses

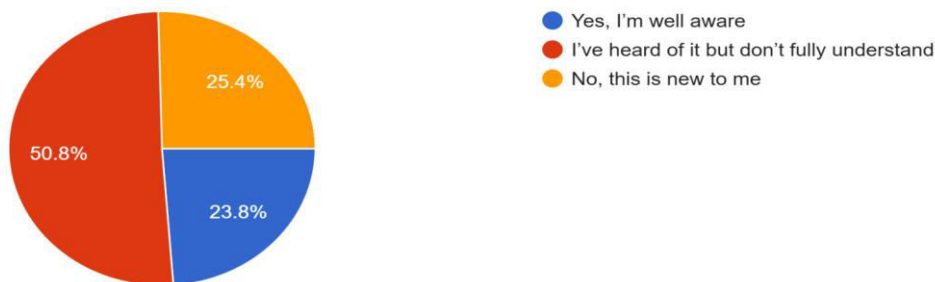


Fig: 4.2.1

According to these statistics, even if a significant percentage of customers are aware of sustainability challenges in fashion, there are still misconceptions that call for further educational initiatives.

### 4.3 Role of Sustainability in Purchasing Decisions

#### 4.3.1 Sustainability's Significance on a Scale of 1 to 5

The average score of 4.25 suggests that consumers consider sustainability while making purchasing decisions. Although many respondents place a high priority on sustainable products, adoption rates are still impacted by variables like availability and cost.

How important is sustainability to you when buying clothes?

126 responses

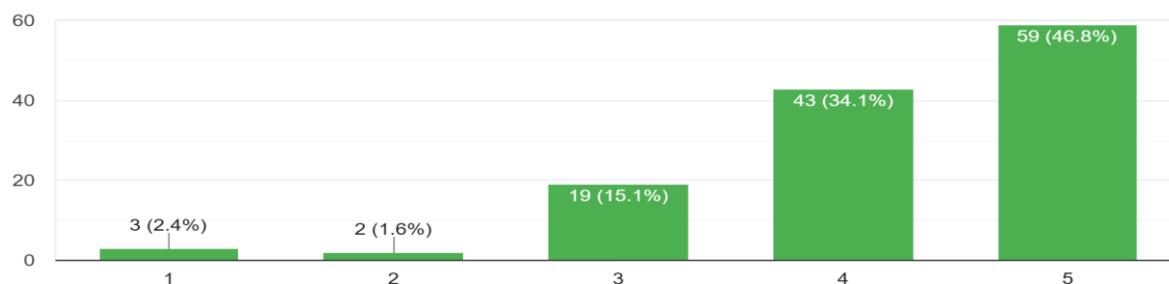


Fig:4.3.1.1

#### 4.3.2 Demand for Models of Circular Fashion

As long as they are accessible and reasonably priced, 52.5% of respondents are amenable to fashion models that are rented or traded. As of right now, 26.2% are eager to implement these concepts. This shows that sustainable alternatives are becoming more and more popular and that there may be room to develop if obstacles related to cost and convenience are removed.





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### 4.4 Consumer Behavior in Clothing Disposal

We asked participants how they get rid of their used clothing :

- Donating is preferred by 57.4% of respondents, indicating a preference for moral disposal practices.
- There has been a shift towards circular consumption behaviors, as evidenced by the 22.1% who resell or trade.
- Even though sustainable disposal methods are widely used, 6.6% of consumers still throw away their clothing, indicating that some still need advice on proper waste management.

### 4.5 Obstacles to the Adoption of Circular Fashion

According to the report, the following are the main barriers to circular fashion's broad adoption:

1. Sustainable fashion is expensive (14%), which emphasizes the need for cost effective production techniques and potential government subsidies. Affordability is still the key issue.
2. Restricted availability of sustainable brands (10%): The lack of eco-friendly brands restricts customer options and suggests that the sector needs to grow.
3. Lack of education and awareness (5.7%): The significance of awareness efforts is highlighted by the fact that many customers are still unaware of circular fashion.
4. Social stigma associated with used apparel (5.7%): Because consumer behavior is still influenced by cultural beliefs, media involvement and influencer support are essential to normalize used clothing.

### 4.6 India's Prospects for Circular Fashion

Possibilities for Fashion Rental and Resale Growth:

- 64.8% think that if these business concepts are properly promoted, they will become more and more popular.
- Strong market potential is indicated by the fact that 25.4% of respondents believe that rental and resale platforms will shape fashion in the future.
- This means that in order to promote broader adoption, companies and legislators ought to spend money supporting alternative fashion models.

Probability of Suggestion on a scale of 1 to 5:

- The average score of 4.11 indicates that customers are very inclined to suggest sustainable fashion to others.

This demonstrates the potential for community driven projects and word of mouth advertising to advance circular fashion.

### 4.7 Stakeholders Responsible for Promoting Circular Fashion

Responses on the question of who should lead the adoption of circular fashion were divided as follows:

1. Customers (39.3%) According to the majority of respondents, people themselves are crucial in helping people make sustainable decisions.
2. Brands of Fashion (26.2%) Businesses are expected to provide more sustainable projects and products.
3. Media and Influencers (19.7%) A sizable percentage of customers believe that influencers and digital platforms play a crucial role in determining trends and opinions.
4. Policymakers and the Government 14.8% According to some responders, broad change can be sparked by legislative actions and policy frameworks.

## V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Findings

According to the survey, there is a significant disconnect between Indian consumers' understanding and use of circular fashion methods. Only 24.6% have thorough understanding, despite 50% exhibiting basic awareness, suggesting severe knowledge gaps. Although consumer sentiments indicate a strong theoretical support for sustainability average grade of 4.25/5, constraints to affordability and limited market availability continue to impede practical adoption. A transitional market state is reflected in behavioral data, which shows both constant linear routines 6.6% discarding and progressive disposal patterns 57.4% donating rates. Adoption is severely hampered by structural issues such as high prices (14% barrier) and little brand participation (10%). The results imply that although there is cognitive acceptance, behavioral translation is impeded by systemic and infrastructure constraints.





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As long as there is more accessibility and knowledge, the market seems optimistic (64.8% forecasting growth), especially for rental/resale models. These findings demonstrate the necessity of coordinated efforts that target market level facilitators as well as consumer education in order to close the theory practice gap in a circular manner.

### 5.2 Recommendation

#### 1) Improving Consumer Education and Awareness:

- Start online awareness efforts to highlight the advantages of circular fashion.
- Add eco labeling to products to facilitate sustainable decision making.
- Plan workshops on ethical fashion consumption for the community and colleges.

It facilitates better consumer comprehension and well informed purchasing choices.

#### 2) Improving Incentives and Affordability

- Encourage sustainable brands with tax breaks or government subsidies.
- Offer trade-in discounts so that customers can swap their used clothing for new, eco-friendly items.
- Encourage EMI and flexible payment plans for premium eco-friendly clothing.

It increases affordability, which raises the rate of adoption.

#### 3) To increase the market reach of sustainable fashion brands:

- Collaborate with well known e-commerce sites like Amazon, Flipkart and Myntra.
- Use pop up shops in shopping malls and other urban areas to expand your physical retail presence.
- Work with prominent fashion retailers to develop brand partnerships.

Expecting Impact may be greater accessibility, which will help circular fashion become more popular.

#### 4) Encouragement of Circular Economy Involvement

- Reduce stigma by implementing incentive schemes for buying used apparel.
- Promote online resale marketplaces and approved second hand shops.
- Through brand led programs, inform customers about appropriate clothing methods to recycle.

Increased involvement in resale, rental and upcycling projects is the anticipated effect.

#### 5) Increasing Stakeholder Cooperation

- Encourage the adoption of circular production models by fashion firms.
- Use celebrities and influencers to advance eco-friendly fashion trends.
- Collaborate with government organizations to create recycling facilities and policies for textile waste.

Expected Effect: A coordinated strategy to advance circular fashion at every level.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The study emphasizes how crucial it is to advance circular fashion in India in order to encourage sustainability, lessen the impact on the environment and promote economic growth. The results show that although people are becoming more aware of circular fashion, major obstacles including expensive prices, little brand availability and a lack of infrastructure prevent widespread adoption. Consumer behavior also shows a willingness to use sustainable techniques, such as rental and resale models, although accessibility and affordability are still major issues.

The successful adoption of circular fashion necessitates a multi stakeholder approach. In order to make sustainable fashion more widely available, fashion businesses need to incorporate circular practices into their business models and use innovation and technology. By putting in place legislative frameworks, financial incentives and infrastructure upgrades to strengthen recycling and waste management systems, policymakers may encourage this change. Campaigns for consumer education can also be quite effective in influencing attitudes and promoting wise purchases.

India's circular fashion industry has a bright future despite its current obstacles. India can become a pioneer sustainably by tackling social, economic and policy related obstacles. In addition to reducing environmental degradation, the fashion industry's use of circular economy principles will open up new economic, entrepreneurial and consumer prospects. By working together, consumers, legislators and brands can transform circular fashion from a niche idea into a popular movement that promotes long term sustainability in the sector.



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