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## **NUTURING ECO-FRIENDLY & SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY: INNOVATIONS, CHALLENGES & FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Sustainability in textiles, focusing on eco-friendly practices and materials. The paper examines the comprehensive approaches adopted by the manner industry to mitigate ecological impact and promote ethical production. It delves into the challenges faced in the pervasive adoption of sustainable practices, considering issues related to scalability, cost-effectiveness, and consumer adoption. Textile, apparel, and fashion (TAF) industries contribute significantly to global environmental pollution at every point of the supply chain. Clothing developed and transportation produce a large volume of waste and high greenhouse gas emissions, often taking advantage of cheap labor in developing countries. This paper offers a methodical literature review of sustainability trends in the TAF industries in the last 20 years. The findings reveal three primary research areas in the TAF context: consumers' behavior towards sustainable clothing, circular economy initiatives, and sustainability challenges across the whole supply chain. This study will help researchers and academicians work in this area to identify unexplored sub-fields, which reflect some potential investigation areas for expanding scientific literature on the theme. Finally, this study supports practitioners and managers in exploring the main research themes addressed in the scientific field, providing knowledge to improve and align business models with current sustainability trends in textile.

### **KEY - WORDS: -**

**Sustainability, consumption, circular economy, fashion, social responsibility, Disposal, nature, environmental, health, business, social, economic etc.**

### **Introduction**

The production and consumption of clothes have constantly increased over the past few decades due to rapid population growth, increasing global incomes, and higher living standards. Rather than evaluating how design and production can integrate consumer desires and sustainability, clothes are engineered and pretend for rapid trend turnovers via obsolescence and early disposal, allowing for fast income. This type of business model makes textile, apparel, and fashion (TAF) industries among the most polluting in the world, generating a huge volume of clothing waste. Indeed, less than 1% of all textiles are used back into clothes, 25% of textile waste is reused or recycled, and 75% of textile trash is disposed of in landfills globally. In terms of water consumption, the fashion industry ranks second globally. In addition, the natural bionetwork suffers greatly from the diffusion into the environment of coloured effluents and microplastics,

which occurs mainly in the clothing manufacture and disposal stages. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased this incident: the management of newly emerging wastes, often known as "COVID wastes," including cloth facemasks, is causing growing concern due to the release of microplastics into the environment. A potential solution to reduce the environmental penalty of cloth facemasks is using natural and biodegradable polymers for their production, such as wood-based polymers. In addition, textile waste can be repurposed for different applications. For instance, they can be used as a renewable source to produce thermal energy. Pyrolysis is a popular substitute for incineration in the treatment of textile waste to increase the economic benefits. In addition, cotton waste can be a perfect material for creating high-performance catalysts and removing pollutants from the environment due to its natural state and affordability. lastly, different reusing and recycling methods for managing textile waste can be employed, such as anaerobic digestion, fermentation, composting, and fibre regeneration.

### **Objectives of the study**

This study offers different opportunities to the public authorities, businesses, and practitioners involved in the path towards sustainability in the TAF context. It provides a broad range of relevant knowledge regarding how sustainability and circularity principles are affecting TAF industries. Such knowledge is essential for managers of TAF industries since it allows them to innovate their business models and prosper in today's competitive environment, thus moving to less polluting production systems and improving company performance. Manufacturing companies, purchasing organisations, and other stakeholders could gain a deeper understanding of the problems, procedures, predictors, barriers, and challenges associated with implementing sustainable practices and developing the skills necessary to reduce environmental impacts and gain competitive advantages.

Furthermore, this study may have political implications. It is acknowledged that the TAF industries represent a major source of environmental pollution. Therefore, the results of this study may inspire governments to promote sustainable initiatives in the TAF industries. For instance, policies implemented by the governments may include incentives for using eco-sustainable and recycled materials or financing for the purchase of green technologies with a lower environmental impact. In addition, for TAF industries to achieve the SDGs, the government must promote cultural changes that move innovation from an individualistic logic bound only to profit maximisation to a collectivistic, communal, and open logic based on sustainable development principles.

### **Limitations of the study**

Although considerable attention was taken to ensure the study process's validity and outcomes, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, despite we adopted a validation criterion to integrate papers published in different academic databases, we limited our initial search to papers published in the WoS database. Furthermore, we just looked at papers and reviews published in peer-reviewed journals, ignoring other types of publications, including conference proceedings and book chapters. Second, we used VOS viewer software to conduct the co-occurrence analysis of keywords and paper terms, but other statistical analysis and clustering methods can be used, such as coauthorship analysis. Another limitation is regarding the related concept (i.e. zero waste), which is not incorporated within the scope of this research. Further studies can expand the scope to such related concepts/theories.

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## Methodology

- 1. Data collection and selection:** this phase includes identifying keywords and the search String, choosing the academic database (e.g. Scopus and Web of Science) to retrieve documents, and defining the inclusion/exclusion criteria to obtain papers focused on the research topic examined.
- 2.Descriptive and content analysis phase:** this phase includes conducting descriptive statistics (e.g. papers over time and articles by methodology) and an in-depth content analysis of the selected papers, aiming at identifying research gaps and providing a research agenda for further investigation.

## NUTURING ECO-FRIENDLY & SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY

Given the increasing attention on the topic, different researchers conducted literature reviews on sustainability in the fashion industry from diverse points of view. Notably, Koeksal et al. focused on social aspects in textile/apparel sustainable supply chain management (SSCM). Paras and Pal reviewed the literature to establish and suggest a theoretical framework for a reuse-based clothing value chain. Koszewska identified the textile sector's challenges in adapting to the circular economy (CE) model. Dordevic et al. reviewed different CSR theories and methods used in the textile/apparel industry. Wagner and Heinzl analysed the literature on CE in the fashion industry, focusing on consumer behaviours concerning the sustainable purchase, usage, consumption, and disposal.

Based on the above premises, in the scientific literature, there is a lack of literature reviews that offers a holistic understanding of sustainability issues in the TAF industries and evaluates research advances and trends on the topic to benefit multiple stakeholders. This paper aims to overcome these research gaps with a comprehensive overview of sustainability trends in the TAF manufacturing context. In addition, this research highlights both CSR and CE principles, supporting academicians, policymakers, practitioners, and other decision-makers in exploring the main research themes addressed in the scientific field. This paper is expected to contribute to the literature in the following ways. First, this study addresses the research gaps by offering a holistic perspective of a study area that is rapidly expanding. Second, this research combines the review process with bibliometric techniques. Although the growing interest in the research field, these approaches have not yet been adopted to explore sustainability progress in the TAF industries. Third, drivers and barriers to implementing CSR and CE practices are identified. Notably, CE is a production and consumption model that aims to extend products' useful lives by helping to minimise waste, while CSR is often described as corporate practices that address economic, social, and environmental issues to benefit citizens, communities, and societies. The proposed taxonomy could be a reference point for further empirical studies. Finally, this article develops a conceptual model based on the extracted research clusters that integrate previous research findings, highlight research gaps, and offers guidance and potential avenues for further research to fill in the literature gaps.

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## **Sustainability Innovation in the Textile Industry**

The textile industry is known for being labor-intensive and has a significant impact on the environment and society. The aim of this paper is to identify key themes of sustainability innovation in the textile industry and to map research in this area. The methodology used is bibliometric approach; with a total of more than 2,500 Scopus-indexed documents analyzed using the bibliometric method. More than sixty percent of the articles are peer-reviewed journal articles. Publications exhibit an increasing trend from year to year, with the main outlets including, for example, the Journal of Cleaner Production, and Journal of Silk. Conceptually, four quadrants of the thematic map are identified such as niche, emerging, declining, and motor themes. These include basic themes consisting of sustainability, innovation, circular economy, and nanotechnology; motor themes include the economy; niche themes consisting of green innovation, smart textiles, and electro spinning; as well as emerging themes, namely competitiveness and technological innovation.

### **Consumer behavior concerning sustainable clothing consumption**

This cluster is focused on sustainable clothing consumption through the lens of consumer behaviour. The consumer's vision of eco-sustainable clothing is a central theme in the literature on TAF industries. The previously reserved attention for an elite audience is now directed to an increasingly widespread profile of evolved consumers who are more interested in the origin of what they buy and the traceability of the supply chain. Therefore, the customer plays a crucial role in the sustainable context, so it is vital to understand his point of view towards eco-sustainable, recycled, or used products. The majority of contributions included in this cluster are surveys, in which the relationship between the constructs was tested chiefly through structural equation modelling (SEM).

### **Circular economy and corporate social responsibility issues in the TAF industries**

This cluster concerns CE and CSR issues in the TAF industries. Unlike the previous one, this cluster includes many explorative studies since the CE and CSR implementation is still in its early stages, necessitating a more detailed understanding based on qualitative analysis. In particular, the CE principles significantly improve sustainability in the way textile products are fabricated, consumed and disposed of. Different frameworks have been developed to help fashion companies transition from a linear to a CE model. Indeed, several critical factors need to be explored for developing a circular product in the textile industry context, such as sustainable product design and reverse logistics. Concepts such as repairability, recyclability, longevity, and reuse and disposal of products are much debated in the literature. Although they are still at the early stages, different methods for reusing, recycling, and regenerating textile waste as well as various technological innovations and plans for a circular textile economy have been developed. Furthermore, many studies used a case study approach to investigate the challenges and solutions that fashion brands face while developing and testing CE strategies within their current business models. The findings show that fashion companies face several obstacles in implementing circular business models in their organisations, including divergent perspectives of value and

undefined performance metrics, weak alignment with the current strategy, a lack of internal skills and competencies, and a lack of customer interest. Further, Paras et al. conducted a multiple case study based on semi-structured interviews with Swedish companies to explore the reuse-based clothing value chain drivers. The results suggest that the main drivers are corporate factors (system, legislation, and awareness), product features (design, quality, and price), and consumer attitude (donor and purchaser).

Other studies focused on the slow fashion movement. According to Onur, the slow fashion movement believes that the fashion industry should not continue operating in the same way it has in the past, putting the world's finite resources at risk. As a result, the author offered a detailed account of creating new learning methods and designing via upcycling, craft, and collaboration in developing countries. Tama surveyed Turkish university students to investigate clothing awareness and attitudes regarding environmental sustainability and slow fashion, and the findings highlighted a lack of knowledge about the slow fashion paradigm.

Moreover, some of the studies analysed circular business models based on clothing swapping,

## **Impact of sustainability initiatives on corporate performance**

Specifically, some studies focused on the sustainable supply chain, which is achieved when the objectives are shared by all the actors involved. This entails reconsidering production flows, operations, and materials, limiting the polluting effects that flow into the environment, limiting production waste, extending the life cycle of the products, and improving social conditions. Kumar used the Delphi-based fuzzy Analytical Hierarchy Process approach to identify long-term factors for implementing social responsibility-based sourcing in the ready-made apparel supply chain in Bangladesh. Further, Ashby used an in-depth case study to explore how a closed-loop supply chain (CLSC) can improve the environmental performance of a UK clothing company. The results highlight the crucial role of strategic resources and a shared vision and culture among the company and its suppliers, from a more reactive environmental damage prevention plan to a comprehensive CLSC. Jesus Munoz-Torres et al. used the LCA method to quantify textile companies' environmental impact throughout the supply chain and compare their performance with global and sectorial sustainability challenges. The findings reveal a connection between global environmental issues and corporate environmental disclosure.

### **Future directions**

The descriptive analysis provided a general overview of the articles included in the literature review, highlighting that, in recent years, there is growing attention on sustainability in the TAF industries and that these topics present different scopes, belong to different disciplines, and are covered by different journals.

The content analysis of the selected articles highlighted the literature's strengths and weaknesses, thus identifying current research and providing research ideas for future investigation. It is possible to classify the selected papers into five main research areas:

- 1) consumer behaviour;
- 2) circular economy;
- 3) corporate social responsibility;
- 4) business models; and

5) supply chain management.

The first research area discusses the drivers influencing sustainable apparel purchasing, clothing reuse (e.g. income and altruism), as well as different clothing disposal behaviour (e.g. donation and recycling). Firstly, future research could perform a meta-analysis to generalise the empirical results of previous quantitative investigations on sustainable clothing consumer behaviour, thereby obtaining more robust conclusions than those drawn from each study. Further, as the production activities, business processes and materials contribute to an increase in the global pollution rate, eco-design features, ecological materials, processes with low environmental impact, and waste reduction have been developed in recent years. This area shows the need for a more in-depth analysis of the eco-design characteristics that positively influence the ethical clothing consumer's purchase intentions. Further, there is also a lack of studies investigating the efficiency and effectiveness of the communication tools adopted by TAF companies to encourage consumers to purchase sustainable clothing. For instance, compared to traditional channels, such as reports and advertising campaigns, corporate websites are constantly being used to present the business' formalised and official viewpoint on CSR activities. The consumers' opinion on this aspect could therefore be more in-depth analysed in further investigation.

The second research area focuses on drivers and barriers to adopting CE strategies in the TAF industries. In the TAF industries, due to the variety of fabrics and clothing accessories used, such as buttons and zips, end-of-life textiles are difficult to handle after disposal. Since there are presently few technologies available for separating recyclable textile waste from non-recyclable textile waste, employees still do much of the job by hand. Future studies could therefore design and develop new technological advances for managing and sorting textile waste. Automating the process and launching it on an industrial scale will therefore be the key to a real revolution in the world of fabrics.

The third research area is mainly focused on CSR drivers and barriers. Organisations require greater attention to social and environmental issues to develop a successful business. As a result, companies are changing their modus operandi, developing sustainable initiatives from a social and environmental point of view. According to Zhu et al., businesses are under pressure from stakeholders to reduce the negative environmental impact they generate while increasing CSR initiatives. Companies recognise the strategic importance of reacting to stakeholder concerns as a means of strengthening their competitive position. Consequently, future studies on the analysis of stakeholder concerns in the context of TAF industries are needed to develop a holistic corporate sustainability strategy.

The fourth research area discusses different types of business models in the field of TAF industries. A vast majority discusses the PSSs and the fast fashion model. However, this area highlights the need for a more comprehensive analysis of the slow fashion business model. Slow fashion is based on various principles, such as the quality of the products, the recycled and eco-compatible materials, and the short supply chain. Consequently, this type of business requires greater awareness of consumers and manufacturers, as it tends to reduce the production cycle and consequently consumption. Slow fashion is aimed at safeguarding the climate, workers, natural resources, and the economy. However, due to the higher costs of slow fashion products compared to mass-produced clothes, the potential of slow fashion to make and maintain a profit represents a critical point that should be explored better. It is necessary to investigate the external

pressures affecting the development of the slow fashion business model, also considering all the issues related to the transition to this new type of business model. Further, there is a lack of studies examining the circular business model innovations in the TAF industries .More in detail, according to the taxonomy proposed by Urbinati et al.,three types of circular companies can be identified: downstream, upstream, and full circular companies. Downstream circular businesses follow a pricing scheme or a marketing strategy focused on product use and re-use, but these contributions neglect the necessary changes at the supplier level or internal processes or product design. On another note, upstream circular companies are described as those that implement circular solutions internally (e.g. using recycled raw materials) and focus on the interactions with their suppliers. Finally, full circular companies implement both downstream and upstream circular business model innovations. As a result, future studies could examine the degree of circularity of the TAF companies, analysing if circular business model innovations are implemented downstream, upstream, or both.

Finally, the fifth research area mainly focuses on the analysis of different social and environmental sustainability challenges along the fashion supply chain. From this research area emerged the need to explore the role of digital technologies in improving sustainability performance. Indeed, digital enabling technologies like blockchain can guarantee the complete traceability and transparency of products, thus optimising the entire supply chain and improving company performance,Consequently, these technologies could be an excellent resource for TAF companies, representing a strategic tool for environmental protection and sustainable development and facilitating the spread of sustainable practices.

### **Challenges of Sustainable Practices in Textile Industry**

As emphasized in the collection of articles for this special issue, clothing and textile production is one of the most polluting industries in the world. Its sustainability challenge involves multiple, interrelated, and complicated issues. Textiles and clothing now play a key role in the global public discourse on climate change, chemical society, water shortage, and human rights. Their production and consumption raise several questions and worries that create challenges about how people live their political, social, and economic lives. Many of the challenges concern several common societal and private practices and the role of various and often conflicting values associated with production and consumption. A large number of different actors and institutions from the corporate, governmental, civil society, media, and private spheres are involved as well. While there are technological solutions that solve some of the challenges, others require committed actions on the part of consumers, NGOs, government, business, and others; and increasingly so on an international scale. Particularly businesses and consumers have been identified as key actors here, due to the nature of the fast textile and fashion industry. Policy makers and activists ponder how businesses and consumers can be encouraged to take responsibility, take voluntary steps towards sustainability improvements, and at times even be outright forced to change their choices and behaviours.

Technological fixes aside, they find that modifying behaviour and practice often requires the more complicated task of working with changing the values associated with production and consumption and doing so in a way sensitive to different cultural, geographic, and political

contexts. Accumulated research also suggests that better information and communication from governments, activists, businesses, educational institutions, the media, and others are necessary. But as discussed in this special issue, the big question is how “better” should be defined, how more effective communication can be formulated and framed, and, finally, which actors are the best able to communicate it broadly. Thus, finding appropriate solutions for the numerous environmental, workers’ treatment, and economic issues within the globalized fashion-driven textile and clothing market industry require innovative thinking and efforts on both the supply and demand side at multiple societal and governmental levels. The sustainability challenge is this need for a functioning interplay between supply side and demand side actors that brings in sustainable values and practices more directly into focus. It asks how the sustainability impact and measures towards progress are and should be distributed among them. Its articles focus on how responsibility for sustainability is presently working, and they use innovative research designs to identify important factors and mechanisms that promote and hinder more sustainable consumer and business practice.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of sustainability trends in the TAF industries, providing different theoretical contributions and extending the results provided by previous research. We adopted bibliometric techniques (i.e. co-occurrence analysis of keywords and abstract terms) to support the content analysis phase of the review methodology and provide quantitative insights offering a holistic understanding of the research field, integrating CSR and CE aspects. Notably, the co-occurrence network of abstract terms revealed three main research clusters: (1) consumer behaviour concerning sustainable clothing consumption, (2) circular economy and corporate social responsibility issues in the TAF industries, and (3) sustainability challenges in the fashion industry. By thoroughly analysing these clusters, we developed a conceptual framework which integrates prior study findings, identifies research gaps, and provides potential directions for future research. Consequently, this study will help researchers and academicians work in this research area to identify unexplored sub-fields, which reflect some potential investigation areas for expanding scientific literature on the topic. Moreover, the proposed taxonomy of CE and CSR drivers and barriers in the fashion industry context could be used by researchers in future investigations as a reference point for conducting empirical studies.

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