

Not all circular fashion models are the same: A comparative study of consumer acceptance of different circular fashion models

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Abstract

Circular economy has emerged as a key response to sustainability challenges facing the fashion industry. However, the literature often treats circular fashion consumption as a homogeneous phenomenon. The aim of this study is to examine whether different circular fashion models—purchasing sustainable products, second-hand consumption, and clothing rental—are accepted to varying degrees among consumers. The study is quantitative, based on a questionnaire survey of a sample of university students ($N = 137$), and we used repeated-measures analysis of variance to analyse the data. The results show significant differences between the examined models ($p < 0.001$) and indicate a large effect size, which suggests that circular fashion cannot be considered a uniform consumption category. Purchasing sustainable products was the most accepted, followed by second-hand consumption, while clothing rental showed significantly lower acceptance. The results suggest that circular models align with consumer decision-making logic to varying degrees, which influences the actual adoption of such models. This study contributes to the literature on sustainable consumption and the circular economy by empirically confirming the heterogeneity of circular fashion and highlighting that the success of sustainable transition depends heavily on consumer acceptance.

Keywords: circular fashion, consumer acceptance, second-hand consumption, clothing rental, sustainable purchasing, consumption models, perceived risk (D12)

Introduction

In recent decades, the fashion industry has become one of the most critical areas of global sustainability discourse, and is characterized by rapidly changing collections, business models based on low prices, and overproduction (Clark, 2008; Goworek et al., 2012). These systems, based on a linear “take–make–dispose” business logic, result in significant environmental impacts, particularly given the dominance of fast and ultra-fast fashion models (Niinimäki et al., 2020). In contrast, the circular economy offers a systemic alternative that focuses on keeping resources in circulation and extending product life cycle (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017; Todeschini et al., 2017). The literature on the circular economy emphasises that the transition to sustainability is not merely a matter of technological or business model innovation, but also requires a structural transformation of consumer behaviour, without which systemic change cannot be achieved. The circular economy is particularly relevant to the fashion industry in terms of waste minimisation and resource efficiency (Shirvanimoghaddam et al., 2020).

Circular fashion can be understood as a consumer-level manifestation of the principles of the circular economy. It does not represent a single category of behaviour, but rather a combination of various forms of consumption. These models—including the purchase of sustainable products, second-hand consumption, and access-based solutions such as clothing rental—differ to varying degrees from the traditional, ownership-based logic of consumption, which influences the consumer acceptance of such models (Hvass, 2015; Jung & Jin, 2016). This means that the implementation of the circular economy at the consumer level should not

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be interpreted as a uniform transition but rather as the adaptation of different models at varying speeds and depths.

At the same time, a growing body of research indicates that sustainable consumption is not being realised despite the positive commitment observed at the level of declared attitudes. The so-called “green gap” phenomenon—the discrepancy between attitudes and actual behaviour—is particularly pronounced in the context of fashion consumption (ElHaffar et al., 2020; Busalim et al., 2022). This phenomenon is particularly problematic from the perspective of the circular economy, as it indicates that positive attitudes alone are insufficient to change actual consumer behaviour, which underscores the need to examine the varying acceptance of individual models. However, the vast majority of research interprets this phenomenon as a uniform consumer reaction and pays little attention to the fact that different circular models may align with consumers’ decision-making logic to varying degrees.

In studies of circular fashion consumption, a significant portion of the research focuses on sustainability attitudes and general willingness to purchase often implicitly assuming that different circular business models are interpreted similarly by consumers. In recent years, an increasing number of studies have drawn attention to the fact that sustainable consumption is not a uniform behavioural category but rather a set of diverse practices linked to differing perceptions, risks, social meanings, etc. (Camacho-Otero et al., 2019; Hvass, 2015). Nevertheless, comparative studies of different circular economy models remain limited. The circular economy emerges as a key element of sustainable development, aiming not only to increase resource efficiency but also to transform production and consumption systems. In this process, consumer behaviour plays a pivotal role, as the social acceptance of sustainable solutions determines their actual adoption. This research addresses this gap by interpreting circular fashion consumption not as a uniform phenomenon, but as a set of practices organised along different consumer logics. The aim of this research is to examine the extent to which various circular fashion models—particularly the purchase of sustainable products, second-hand consumption, and clothing rental—are considered acceptable among university students, and whether significant differences exist among them.

Literature review

The heterogeneity of circular fashion consumption

The aim of this study is to examine the extent to which various circular fashion models—particularly the purchase of sustainable products, second-hand consumption, and clothing rental—are considered acceptable by consumers, and to identify the underlying mechanisms that explain differences among buyers. The research was based on the assumption that circular fashion is not a uniform consumer category, but rather a set of practices organized according to different logics.

Circular fashion and its significance

Sustainability challenges facing the fashion industry have become increasingly prominent in recent decades particularly due to the overproduction and excessive resource consumption associated with fast and ultra-fashion (Clark, 2008; Goworek et al., 2012). In response, the concept of the circular economy offers alternative models aimed at extending the life cycle of materials and products, and keeping resources in circulation (Todeschini et al., 2017).

Circular fashion represents the implementation of these principles at the consumer level, and encompasses a variety of business models, including the purchase of durable products, second-hand consumption, recycling, and alternative access models such as clothing rental (Hvass, 2015; Jung & Jin, 2016). Although these models share the common goal of promoting sustainability, their operation and consumer perception can vary significantly. The literature,

however, points out that the environmental and economic impacts of these models as well as their consumer acceptance can vary significantly (Shirvanimoghaddam et al., 2020). This suggests that circular models differ significantly not only in their environmental impacts but also in consumer perceptions and acceptance, which justifies a comparative analysis. This is particularly important from the perspective of sustainable development, as the gap between positive attitudes and actual behaviour may limit the real environmental impact of circular models.

Circular consumption as a heterogeneous practice

Much of the literature treats circular fashion as a uniform phenomenon and focuses primarily on examining sustainability attitudes and general willingness to purchase (Camacho-Otero et al., 2019). However, this approach often overlooks the fact that different circular models align with consumers' everyday practices and norms to varying degrees.

In their systematic literature review, Camacho-Otero et al. (2019) point out that different forms of circular consumption are organised around distinct motivations and barriers, yet these differences are rarely analysed in an integrated manner. The study's strength lies in its extensive database and structured analysis; however, its limitation is that it remains primarily at the conceptual level and does not offer an empirical comparison between the different models. Nevertheless, most of the existing research examines individual models in isolation, or approaches sustainable consumption in aggregate terms, thus obscuring the structural differences among the models and their implications for consumers.

Hvass (2015) reaches a similar conclusion: in examining circular fashion business models, he emphasises that each model offers a distinct value proposition to consumers. Although the study makes an important theoretical contribution, it is limited from a methodological perspective, as it does not support the differences in consumer acceptance with empirical data.

Second-hand consumption: a practice becoming mainstream

Second-hand fashion is one of the most widely studied circular models, which has gradually become mainstream among consumers in recent years. According to research by Jung and Jin (2016), the acceptance of second-hand products is primarily motivated by economic benefits and sustainability values. The study employs a quantitative method, which allows for the statistical analysis of factors but is limited in that it does not compare the second-hand model with other circular alternatives.

Clothing rental: Low acceptance and high uncertainty

Clothing rental, as an access-based model, differs significantly from the traditional consumption logic of ownership, which may help explain the lower acceptance of this model. According to Lang and Armstrong (2018), the acceptance of clothing rental is significantly influenced by perceived risk, particularly by concerns about hygiene and quality. The study's strength lies in its use of an experimental method, which allows for the examination of causal relationships. However, its limited sample size reduces the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, the research does not contextualise clothing rental within other circular models, thus failing to address how widely accepted this model is in relative terms.

In line with this, Becker-Leifhold and Iran (2018) point out that the acceptance of access-based models depends heavily on consumers' attitudes towards ownership. The study is strong from a theoretical perspective, but its empirical validation is limited.

The role of perceived risk and consumption norms

Perceived risk is a key mechanism underlying the differences among circular fashion models. Kim et al. (2021) demonstrated that concerns about quality and hygiene significantly reduce willingness to consume, particularly for second-hand items and clothing rental. Price sensitivity is also a key factor (Blas Riesgo et al., 2022), particularly when consumers do not perceive clear added value in sustainable alternatives. Gazzola et al. (2020) further highlight the role of accessibility, which poses a barrier particularly in less developed markets. Taken together, these studies suggest that the acceptance of circular models is not solely a matter of attitude, but rather a process determined by the specific consumption context. At the same time, these factors are typically examined in isolation, which limits the ability to compare models.

The spread of circular models is influenced not only by individual perceptions but also by structural and market barriers, which affect individual business models to varying degrees. These barriers—including accessibility issues, lack of trust, and infrastructure limitations—can further reinforce differences in acceptance across models.

Research gaps and contribution

Based on a critical analysis of the literature, it is clear that while the factors associated with various models of circular fashion are well documented, their comparative analysis remains incomplete. Most studies examine a single model or approach to sustainable consumption at a general level without accounting for the structural differences across consumption forms.

This fragmented approach makes it difficult to understand why consumers accept different circular models to varying degrees. Consequently, the aim of this study is to address this gap through a comparative empirical analysis.

Summary

Overall, it can be concluded that the literature on circular fashion consumption provides an important foundation for understanding the various models, yet it exhibits significant gaps in terms of their comparative examination. The strength of existing research lies in identifying key mechanisms—such as perceived risk, price sensitivity, and social norms—but an integrated analysis of these is lacking.

This study contributes to this gap by empirically examining the acceptance of various circular models and highlighting that circular fashion is not a uniform phenomenon but rather a system of practices operating along different consumer logics.

Methodology

The study employs a quantitative cross-sectional methodology, using questionnaire-based data collection to examine consumer acceptance of various circular fashion models. This research approach is particularly suitable for achieving the objectives of this study, as it allows comparisons of different consumption patterns within the same sample and the identification of statistical differences in consumer preferences. The choice of quantitative methodology is justified by the fact that the research does not aim to gain a deep understanding of a single phenomenon, but rather to measure and compare differences between various circular models, which requires the use of standardised measurement tools and inferential statistical methods. Data collection was conducted using convenience sampling rather than probability sampling. The questionnaire was distributed among university students, primarily through online channels including university mailing lists and student groups. This sampling strategy allowed for quick and efficient access to the target group, but it also has limitations regarding the representativeness of the sample (Bryman, 2016).

The selected target group—university students—is appropriate for this research, as this consumer segment is particularly relevant to the study of circular fashion models. Young adults are, on the one hand, more open to innovative and sustainable forms of consumption. On the other hand, their decisions are highly sensitive to price, perceived risk, and social norms, which play a key role in the acceptance of various circular models (Jung & Jin, 2016). Inclusion in the sample was voluntary, participation was anonymous, and there was no financial incentive. A total of 146 responses were collected, of which 137 were found to be complete and suitable for analysis following the data cleaning process. During data cleaning, incomplete or inconsistent responses were removed, thereby the reliability of the analysis was ensured. The sample size meets the requirements for conducting basic statistical analyses, particularly for repeated-measures procedures (Field, 2018). Although convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the results, the aim of this study is not to draw conclusions representative of the entire population, but rather to explore the relative differences between various circular fashion models. In this sense, the selected sample provides an appropriate framework for examining the research questions, particularly since the comparison is based on the evaluations the same respondents.

The questionnaire consisted of several sections, of which the items concerning purchase intention and the acceptance of various circular models are of particular importance for the present analysis. Respondents rated their agreement with each statement on a five-point Likert scale, where a score of 1 indicated complete disagreement and a score of 5 indicated complete agreement. The three circular models examined were the purchase of sustainable products, second-hand consumption, and clothing rental. These models were operationalized through separate measurement items that reflect the level of consumer acceptance.

The analytical strategy of the study was based on comparing the acceptance of different circular models. Since the same respondents evaluated all three models, we used repeated measures ANOVA in the analysis. This method allows us to examine whether there are significant differences in the average acceptance of different consumption forms while controlling for individual respondent variance (Field, 2018). The use of repeated measures ANOVA is particularly justified in this case, as the goal is not merely to describe the absolute levels of each model, but to compare them relative to one another within the same decision-making context.

In the first step of the analysis, descriptive statistics were calculated to provide an overview of the acceptance levels for each model. We then used a repeated-measures ANOVA to test the main effect—that is, whether the model type significantly affects acceptance level. After demonstrating a significant main effect, we performed pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni correction to determine which models exhibit statistically significant differences. This procedure reduces the risk of Type I errors arising from multiple comparisons, and ensures more reliable results (Armstrong, 2014).

During the statistical analyses, we paid particular attention to testing the assumptions. One of the key assumptions of repeated-measures ANOVA is sphericity, which we tested using the Mauchly test. If the sphericity assumption was violated, we applied the Greenhouse–Geisser correction to adjust the F-statistic, thereby ensuring the validity of the results (Field, 2018). In addition, we checked the data distribution for outliers, which could skew the results. The statistical methods used in the analysis made it possible to answer the central question of the study, namely, whether different circular fashion models are perceived as acceptable by consumers to varying degrees. The chosen methodological approach ensures that the results are not merely descriptive but also suitable for drawing statistically supported conclusions.

Overall, the quantitative, repeated-measure research methodology and the applied analysis of variance provide an appropriate framework for examining the heterogeneity of circular fashion consumption. The methodological approach aligns with the research objectives

by enabling the systematic exploration of differences among consumption models and contributing to a nuanced understanding of circular consumption. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. The study was conducted in accordance with applicable ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. Data supporting the study's findings are available from the author upon request. For privacy reasons, the data are not publicly available.

During the preparation of this manuscript, we used AI-powered tools to improve the linguistic quality of the text. The authors have reviewed and edited the entire content and assume full responsibility for the final version.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Based on descriptive statistics, there is a clear difference in the acceptance of the circular fashion models examined (Table 1). Purchasing sustainable products showed the highest mean value ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.96$), followed by second-hand consumption ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.36$), while clothing rental showed a lower average value for acceptance ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.39$). The results preliminarily indicate a hierarchy of acceptance among the different models.

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics of circular fashion models*

Source: *Compiled by the author based on JASP program*

Model	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Sustainable purchase	4.01	0.96
Second-hand	3.80	1.36
Rental	3.20	1.39

This trend is consistent with previous studies, which indicate that ownership-based sustainable consumption models are more widely accepted than access-based alternatives (Jung & Jin, 2016; Lang & Armstrong, 2018).

Table 2: *Repeated measures ANOVA results*

Source: *Compiled by the author based on JASP program*

Effect	F	df	p	Partial η^2
Model type	26.90	(1.85, 253.3)	< .001	0.164

We used repeated-measures analysis of variance to statistically test for differences (Table 2). The sphericity assumption was violated (Munchley $W = 0.919$, $p = 0.003$), so we applied the Greenhouse–Geisser correction ($\epsilon = 0.925$). The ANOVA results showed a significant main effect of model type, $F(1.85, 253.3) = 26.92$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.164$. This indicates a large effect size, which suggests that the acceptability of the different models differs statistically significantly. The repeated-measures ANOVA showed a significant main effect of model type, $F(1.85, 253.3) = 26.92$, $p < .001$, which clearly indicates that the acceptance of different circular fashion models differs statistically significantly. These findings confirm that consumers evaluate circular fashion models in different ways, which is consistent with previous research highlighting the heterogeneity of circular consumption practices (Camacho-Otero et al., 2019; Hvass, 2015).

Model-specific results

Based on the descriptive statistics, clear differences are evident in the level of acceptance concerning each model. The purchase of sustainable products showed the highest mean value ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.96$), followed by second-hand consumption ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.36$), while a significantly lower mean value was observed for clothing rental ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.39$). This result empirically supports the notion that different circular models cannot be considered a homogeneous consumption category. This finding is consistent with previous findings that have highlighted that sustainable fashion is more readily accepted when it aligns with existing purchasing habits (Blas Riesgo et al., 2022; Jung & Jin, 2016). The consumption of second-hand goods showed moderate acceptance. This finding is consistent with studies indicating the increasing normalisation of second-hand markets, although acceptance among consumers remains varied (Cairns et al., 2022).

Of the models examined, clothing rental showed the lowest level of acceptance. This finding is consistent with previous research, which identified risk perception, lack of knowledge, and trust-related concerns as barriers to the adoption of rental services (Lang & Armstrong, 2018; Kim et al., 2021).

Interpretation of results

The results suggest that circular fashion models cannot be considered a homogeneous consumer category. These differences indicate that consumers have varying attitudes towards each model, which influences their acceptance and potential adoption. The higher acceptance of purchasing sustainable products suggests that models closer to traditional consumption logic can be more easily integrated into existing consumer practices. The results reveal a clear hierarchy of acceptance among the models examined. Ownership-based forms of consumption—particularly the purchase of sustainable products—enjoy greater acceptance while access-based models, such as clothing rental, are significantly less popular among consumers.

The research findings indicate that circular fashion is not perceived as a uniform consumer category by consumers. This finding suggests that the differences between circular fashion models are not merely marginal but reflect structural differences in consumer decision-making.

These findings suggest that the effectiveness of circular fashion models in contributing to sustainability goals is strongly influenced by their level of consumer acceptance.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine whether consumers perceive different circular fashion models similarly and whether significant differences exist among them.

Confirmation of ownership-based dominance

The results show that purchasing sustainable products enjoyed the highest level of acceptance. This finding confirms previous studies that indicate that consumers are more likely to adopt sustainable fashion practices when these practices align with their existing ownership-based consumption habits (Jung & Jin, 2016; Blas Riesgo et al., 2022). This supports the broader argument found in the literature that behavioural compatibility plays a central role in the spread of sustainable consumption. Consumers are more likely to commit to sustainability if it does not require a fundamental change in their consumption logic. At the same time, this study complements previous research by demonstrating that a preference for sustainable purchasing is not observable only in isolation but remains dominant even when directly

compared with other circular models. This comparative evidence reinforces existing claims regarding the relative attainability of ownership-based sustainability.

Partial confirmation and clarification of the normalization of second-hand goods

The results suggest that the consumption of second-hand goods occupies an intermediate position in terms of acceptance. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that second-hand fashion has become increasingly normalised and socially accepted (Cairns et al., 2022).

However, the results also reveal substantial variation in responses, which suggests that acceptance is not uniform among consumers. This nuance complements the existing literature, which often emphasises the growth of second-hand markets but pays less attention to the persistence of ambivalence or resistance among certain consumer segments. Thus, while the study confirms the trend towards normalisation identified in previous research, it also demonstrates that the consumption of second-hand goods remains a transitional model situated between traditional ownership and more revolutionary circular practices.

Clear confirmation of access barriers related to clothing rental

The significantly lower acceptance of clothing rental clearly confirms previous findings that access-based fashion models face greater barriers to adoption (Lang & Armstrong, 2018; Kim et al., 2021). These barriers include perceived risk, unfamiliarity, and trust-related concerns.

However, this study supplements the existing literature with direct comparative evidence. While previous studies have identified barriers to borrowing, they have often examined these barriers in isolation. In contrast, the current findings show that renting is not only less accepted in absolute terms but is also significantly less accepted within the same consumer context than sustainable purchasing or second-hand consumption.

This suggests that renting is not merely a less mature circular alternative, but represents a fundamentally different logic of consumption. It appears that the shift from ownership to access-based consumption requires a bigger behavioural and cultural change than has been emphasised so far.

The heterogeneity of circular fashion: Extending previous frameworks

The most important finding of this research is the empirical confirmation that circular fashion models differ significantly in consumer acceptance. This finding reinforces previous research that has emphasised the diversity of circular consumption practices (Camacho-Otero et al., 2019; Hvass, 2015). At the same time, this study complements the existing literature by demonstrating that these differences are not merely conceptual but are statistically significant, and also relevant from a behavioural perspective. While previous research has often treated circular fashion as a unified category, the present findings challenge this assumption.

This suggests that future research and practice should move beyond general approaches to circular fashion and should, instead, consider the adoption dynamics specific to particular models.

Clarifying the “green gap”: differences between models

The results also contribute to the relevant literature on the “green gap,” which highlights the discrepancy between eco-friendly attitudes and actual behaviour (ElHaffar et al., 2020; Busalim et al., 2022). The results do not contradict this literature but clarify it by demonstrating that the green gap is not uniform across circular fashion models. Purchasing sustainable products

appears to reduce the gap as it aligns with consumers' existing habits. In contrast, clothing rental may widen the gap due to higher behavioural and psychological barriers.

This interpretation is consistent with Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour, which emphasises that attitudes alone are insufficient for predicting behaviour. Perceived control, familiarity and social norms also play a decisive role in the development of acceptance.

Where the results differ from previous assumptions

Although most of the results are consistent with the existing literature, the study also highlights important differences.

First, the extent of the difference between ownership-based and access-based models suggests that previous research may have underestimated the structural nature of this divide. Circular fashion is often discussed as a linear transition, but the results indicate that different models may follow fundamentally different implementation pathways.

Second, although second-hand clothing is often described as fully normalised, the observed discrepancies suggest that normalisation is not yet complete. This indicates that social acceptance is still evolving and may vary depending on context or consumer group.

Third, the results challenge the implicit assumption that promoting sustainability as a general concept would be equally beneficial for all circular models. The findings suggest instead that acceptance depends on how well a model aligns with existing consumption habits.

From a practical perspective, the results have important implications for companies and decision-makers. The introduction and scaling of circular business models cannot be addressed with a one-size-fits-all strategy, as individual models vary in acceptance. When it comes to purchasing sustainable products, the focus may be on communication and branding while, in the case of the second-hand market, ensuring trust and quality is key. In the case of clothing rental, however, deeper structural and cultural barriers must be overcome such as reducing perceived risk and increasing social acceptance. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that circular business models cannot be addressed with a one-size-fits-all strategy. While communication and branding play a key role in the purchase of sustainable products, trust, risk reduction, and increased social acceptance become critical factors for second-hand goods and, in particular, clothing rental.

According to the systemic approach to the circular economy, a sustainable transition can only be successful if business models, the regulatory environment, and consumer practices change in a coordinated manner (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). However, the present findings suggest that certain models—particularly access-based solutions—do not currently align well with dominant consumption norms, which limits the widespread adoption of such models.

At the same time, this research has limitations. Convenience sampling and a sample limited to university students reduce the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, the study relies on self-reported data, which may distort the relationship between actual behaviour and attitudes. Further research is needed involving different demographic groups, as well as longitudinal and experimental methods.

According to the systemic approach to the circular economy, a sustainable transition can succeed only if business models, the regulatory environment, and consumer practices change in a coordinated manner (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017).

Overall, this research highlights that the successful adoption of circular fashion depends not only on strengthening sustainability attitudes but also on how well individual business models align with consumers' existing practices and norms. This insight opens new avenues for research and practical implementation in the circular economy. The results suggest that the acceptance of circular models depends not only on sustainability attitudes but also on how well

a given model aligns with dominant consumption norms and the cultural meanings associated with ownership.

This systemic interpretation of the results is reinforced by the fact that policy frameworks for the circular economy also emphasise the key role of consumer behaviour in the success of the transition (European Commission, 2022). This research indicates that transition does not occur uniformly. Rather, different business models can embed themselves in consumer practices to varying degrees. This is consistent with the systemic approach to the circular economy, which holds that a sustainable transition can succeed only if business models, the regulatory environment, and consumer practices change in a coordinated manner (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017).

The findings of this study highlight that sustainability transitions in the fashion industry are not solely dependent on technological or business model innovation, but also on consumer adoption patterns. This underscores the importance of aligning circular models with existing social norms and consumption practices.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine whether different circular fashion models are perceived as acceptable to varying degrees among consumers. The results clearly confirm that circular fashion is not a uniform consumer category, but rather a collection of models organised according to different logics.

According to the identified hierarchy of acceptance, purchasing sustainable products is the most accepted, followed by second-hand consumption, while clothing rental shows the lowest level of acceptance. This pattern suggests that consumers are more likely to accept circular solutions that align with the traditional, ownership-based logic of consumption.

The main contribution of this study lies in empirically confirming the heterogeneity of circular fashion and highlighting that different models operate through distinct consumer mechanisms. This finding has important theoretical and practical implications, as it indicates that the successful implementation of the circular economy cannot be addressed with a one-size-fits-all approach.

Our findings are consistent with the systemic approach to the circular economy, which holds that the transition to sustainability is not a uniform process, but rather unfolds at different speeds and through different mechanisms across various business models.

Overall, the successful implementation of circular fashion models requires not only structural and regulatory changes but also a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour, which is key to achieving long-term sustainability goals.

Limitations

When interpreting the results of this study, several limiting factors must be taken into account. First, the sampling was not probability-based, and the study was limited to university students. While this sample is relevant in terms of circular fashion, it limits the generalizability of the results to other demographic groups.

Second, the research is based on self-reported data, which is subject to the bias of socially desirable responses. Regarding sustainability-related questions, respondents may present a more positive picture of their own behaviour than is actually observed.

Third, the study is cross-sectional in nature, thus it does not allow for the clear identification of causal relationships or the tracking of changes in consumer attitudes and preferences over time. Furthermore, the study examined three specific circular models, which, while allowing for comparison, do not cover all possible forms of circular fashion.

Finally, the variables under examination were measured with a single indicator, which may limit the ability to fully capture the complexity of the constructs.

Future research

This study provides a foundation for further research in several areas. First, future research should examine the acceptance of circular fashion models across diverse demographic and cultural contexts to explore the role of contextual differences. It may be particularly interesting to examine differences between developed and emerging markets. An important direction for future research is to investigate how these acceptance patterns evolve across different cultural and demographic contexts, as well as which factors can increase the social embeddedness of models with lower acceptance.

Second, the research could be expanded by employing a longitudinal methodology, which would allow for the analysis of changes in consumer attitudes and behaviours over time, particularly regarding the dynamics of the spread of circular models.

Third, future studies should explore in greater depth the psychological and social mechanisms underlying these models, including the roles of perceived risk, trust and social norms. An integrated examination of these factors could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of circular consumption.

Fourth, further research is needed to examine the extent to which various communication and marketing strategies can influence the acceptance of specific models, particularly in the case of access-based models with lower acceptance rates.

Finally, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods could be a promising direction for future research, as it would allow for a deeper, more context-sensitive understanding of consumer decisions.

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