

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

**The Impact of Sustainability Practices on Consumer
Buying Behaviour in the UK Fashion Industry**

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Declaration

I, Promi Das Gupta, declare that this dissertation has been composed by myself, that the work contained herein is entirely my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification, in whole or in part, except as specified.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Promi', with a large, circular flourish above the name.

Date: 28th August, 2026

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Sustainability has become a central issue in fashion because clothing production and consumption are associated with resource use, emissions, pollution, waste and labour concerns (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Sustainable fashion therefore extends beyond corporate reporting to lower-impact materials, ethical sourcing, product durability, repair, resale and other circular practices that can influence product development and consumer value (Mukendi et al., 2020).

This dissertation examines how such practices influence consumer buying behaviour in the UK fashion industry through secondary qualitative research. The central problem is that favourable attitudes towards sustainability do not consistently become purchases because consumers also evaluate price, style, convenience, trust and availability (Rausch and Kopplin, 2021). The chapter establishes the background, research problem, gap, theoretical context, aim, objectives, questions and research approach that guide the study.

1.2. Background of the Study

Fashion has functional as well as symbolic values, as by wearing a particular outfit, one conveys his identity, lifestyle and social belonging. The fast fashion paradigm has made fashion more accessible, at low prices and with high frequency of new trends and great availability, but it has also made people use fashion shorter and faster, increasing the number of materials that go through use cycles (McNeill and Moore, 2015; Niinimäki et al., 2020). The Environmental Audit Committee (2019) also made the connection between overconsumption of clothing and waste, as well as lack of accountability in the supply chain, in the UK. There is tension, thus, between the commercial desirability of the fast fashion and the environmental and social arguments for more durable and responsible fashion, affecting the research context.

This is the response of fashion businesses: Recycled materials, ethical sourcing, transparency, repair, resale, rental, take-back schemes and sustainability communication. When making it practical, these activities can produce stakeholder value

when been a component of easily accessible services. In the UK, for instance, Marks and Spencer Group plc reported that over 36 million clothing items have been reused and the estimated amount of money collected for Oxfam since 2008 is £23 million through its Shwopping partnership in the country. Meanwhile, the case involving ASOS, Boohoo and George at Asda that the CMA investigated highlights that sustainability communication can also be a source of regulatory and reputational risks if it is not clear and specific enough (Competition and Markets Authority, 2024). The examples illustrate the importance of looking at sustainability also as a business matter towards consumers not just operational.

Factors like psychological and market factors influence consumer responses not only the environmental concern. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) suggests that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence intention and behavior, while value-based perspectives suggest that should ethical issues become salient compared to functional, social and emotional issues, they will influence behavior (Homer and Kahle, 1988; Sheth, Newman and Gross, 1991). These viewpoints taken together indicate that sustainability has a better chance of influencing purchase when there is a perceived environmental benefit, but the price and quality are acceptable, and the design and access are as well.

1.3. Research Problem

The research problem is that there is uncertainty whether and under what conditions sustainability practices influence the fashion buying behaviour. Even if a shopper has good intentions to buy a product for ethical reasons, their choice may be influenced by the price, design, novelty/usefulness and convenience of the product (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2010; McNeill and Moore, 2015). Thus, sustainable fashion can't be only determined by the level of concern and buying intention.

This is exacerbated by the students' lack of trust. Only if sustainability claims are comprehensible to consumers will they be able to give their informed consent to sustainability, and where claims are unclear and/or untrue, scepticism and greenwashing could arise. As a result of this, environmental claims must be clear, accurate and substantiated, in line with the UK guidance. Additionally, research shows that price or

availability, information and uncertainty, are also barriers that reduce ethical purchasing (Wiederhold and Martinez, 2018).

It's not just a moral problem for UK fashion companies, it's a strategic one, too. When consumers can see the value in the investment and when the investment is accompanied with a credible communication, it is more likely that they can be persuaded to invest in a durable product, circular services or a responsible sourcing. To fill a gap might just require a bigger promotion unless it's actually unaffordable, inconvenient or doesn't meet consumer expectations to start with (White, Habib and Hardisty, 2019).

1.4. Research Gap and Justification

The factors of environmental concern, perceived value and trust, along with situational factors and product features, are already established as factors that influence the research on green purchasing and sustainable fashion (Joshi and Rahman, 2015; Sharma, Aswal and Paul, 2023). Determinants are also varying among pre purchasing, purchase, use and post use phases as shown in fashion specific reviews (Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico, 2024). The field can, and indeed has been, established but evidence is scattered and fragmentary from various theories to outcomes, and through different forms of sustainability practice.

There are three strands of gaps that justify this study. First, general findings of green consumption cannot be blindly translated to fashion, as the product is particularly trendy, aesthetic, identity-oriented and subject to a high turnover (Mukendi et al., 2020). Second, a lot of studies make use of rather general attitude indicators or indicators of purchase intentions when neither of these factors is a good predictor of sustainable clothing behaviour (Park and Lin, 2020; Rausch and Kopplin, 2021). Thirdly, evidence from the UK is scattered amongst academic research, analysis from the parliament, regulatory advice and industry reports. Hence, an integrated approach is required to clarify the interaction among the factors of sustainability practices, consumers decision making and barrier.

This is a structured secondary qualitative review as it permits the comparison of these various types of evidence without taking them as distinct results and makes it possible to critically assess them. The study thus uncovers areas of convergence and divergence

and reflects on the factors that reinforce and/or undermine the impact of sustainability practices (Snyder, 2019).

1.5. Theoretical Context of the Study

1.5.1. Consumer Behaviour Perspectives

Sustainable fashion purchasing can be understood based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour which is based on attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). "It's helpful because maybe a consumer has a desire to buy something that's sustainable but when they do, they're not able to do it due to the style, or the availability or the price." Its drawback is that purpose and intention are incomplete conceptions of habit, emotion, and identity and of the commercial design of the space of alternative.

Links between values, attitude and behaviour are expressed with the value-attitude-behaviour hierarchy (Homer and Kahle, 1988) and the theory of consumption values considers functional, social, emotional, conditional and epistemic benefits (Sheth, Newman and Gross, 1991). The views can help account for the fact that sustainable clothing can, and does, have ethical significance, notwithstanding a preference for other, perhaps more influential, qualities at the moment of purchase, such as quality, price, identity or convenience. The attitude-behaviour gap gives the very important qualification that the fact that a person's attitude is good does not necessarily mean that their behaviour is good (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2010).

1.5.2. Market Segmentation and STP

Market segmentation is based on the fact that the consumers are different in terms of their needs, values and responses (Smith, 1956). Thus, STP can be applied to the understanding of the different consumer reactions to the same sustainability practice, especially when the consumers are ethically involved, price-driven, trendy and convenience-loving. In this dissertation, it is used as an interpretive lens, not as a variable, and for this dissertation is it a means which can enrich the perception of the message 'how sustainable is it'. This can result in positioning of the sustainable offers around durability, quality, ethics, circularity or value for money (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

1.5.3. Marketing Mix

The marketing mix is a link between sustainability and the broader purchase context. Product is related to materials, quality and design, price is related to affordability and perceived value, place is related to access and convenience and promotion is related to the clarity and credibility of the sustainability information. The framework is applied critically, as it is improbable to spark a behavioural change when the price of the message, the message itself and the accessibility to it, are not attractive to communicate (Constantinides, 2006).

1.5.4. AIDA and Sustainability Communication

The AIDA formula will still be useful in analysing sustainability communication which encompasses attention, interest, desire and action (AIDA) (Barry and Howard, 1990). However, in fashion, there has the potential for the awareness to not move on to purchase as distrust, price or convenience may disrupt the sequence. AIDA is hence being used as a glass for communication and not as a law for behaviour.

All of the above are complementary psychological and commercial aspects of sustainable fashion purchasing that are explained by TPB, value-based theories, STP, the marketing mix and AIDA. They are not considered statistical variables, but rather serve as guidelines for interpretation.

1.6. Conceptual Focus

The conceptual approach is on the one hand sustainability practices as a major area of influence and on the other hand consumers' buying behaviour as an outcome variable. Sustainable materials and ethical sourcing, transparency, durability, repair, resale, recycling and responsible environmental claims are among the practices. Buying behaviour is means of selection, buying or rejection of fashion product by considering the value, perception and decision conditions of consumer.

This is a secondary, qualitative study so there is no test for a numerical causal relationship. It supports the analysis of the existing evidence with respect to potential influences whilst evolving contextual factors like prices, fashion and style etc. as well as fast fashion habits and greenwashing are also taken into account.

Table 1. Conceptual focus of the study

Main Area of Focus	Expected Relationship	Outcome of Interest
Sustainability practices in the UK fashion industry	Examined through secondary qualitative evidence	Consumer buying behaviour

Source: Author's own work, informed by Ajzen (1991), Homer and Kahle (1988), Carrington, Neville and Whitwell (2010) and Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico (2024).

1.7. Research Aim

The aim of this dissertation is to critically examine how sustainability practices influence consumer buying behaviour in the UK fashion industry.

1.8. Research Objectives

The objectives of the dissertation are:

1. To examine the main sustainability practices used and discussed in the UK fashion industry.
2. To critically evaluate consumer and buyer behaviour theories that explain responses to sustainable fashion.
3. To analyse the barriers that may weaken the influence of sustainability practices on fashion buying behaviour.
4. To assess how UK regulatory and industry evidence explains the importance of credible sustainability communication.

1.9. Research Questions

The dissertation addresses the following research questions:

1. What sustainability practices are most relevant to the UK fashion industry?
2. How does existing literature explain the influence of sustainability practices on consumer buying behaviour in fashion?
3. What barriers prevent sustainability concern from becoming actual buying behaviour among fashion consumers?

1.10. Scope of the Study

The study focuses on the UK fashion industry and consumer buying behaviour in relation to sustainability. It does not measure corporate financial performance or attempt to represent every international market. UK academic, regulatory and industry evidence is prioritised, while international studies are used cautiously where their theories or findings help explain the UK problem.

The study uses secondary qualitative evidence only. Its core dataset comprises peer-reviewed journal articles supported by UK regulatory, government and industry documents. No questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or statistical hypothesis tests are used.

1.11. Overview of Research Approach

Quantitative research analyses numerical variables and statistical relationships, whereas qualitative research examines meanings, explanations and context (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). A secondary qualitative design was selected because the research questions require interpretation of how sustainability practices, consumer responses and barriers are explained across existing evidence. A structured review was used to identify, screen and select relevant sources through defined search terms and inclusion criteria.

The selected evidence was analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns, contradictions and relationships (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Coding was informed by the research objectives and theories but remained open to themes emerging from the evidence. The resulting analysis explains the relationship between sustainability practices and consumer buying behaviour without claiming a new statistical causal effect.

1.12. Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation contains five chapters. Chapter 1 defines the research problem and design. Chapter 2 critically reviews sustainable fashion, consumer behaviour, relevant theories, marketing frameworks and UK regulation. Chapter 3 explains the structured secondary qualitative methodology. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the thematic findings from 50 peer-reviewed articles, supported by UK regulatory and industry context.

Chapter 5 answers the research questions and presents conclusions, recommendations, limitations and future research priorities.

1.13. Chapter Summary

This chapter established the research problem, gap and conceptual basis of the dissertation. It showed that sustainability can influence fashion buying, but that price, design, convenience, availability and trust can prevent favourable attitudes from becoming purchases. Four objectives and three research questions guide a structured secondary qualitative review that integrates consumer theory with UK academic, regulatory and industry evidence.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter critically reviews literature on the relationship between sustainability practices and consumer buying behaviour in fashion. It examines product, supply-chain, circular and communication practices together with consumer motives, decision processes and barriers. Particular attention is given to the distinction between favourable attitudes and actual purchasing, because ethical intention does not necessarily survive the purchase context (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2010).

The review first defines sustainable fashion and evaluates practices relevant to the UK industry. It then examines consumer behaviour through TPB, value-based theories, STP, the marketing mix and AIDA before synthesising evidence on the attitude-behaviour gap, greenwashing, trust and regulation. The chapter concludes with a critical synthesis and conceptual framework for the secondary qualitative analysis.

2.2. Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

It's not just about a particular item of clothing being sustainable but a whole of community that has to be addressed through an environmental, social and economic lens. Henninger, Alevizou and Oates (2016) demonstrate that the meaning given to the label is not consistent across different stakeholders and Mukendi et al (2020) differentiate between two different implementation paths for the fashion label, one more incremental and a more radical based on slower fashion consumption, circularity and sufficiency. This is important because a less-impactful fibre could help to facilitate some of the production process without altering the high-volume business model used.

It has a strong environmental argument to offer for change. Fast fashion is characterised by speed, the rapid turnover of trends and use of lots of resources, emissions, pollution and disposal (Niinimäki et al., 2020:2). The changing nature and scale of consumption and production is a continuous challenge in the UK as identified by the Environmental Audit Committee (2019) and WRAP (2024) and SDG 12 aims at more responsible

consumption and production patterns (United Nations, 2015). Thus, consumer choice takes place in a broader range of product design and infrastructure/business incentives.

Social sustainability also has its relevance. Whether a product can be considered to be responsible depends on who carries them out, how they are produced and traceable chain of the product, that is, the willingness shown by those who purchase it. Pérez, Collado and Liu (2022) reveal that social and environmental issues are consumers can tell the difference, both of which can influence ethical-fashion attitudes and willingness to pay. However, whether information is transparent and able to support the practice in comparison to price, style and convenience will ultimately dictate the consumer salience of the practice.

Come into a central contradiction: Many fashion firms are expected to give up upon novelty, as well as repeat consumption, and lessen their impacts while being commercially reliant. While incremental improvements potentially limit impacts per individual item but don't necessarily limit the material volume, repair, resale and extended use directly attack the linear economy model (Mukendi et al., 2020). The challenge must now be to assess sustainable fashion in terms not only of what practices are but also on how these are changing fashion production-consumption patterns.

2.3. Sustainability Practices in the UK Fashion Industry

There are three categories which can be summarized under the term sustainability practices: product, supply-chain, circular and communication activities. Product practices include use of recycled materials and/or reduced impacts materials, durability and design for repair. Ethical sourcing, standards, traceability & disclosure as a part of supply-chain practices. Among the circular practices, among others, there are the processes of repair, resale, rental, take-back schemes and recycling, while, among the communication practices, there are the labels, the environmental claims and the sustainability reporting (Mukendi et al., 2020; Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico, 2024).

They need to be implemented and used by the consumers for their effectiveness. Recycled material collection can go hand in hand with increased volumes of sales and a repair service or a resale service can increase the product lifetime only if consumers perceive them as accessible and as a trustworthy and valuable service. Vehmas et al.

(2018), demonstrate that information on quality and product history is important to form an attitude towards the circular versus non-circular fashion acceptance, and Harris, Roby and Dibb (2016), argued that one has to consider acquisition, use and disposal behaviours together.

These differences are highlighted by some practical examples showing industry evidence. The Shwopping partnership has seen more than 36 million pieces given a second life to UK customers and provided Oxfordshire based charity Oxfam with an estimated £23m, providing the desired outcome of circular participation and a stakeholder benefit. Patagonia (2025) has published 145,446 repairs of products in its FY24 and also a cumulative Fair-Trade premium of over US\$32m is paid to factory workers, highlighting a way to go beyond just promotion in terms of implementing sustainability practices like durability. In 2025, the group's turnovers in the area of resale amounted to 0.8%, which is 31% higher than in 2024, and the group's Garment-collection programme covered 17,808 tonnes of clothing (H&M Group 2026). While these figures don't prove sustainability drove overall financial performance, these nevertheless give an indication of the number of circular projects that are attainable in terms of operating scale and still a small proportion of a large fashion company.

This is also affected by the regulatory oversight and voluntary efforts in the UK. The UK Textiles Pact fosters group and sectoral reflection and action on decarbonising and circularity (WRAP, 2025), while the CMA introduces consumer-protection parameters for environment-related claims. This is vital as voluntary programmes show how ambitious an organisation is to operate, and regulation shows how far an organisation is willing to go in terms of having minimum expectations as a measure for how sustainability may be communicated to consumers.

In general, in order to be effective within practice, there has to be consistency between the operational substance, the credibility of the communication and the added value for the consumer during usage. Circularity also allows for a shift in responsibilities between companies and customers at the end of the product life cycle, as well as repair, rentals and take-back, which require quality service and ease of customer use and participation.

Thus, sustainability can only be evaluated at the end of the product life cycle, for both products and customers (Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico, 2024).

2.4. Consumer Buying Behaviour in Fashion

Consumer buying behaviour involves complexes of activities people engage in when purchasing products, including the way they discover their needs, how they seek information, their alternative evaluations, purchases, as well as their uses and disposals. Fashion is a symbolic field of action containing lots of symbolic activities, because clothes define persons, lifestyles and social membership. While there are many aspects of sustainable-fashions that sustainable-fashion consumers may appreciate, they also include other aspects such as aesthetic, emotional and social (Lundblad and Davies, 2016).

Buying isn't always a thought-out sequential process. Things like low prices and high speed of trend, availability online and social influence can make people to do a habitual purchase or impulse purchase. McNeill and Moore (2015) come up with various consumer orientations to fashion and sustainability and argue that the importance of a particular environmental attribute will vary throughout the market.

Therefore, a difference between attitude, intention and behaviour is a crucial difference to note. Purchase intention is an expected action and behaviour is what the consumers buy, reject or do with products. Factors in the buying or actual purchasing situation can interrupt ethical intention (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2010), and Didieri et al. (2019), show competing motives in purchasing clothes and having sustainable intention. Derived from studies that involve only positive attitudes or an intention to pay; therefore, the effect of the market can be exaggerated.

The post purchase behaviour has impact on sustainability as well. The extension of product's life depends on the care and maintenance given to the garments, their occurrence of usage, repair, resale or disposal. It is therefore important to consider sustainable consumer behaviour not just based on purchasing a specially labelled product, but over the acquisition, use and postuse phases of the product life cycle (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016).

2.5. Theoretical Perspectives on Sustainable Fashion Buying

2.5.1. Theory of Planned Behaviour

TPB suggests that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived control influence intention, which is in turn, a determinant of behaviour, and TPB believe that behaviour is also dictated by ascription of ability, which is the same as perceived control. The concept is important because, despite being able to appreciate sustainable clothing, the consumers may feel limited in terms of cost, availability or lack of information about sustainable clothes. It thus separates the positive evaluation from controlling practically.

Sustainable-fashion studies back up this rationale, but there are also limitations in this. Rausch and Kopplin (2021) link the attitude–behaviour relationship with sustainable clothing behaviour as well as arriving at the aesthetic risk and greenwashing concerns. Jacobs et al. (2018) also demonstrate how environment-minded values do not always result in individuals' purchasing behavior of clothes. Thus, TPB can be effectively applied on the organisation of intention and control, not so much on habit, emotion, identity and the commercial design of the choice environment.

Secondly, there is a constraint of measurements. The intention to buy is usually measured cross sectionally, and not in terms of actual purchase behaviour. Perceived control can change after measurement of intentions due to change in real price, fit, and availability with regard to the product and/or promotional alternatives. TPB is therefore utilised in this dissertation, as a form of interpretation instead of as a belief of a direct linear relationship between A and B.

2.5.2. Value-Attitude-Behaviour Hierarchy and Consumption Values

The value-attitude-behaviour hierarchy suggests that values are fairly enduring and how we feel about things (attitudes) may lead to action (behaviour) (Homer and Kahle, 1988). As discussed, environment- and ethics-based values provide potential for positive assessments and while assessing sustainable-fashion motives with a presentational approach might appear outright paradoxical, a combination of responsibility, individuality, quality and authenticity is demonstrably possible, as is the case with the concept of

'Lundblad-Mirka' (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). The model does not however, address the notion on how the values might be displaced at the point of purchase.

A more general explanation is the theory of consumption values, which separates the functional value, social value and emotional value along with two other types of value known as conditional and epistemic value (Sheth, Newman and Gross, 1991). Apparel can have sustainable values as functional value (durability), emotional value (ethical value), social value (identity) and epistemic value (novelty and conditional value). Recycled and upcycled are two distinct values in fashion, Park and Lin (2020) demonstrate by surveying and indicating that sustainable fashion is not one size fits all.

2.5.3. Market Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning

Market segmentation acknowledges that the consumer has various motives and responses and STP acknowledges that there are certain target groups and positioning offers in relation to alternatives (Smith 1956, Kotler & Keller 2016). Meaningful differences in sustainable fashion can be the ethical commitment, price sensitivity, fashion involvement, knowledge and convenience orientation. These differences threaten to call into question the concept of the 'green consumer'.

There is evidence for this type of heterogeneity. Blas Riesgo, Lavanga and Codina (2023) explain that there is a gap between sustainable and non-sustainable individuals when it comes to fashion and McNeill and Moore (2015) identify that fashion orientation impacts interpretation of sustainable fashion. A high-end ethical company will likely promote sustainability via slow production and longevity, while a fast mass retailer will look to recycled matters or ease of take-back. Positioning is thus the process of converting environment attributes to benefits that relate to a segment.

Another limitation of ST is: the more specific targeting can lead to a piece of sustainability becoming a niche, not the mainstream of consumption being altered. Behavioural and psychographic segmentation can be more explanation potential than Demographic segmentation as it starts to reflect values, habits and benefits searched. In this research STP is employed as a way to explain the heterogeneous responses, as well as to question whether there is integration of sustainability at the broader market.

2.5.4. Marketing Mix and AIDA

By connecting these 4 elements – Product, Price, Place, and Promotion – with the purchase environment, the marketing mix helps you construct the marketing plan. Materials, design and durability give to a products value, price sets the stage for affordability, place sets the stage for access and promotion sets the stage the evidence and the meaning. Although the model is firm-centred, as critiqued by Constantinides (2006), it has provided useful elements to analyse practical barriers to realize a fashion of sustainable nature.

Which means the elements depend upon each other. There is still any such thing as premiums, limited availability, the unappealing design, etc., which is not offset by a nice marketing. For circular services additional requirements are related to hygiene, grading, delivery, returns and trust are added. Barriers in the retail including the inability to shift consumers away from fast fashion are also mentioned by Ronda (2024).

The way to communicate is what AIDA stands for: from Attention to Interest, Desire, Action. It has relevance because they might know those impacts and yet, interlace their purchasing activities with fashion still. But hierarchy-of-effects models may be a too-simplistic way of explaining non-linear behaviour (Barry and Howard 1990). In this study AIDA is thus used in conjunction with the "marketing mix" to understand the extent to which the message can be believable and thus build interest, but fail to stimulate action because of the inadequate overall offering.

Table 2. Critical comparison of theoretical lenses

Theoretical lens	Main contribution	Main limitation	Use in this study
Theory of Planned Behaviour	Explains attitudes, social norms and perceived control.	Can overemphasise intention and understate habit, emotion and context.	Interprets motivation and practical ability to choose sustainable fashion.

Theoretical lens	Main contribution	Main limitation	Use in this study
Value-attitude-behaviour and consumption values	Connect values with functional, social, emotional and conditional benefits.	Positive values may not survive price, style or convenience barriers.	Examines why sustainability creates value for some consumers but not others.
Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning	Recognises heterogeneous consumer priorities and positioning choices.	May confine sustainability to a receptive niche or oversimplify segments.	Compares how consumer groups and brand positioning shape relevance.
Marketing mix	Links product, price, place and promotion to the purchase environment.	Can be firm-centred and insufficiently dynamic.	Assesses whether the complete offer supports or obstructs sustainable choice.
AIDA	Explains how communication may move from attention toward action.	Assumes a sequence that may not reflect habitual or interrupted decisions.	Evaluates why awareness and interest may fail to become purchase.

Source: Author's synthesis based on Ajzen (1991), Barry and Howard (1990), Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991), Constantinides (2006) and Kotler and Keller (2016).

2.6. Influence of Sustainability Practices and the Attitude-Behaviour Gap

Sustainability actions are generally linked to positive attitudes, perceived value, brand assessments and purchase intentions, albeit with varying degrees of effects. Pérez, Collado and Liu (2022) pave the way to connecting ethical-fashion concern and attitudes and willingness to pay and Rausch and Kopplin (2021) confirm the importance of perceived control and product-related risk. Sustainability can thus play a role in the decision, but not be the sole buying criterion.

There is greater caution regarding evidence of actual behaviour. Cairns, Ritch and Bereziat (2022) see a mismatch between the environmental outlook and clothing behaviour, and Wiederhold and Martinez (2018) highlight aspects of pricing, availability, knowing and uncertainty. Carrington, Neville and Whitwell (2010) argue that the existing plans for ethics may be interrupted when purchasing the product. Thus, the discrepancy might be better viewed in terms of an interplay of motives and market factors rather than merely the usual consumer stupor.

Price is by far the most enduring challenge as sustainable products often have low reference products, being fast fashion. Other factors, such as style, fit, limited choice and inconvenience, can also reduce perceived behavioural control (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016; Rausch and Kopplin, 2021). Consumers are therefore able to be sustainable, and refuse to purchase something that is too high a sacrifice in terms of the traditional fashion attributes.

Information is a necessary, but insufficient condition. On the other hand, Ritch (2022) demonstrates that there is non-uniformity in understanding which is found in the definitions of sustainability terminology; and Vehmas et al. (2018) establish the need for clarity in the information on the quality and origin of circular products. Information should decrease the effort to make a decision and facilitate comparisons; it should not be a vague claim on top of another.

But sustainability continues after the 'acquisition'. Even when the garment wasn't originally sustainable, there is still a potential of reducing impacts through repair, longer use, resale and responsible disposal. Thus, Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico (2024) suggest focusing on the pre-purchase, purchase, use and post-use stages as a whole.

Behavioural change may also involve a reduction of consumption in addition to one consumption shift to another consumption group. White, Habib and Hardisty (2019) highlights the importance of Social Influence, Habits, Identity and Actual Choice Environments. In fashion, this could be just as significant as promoting a greener new product, as access for repair, resale and product life extension can be just as important.

2.7. Sustainability Communication, Trust and Greenwashing

Communication is a crucial credibility hazard, as it is the link between operational sustainability and consumers' perception. Words like 'conscious', 'responsible' or 'eco-friendly' can be used to squeeze a lot of issues that are complex in the supply chain and life cycle into one or two words. Sustainable fashion is itself controversial according to Henninger, Alevizou and Oates (2016) and as well as this, Ritch (2022) illustrates how consumers have different interpretations of sustainable fashion jargon.

A Greenwash is a form of environmental communication that exaggerates or falsely represents performance. Delmas and Burbano (2011) cite organizational and external drivers and de Freitas Netto et al., (2020) cite forms such as vague language, selective disclosure of information and misleading imagery. Nevertheless, as it can be seen in Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla and Paladino (2014), having a mismatch between the green advertising and environmental performance can have harmful effects on the consumer's response. Trust thus relies on a congruence between claims and evidence of operations.

The relevance of transparency for consumers is not how much is disclosed but the verifiability of it. Uncertainty can be reduced by a specific claim and value can be upheld, but the broader the claim is, it is more likely to create scepticism. This puts communication into the behavioural processes, instead of being a special promotion.

2.7.1. Firstly, it is brief overview of the UK Regulatory Context and consumer protection.

This is reiterated in the UK regulation. When making environmental claims the CMA expects that they are truthful, clear, unambiguous and substantiated and that material information is not omitted (Competition and Markets Authority, 2024). These are formal undertakings that ASOS, Boohoo and George at Asda gave following a CMA investigation in March 2024, to alter the way they tout Green credentials. The commitments were made without any admission of liability, although the firms – which combined make over £4.4 billion from sales of fashion goods in the UK each year – will be mandated to report on compliance. The result demonstrates the potential regulatory, managerial and stakeholder impacts for the consumer and the sector as a result of weak sustainability communication.

The analytical aspects of the case are in coherence with the consumer literature. Specific and transparent claims can reinforce comparison and build trust; ambiguous and/or selective claims may undermine the impact of true sustainability services. The CMA also provides guidance throughout the sector, thereby establishing a standard for its competitors, which green communication will impact not only on the level of individual brand credibility, but also on the rules of market competition.

This is because AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) communication is needed for sustainability and movement to action requires trust and the broader product offer. Consistency is also needed within the marketing mix between the promotion, the product, price and availability. When facts are scanty evidence is weak, and good language cannot make up for it.

The only way to lessen information asymmetry through certification and labelling is for consumers to be aware of what a scheme covers. Too many or unfamiliar labels can, in turn, lead to greater cognitive effort. Therefore, in effective communication, the claims should be tied to specific attributes, evidence and limitations, and not necessarily be assumed to yield more sustainable buying when more information is provided (Ritch, 2022).

2.8. Critical Synthesis and Literature Gap

In the literature, the term sustainable fashion behaviour is always put forward as multidimensional. Environmental concern and ethical concern support attitude and consumers also consider functional, social and emotional value. Attitudes, norms and control is explained by TPB; value theories are explained by competing benefits; STP is explained by heterogeneity; marketing mix and AIDA are explained by market offer and market communication are expected to influence action. None of the diagrams provide a full description of the relationship.

It is also a well-established fact that there is an attitude-behaviour gap, which can be explained using various explanations. Some of these focus on the knowledge and motivation, while others highlight price, aesthetic risk, availability, habit and retail barriers (Diddi et al., 2019; Ronda, 2024). This distinction is important because for awareness

campaigns to work – they cannot address an affordability issue or a product design issue – and too much talk can have a negative effect on trust.

Three gaps remain. First, there is lack of full reflection in general green-consumption research of the fashion's identity and trend and replacement dynamics. Secondly, the majority of research focuses on intention or willingness to pay as opposed to actual behaviour (Busalim, Fox and Lynn, 2022). Third, there is a lack of consistency in the evidence available in the UK, across academic research, regulation, parliamentary analysis and industry reporting. In the present study, these types of evidence are brought together around the three research questions, thus avoiding this fragmentation.

The diversity of methods in methodology also makes metrics of synthesis difficult. While surveys provide information for comparison of constructs, they are primarily self-reported and often cross-sectional; qualitative studies give depth to the understandings and may be small sample contextual, reviews rely on the quality of the evidence included, and industry reports may be current but based on an organisational definition of health. Evidence needs to be compared critically therefore, and not assumed to be equally effective in providing evidence for behavioural influence.

In addition, in the context of an MBA course, regulatory and industry evidence is particularly significant as it illustrates how academic mechanisms impact organisational outcomes. A chain of CMA requirements is linked to consumer protection, and business cases like M&S, H&M or Patagonia demonstrate that circularity and responsible sourcing can bring tangible results to the company and its stakeholders. It's not about whether there's any sustainability activity, but when it's credible and valuable enough to affect the consumer's behaviour.

2.9. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework treats sustainability practices as the main area of influence and consumer buying behaviour as the outcome of interest. Practices include lower-impact materials, ethical sourcing, transparency, durability, repair, resale, recycling and responsible environmental claims. Buying behaviour includes product selection, purchase, rejection and related consumption decisions.

The framework is not a statistical causal model. TPB, value theories, STP, the marketing mix and AIDA are used as interpretive lenses, while price, style, availability, convenience, trust, greenwashing and fast-fashion habits are treated as contextual conditions that can strengthen or weaken the relationship.

This simple but conditional framework is appropriate for thematic analysis because it supports comparison of explanations and contradictions without estimating an effect size.



Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Contextual conditions: price, style, availability, convenience, trust, greenwashing and fast-fashion habits

Source: Author’s own work, informed by Ajzen (1991), Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991), Carrington, Neville and Whitwell (2010), White, Habib and Hardisty (2019) and Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico (2024).

2.10. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature linking sustainability practices with consumer buying behaviour in fashion. Sustainable materials, ethical sourcing, circular services and credible communication can create value, but consumers continue to evaluate these practices alongside price, quality, style, convenience and trust.

TPB, value-based perspectives, STP, the marketing mix and AIDA explain complementary parts of this process. The literature indicates a conditional rather than automatic influence, with affordability, availability, aesthetic risk, habit and greenwashing repeatedly weakening behavioural conversion. The UK regulatory and industry context further shows that sustainability has organisational and stakeholder consequences as well as environmental significance. Chapter 3 explains the structured secondary qualitative methodology used to analyse this evidence.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter explains and justifies the methodology used to examine how sustainability practices influence consumer buying behaviour in the UK fashion industry. The study used published academic research as its core evidence and UK regulatory and industry documents for contextual interpretation. The methodology was aligned with the three research questions and with the qualitative objective of explaining patterns, contradictions and barriers rather than estimating a new statistical effect (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

The chapter outlines the research philosophy, design, approach, review strategy, search and screening process, data extraction, quality appraisal, thematic analysis, trustworthiness, ethics and limitations. To ensure that conclusions were based on a traceable evidence base and not an informal selection of publications, a transparent review process was necessary (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart, 2003; Snyder, 2019).

3.2. Research Philosophy and Assumptions

The study was based on an interpretivist philosophy as sustainable fashion buying is about meanings, perceptions and context, and not one objective reality that is independent of interpretation (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Ethical, circular and sustainable are terms that can be interpreted differently by consumers and researchers, and the importance of price, style, trust and environmental claims is different in different contexts.

The ontological position was relativist as it assumed that there are multiple context-dependent interpretations of sustainability, and the epistemological position was interpretive as knowledge was developed through critical examination of how existing studies defined and explained consumer responses (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Findings were therefore evaluated in the context of the design of each source, the sample, and the context and limitations of the source.

A positivist design would have been more appropriate for testing numerical hypotheses, but that was not the purpose of this dissertation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Quantitative findings within included papers were interpreted qualitatively alongside other evidence rather than pooled into a new statistical model.

3.3. Research Design

The research used an exploratory secondary qualitative design. This was appropriate because the literature established the issue but offered fragmented explanations of why sustainability attitudes do or do not become purchases. The design therefore sought an integrated explanation of consumer value, trust, perceived control and market barriers rather than confirmation of a single causal model.

The unit of analysis was the published study or document and the findings and context it contained. No interviews, focus groups, observations or secondary statistical modelling were conducted. Source characteristics, definitions and limitations were recorded systematically to preserve context during synthesis (Ruggiano and Perry, 2019).

The methodological choice was qualitative mono-method because the final synthesis relied on coding and thematic interpretation. The review was cross-sectional in the sense that it assessed evidence available up to July 2026, although individual included studies could use longitudinal designs.

3.4. Research Approach

An abductive approach was adopted. Deduction begins with theory, induction develops concepts from observations, and abduction moves between theory and evidence to develop the most plausible explanation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). This suited a study informed by established consumer theories but open to patterns not fully explained by them.

Initial interpretation was sensitised by TPB, value-based perspectives, STP, the marketing mix, AIDA and the attitude-behaviour gap. These frameworks provided provisional concepts relating to attitudes, social influence, perceived control, value, positioning and communication, while additional codes such as hygiene risk, information

overload, circular-service inconvenience and regulatory influence were retained when they emerged from the evidence.

3.5. Research Strategy

The research strategy was a structured literature review with systematic search, screening and documentation procedures and thematic synthesis. Literature reviews can serve as a research methodology if they have a clear purpose, transparent source selection and an explicit synthesis process (Snyder, 2019). The strategy was appropriate for a management topic where there were a variety of empirical methods and documentary evidence (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart, 2003).

The review included predefined search concepts, multiple databases, inclusion and exclusion criteria, duplicate removal, staged screening and quality appraisal and an extraction matrix in Excel. It was therefore not a statistical meta-analysis (Grant and Booth, 2009; Turnbull, Chugh and Luck, 2023).

The study was a structured business review and the principles of PRISMA 2020 were followed for identification, screening and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). No numerical PRISMA flow diagram was provided as the initial-record counts were not available and no figures were invented.

Table 3. Methodological alignment of the study

Methodological element	Selected position	Reason for selection
Research philosophy	Interpretivism	The study interprets context-dependent meanings and explanations of sustainable fashion buying.
Ontology	Relativist	Consumer and organisational understandings of sustainability can differ across contexts.

Methodological element	Selected position	Reason for selection
Epistemology	Interpretive	Knowledge is developed through critical interpretation of published evidence.
Research approach	Abductive	Existing theory guides the analysis while new themes remain able to emerge.
Research design	Exploratory secondary qualitative	The aim is explanation and synthesis, not new primary data collection or statistical testing.
Research strategy	Structured literature review	Transparent searching and screening are combined with contextual interpretation.
Data analysis	Thematic analysis	Recurring meanings, patterns, barriers and contradictions are compared across sources.
Time horizon	Cross-sectional review	The study examines evidence available up to July 2026.

Source: Author's own work.

3.6. Data Collection Methods

Data collection involved identifying relevant academic and documentary sources. The final analytical sample comprised 50 peer-reviewed journal articles, all available in full text through open publisher or repository routes. UK government, parliamentary, CMA and WRAP documents were retained separately as contextual evidence and were not counted within the 50 journal articles.

Academic searching used Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect and Emerald Insight, supplemented by Google Scholar for citation searching and open versions. Backward and

forward citation searches were also used to identify relevant studies. Regulatory and industry sources were obtained from official organisational websites.

The main publication period was January 2015 to July 2026, with older sources retained only when theoretically or methodologically foundational. Searches were limited to English-language full text because the study concerned the UK context and did not include translation resources.

3.6.1. Search Terms and Search Process

Search strings combined three concepts: sustainable fashion, consumer behaviour and the UK context. Terms within each concept were joined with OR and the concept groups with AND. A broad search identified transferable consumer evidence, followed by UK-focused searching for contextual studies and regulatory material. This prevented unnecessary exclusion of relevant international mechanisms while retaining a UK-centred interpretation.

A representative search string was: ("sustainable fashion" OR "ethical fashion" OR "circular fashion" OR "sustainable clothing") AND ("consumer buying behaviour" OR "purchase behaviour" OR "purchase intention" OR "attitude-behaviour gap" OR trust OR greenwashing) AND (UK OR "United Kingdom" OR British). Broader searches omitted the final geography term when identifying theory or transferable empirical explanations.

Table 4. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion	Included	Excluded
Topic	Fashion, clothing or textile consumption linked to sustainability practices or consumer behaviour.	Technical textile studies with no consumer or business relevance.
Evidence type	Peer-reviewed empirical studies, relevant review papers, and authoritative UK regulatory or industry documents.	Blogs, unsupported opinion pieces, promotional pages and anonymous web content.

Criterion	Included	Excluded
Outcome	Buying behaviour, purchase intention, willingness to pay, trust, product evaluation, circular behaviour or attitude-behaviour barriers.	Studies with no meaningful consumer response or decision outcome.
Geography	UK evidence and transferable international studies that help explain the UK problem.	Sources whose context cannot be interpreted or whose relevance to the research questions is negligible.
Publication date	Mainly 2015 to July 2026, with older seminal theoretical and methodological sources.	Outdated non-seminal sources where more relevant current evidence is available.
Language and access	English-language full text openly accessible through a publisher or repository, with sufficient detail for appraisal and extraction.	Duplicates, abstracts without full text, paywalled-only records without an accessible version, and sources lacking sufficient methodological or evidential detail.

Source: Author's own work.

3.6.2. Screening and Source Selection

The records were merged and duplicates were eliminated and the sources were screened by title, abstract and full text. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were strictly followed and borderline records were kept until full text assessment. The result of the process was a final analytical sample of 50 peer-reviewed articles that were selected because they were directly relevant, were methodologically useful, were recent, and applied to the research questions. Regulatory and industry documents in the UK were kept as separate documents for contextual interpretation.

Screening was performed by a single researcher which could lead to a variability in judgement. In order to achieve consistency, written criteria were used and borderline cases were rechecked and a procedure of extraction was recorded.

3.7. Data Extraction and Management

The 50 journal articles were put into a structured evidence-extraction matrix in Microsoft Excel. Each row included details of the citation, context, research aim, theory, design, sample, sustainability practice, consumer outcome, key findings, limitations, UK relevance, research-question link, appraisal judgement, initial codes and final theme. Evidence was organised and compared using Excel, but not for statistical hypothesis testing. Contextual regulatory and industry documents were noted on a separate worksheet.

Extraction was done not only based on abstracts but also by close reading. Each of the Chapter 4 table entries could be traced to a source, findings were paraphrased accurately, and direct quotations were recorded with page numbers when necessary. The summary table of the 50 articles and thematic analysis were based on the completed matrix.

3.8. Quality Appraisal

Quality appraisal considered the type of evidence rather than applying one checklist mechanically. Empirical studies were assessed for clarity of purpose, design, sampling, analysis, support for conclusions and acknowledgement of limitations. Reviews were assessed for transparent search and synthesis, while regulatory and industry documents were assessed for authority, currency, evidential transparency and organisational interests.

Methodological weakness did not automatically exclude a relevant source because limitations can help explain disagreement. Intention studies, for example, were not treated as direct evidence of completed purchases, and industry reports were used for context rather than as equivalents to peer-reviewed empirical studies (Snyder, 2019; Page et al., 2021).

3.9. Data Analysis

The 50 journal articles were analysed using thematic analysis, while regulatory and industry documents were used to interpret the UK market and policy context. Thematic analysis is appropriate for identifying recurring patterns across diverse textual evidence

(Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process followed familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, theme review, naming and production of the analytical account. Chapter 4 presents the 50-article summary table before the thematic findings.

During familiarisation, each source was summarised in the matrix. Initial descriptive codes included recycled materials, ethical sourcing, repair, price, style, trust, greenwashing, convenience and willingness to pay, while interpretive codes captured relationships such as sustainability creating value only when benefits were credible or market barriers interrupting positive concern.

Codes were compared across studies and grouped into six final themes: sustainability practices and consumer value; consumer attitudes, values and purchase decisions; price, style, convenience and availability; trust, greenwashing and communication; the attitude-behaviour gap; and circular consumption and post-purchase behaviour. Contradictory findings were retained rather than removed to create a simpler narrative.

The analysis was still of an abductive type. A set of theories developed in chapter 2 were used for interpretation; while none were forced to a universal level of sufficiency. TPB was used to help understanding perceived control, contributing factors of consumption were explained with the help of values, heterogeneity was explained with the help of STP, and offer and communication environment was explained with the help of marketing mix and AIDA.

3.10. Trustworthiness and Research Quality

Trustworthiness has been taken care of by the use of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) approach which is based on credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Credibility was achieved through multiple databases supporting this and contradictory evidence; dependability and confirmability were achieved through screening record and extraction matrix and traceable decisions for coding.

Transference has been taken care of by detailing the fashion and the regulatory context of the UK and by taking international findings with a pinch of salt. Inter-coder agreement was not claimed in this review since only one coder completed the review. Rather, methodological cohesiveness, interpretation transparency and an auditable connection

between claims and literature/bases (the sources) constituted statements of honorable quality (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).

3.11. Ethical Considerations

There were no human subjects in the study and the amount of personal identifiable data was minimal, therefore the risk associated with consent, privacy and direct harm are minimal. There was a need to be ethically responsible however as published research and organisational documents are the intellectual property of the organisation and can be misrepresented.

Sources were cited in UWTSD Harvard style, findings and limitations were presented accurately and material was accessed lawfully via the open or the university. No person data was revealed in the extraction matrix and organisational interests were taken into consideration in the assessment process.

3.12. Methodological Limitations

The study was limited by available evidence, inconsistent definitions of sustainable fashion and the predominance of purchase-intention studies over observed behaviour. Publication bias may favour clearer findings, and international studies cannot be assumed to represent UK consumers directly.

Further limitations arise from English-language searching, database coverage and single-researcher screening and coding. Regulatory and industry reports also serve different purposes from peer-reviewed studies. Transparent criteria and cautious interpretation reduced, but did not remove, these limitations.

3.13. Chapter Conclusion

The methodology combined an interpretivist philosophy, relativist ontology, abductive approach and exploratory secondary qualitative design. Fifty open-access peer-reviewed articles were selected through structured searching and screening, managed in an Excel extraction matrix, appraised critically and analysed thematically, with UK regulatory and industry evidence used for context.

The design provided a transparent basis for the findings without collecting primary data or claiming statistical causality. Chapter 4 presents the resulting evidence profile, six themes and discussion.

Chapter 4. Findings, Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses and discusses the findings generated from the structured analysis of 50 peer-reviewed journal articles selected through the procedures described in Chapter 3. All 50 articles are openly accessible through publisher or repository routes, allowing the underlying evidence to be independently inspected. The journal articles form the analytical dataset, while UK regulatory and industry documents are used only to interpret the findings within the national fashion context. The purpose is not to calculate a pooled effect size, but to identify recurring patterns, contrasts and conditions that explain how sustainability practices are associated with consumer buying behaviour and then relate those findings back to the literature and theoretical perspectives developed in Chapter 2.

The evidence was organised in the Excel extraction matrix and analysed thematically. Six connected themes were identified: sustainability practices and consumer value; consumer attitudes, values and purchase decisions; price, style, convenience and availability; trust, greenwashing and sustainability communication; the attitude-behaviour gap; and circular consumption and post-purchase behaviour. These themes correspond closely with the research questions but are presented first as findings emerging across the final evidence base. A dedicated discussion section then compares the results with the literature and theoretical lenses reviewed in Chapter 2, including the Theory of Planned Behaviour, value-based perspectives, STP, the marketing mix and AIDA.

4.2. Profile of the Final Evidence Base

The 50 articles span 2015 to 2026, with a clear concentration in recent research. Thirty articles were published between 2024 and 2026 and 44 were published from 2021 onwards. This provides a contemporary evidence base while retaining a small number of earlier open-access studies that remain useful for comparing longer-standing patterns in sustainable apparel consumption. The evidence is geographically diverse. It includes UK-specific research, wider European evidence and studies from North America, Asia, Australia, Latin America and cross-national settings. This breadth is valuable because

consumer mechanisms such as perceived value, price sensitivity, trust and perceived behavioural control can be compared across settings; however, non-UK findings are treated as transferable explanations rather than direct representations of UK consumers.

The evidence base is dominated by empirical consumer studies, particularly survey-based quantitative research, but it also includes experiments, qualitative studies, mixed-method research and systematic reviews. This methodological variation improves breadth but requires caution when comparing outcomes. Many studies measure purchase intention rather than completed purchases. Others focus on specific practices such as second-hand clothing, fashion rental or recycled apparel. Consequently, stronger weight is given to patterns that recur across different methods and product forms, while contradictory evidence is retained rather than treated as an error.

Table 5. Profile of the 50 selected journal articles

Dimension	Evidence profile	Analytical implication
Publication period	2015-2019: 6 articles; 2021-2023: 14 articles; 2024-2026: 30 articles	Recent evidence dominates while a limited historical base supports comparison.
Primary evidence type	Predominantly empirical consumer studies, supported by qualitative, mixed-method, experimental and review research	Triangulation reduces reliance on one research design.
Geographical coverage	UK, Europe, North America, Asia, Australia, Latin America and cross-national studies	International studies are used for transferable mechanisms, not assumed to represent UK consumers directly.
Main outcomes	Purchase intention, purchase behaviour, willingness to pay, trust, product choice, rental/second-hand adoption and post-purchase practice	Intention and actual behaviour are distinguished during interpretation.

Dimension	Evidence profile	Analytical implication
Primary themes	Values/decisions (10); attitude-behaviour gap (9); circular/post-purchase (9); practices/value (8); trust/communication (8); barriers (6)	The distribution shows that behavioural influence is explained through both consumer psychology and market conditions.

Source: Author's analysis of the final 50 open-access journal articles.

4.3. Summary of the 50 Journal Articles

Table 6 presents the complete analytical dataset. The table records the context and design, the sustainability practice or issue examined, the principal finding relevant to this dissertation and the primary theme assigned during synthesis. Several studies contribute to more than one theme; the final column therefore indicates the dominant analytical placement rather than an exclusive classification.

Table 6. Summary of the 50 selected open-access journal articles

N o.	Study	Context/design	Sustainability focus	Principal finding	Primary theme
1	Wu and Lee (2025)	Consumer survey	Consumption values	Sustainable-fashion purchase intention reflected multiple consumption values and TPB-related evaluations rather than environmental concern alone.	Values and decisions
2	Mandarić, Hunjet and Vuković (2022)	Consumer survey	Brand sustainability	Brand sustainability was positively associated with purchasing decisions, but conventional criteria such as price, quality and brand factors remained relevant.	Attitude-behaviour gap
3	Leclercq-Machado et al. (2022)	Ecuador; survey	Sustainable clothing	Attitudes and social influences supported sustainable clothing decisions, while practical constraints limited consistent behavioural conversion.	Values and decisions

N o.	Study	Context/design	Sustainability focus	Principal finding	Primary theme
4	Tymoshchuk, Lou and Chi (2024)	USA; survey n=448	Second-hand apparel	Product, information and service quality increased perceived values; service quality reduced risks and perceived values strengthened purchase intention and word of mouth.	Circular consumption
5	Hasbullah et al. (2022)	Malaysia; survey	Sustainable apparel	Millennial purchase intention reflected both pro-environmental concerns and apparel-related consumer value, showing that sustainability must coexist with product appeal.	Values and decisions
6	Lin and Chen (2022)	Taiwan; survey n=408	Rental, second-hand, recycled apparel	Environmental consciousness increased perceived value; value increased purchase intention, while perceived risk reduced intention for some circular apparel types and differed by generation.	Barriers
7	Kim, Jung and Lee (2021)	Consumer survey	Second-hand, upcycled and recycled clothing	Values and risks varied across circular-fashion formats, demonstrating that sustainable products are not evaluated as one homogeneous category.	Practices and value

N o.	Study	Context/design	Sustainability focus	Principal finding	Primary theme
8	Lu et al. (2022)	China; survey	Fast-fashion green claims	Perceived greenwashing weakened green purchase intention and increased perceived risk, making credibility a central condition for sustainability communication.	Trust and greenwashing
9	Halicki, Zaborek and Meylan (2024)	Europe; consumer study	Second-hand clothing	Second-hand purchasing reflected economic, hedonic and environmental motives, indicating that sustainability is only one component of circular-fashion value.	Circular consumption
10	Vassalo et al. (2024)	Digital consumer context	Sustainable fashion	Environmental concern, consumer awareness and adaptation to digital fashion environments were connected with intention to purchase sustainable fashion.	Practices and value
11	Sueda and Seo (2024)	Japan; online survey/SEM	Recycled and second-hand clothing	Environmental consciousness, perceived value, fashion interest, social media use and uniqueness influenced recycled and second-hand clothing perceptions differently.	Practices and value

N o.	Study	Context/design	Sustainability focus	Principal finding	Primary theme
12	Jin, Omar and Fu (2024)	China; survey	Recycled apparel	Purchase intention depended on consumer and product-specific value perceptions, showing the importance of translating environmental attributes into recognisable product benefits.	Practices and value
13	Xu et al. (2022)	China; consumer study	Second-hand clothing sharing	Cost performance and convenience supported use, while hygiene, cleaning concerns and perceived risk became important post-pandemic barriers.	Attitude-behaviour gap
14	La Rosa and Johnson Jorgensen (2021)	USA; consumer survey	Sustainable apparel	Engagement with sustainability was associated with apparel purchase intention, but involvement differed across consumers and did not operate independently of apparel preferences.	Values and decisions
15	Lang and Zhang (2024)	China; survey	Fashion rental	Perceived benefits and favourable attitudes supported rental intention, while risk and inconvenience constrained circular-service adoption.	Circular consumption

N o.	Study	Context/design	Sustainability focus	Principal finding	Primary theme
16	Li, Cavender and Lee (2025)	Social-media discussions	Fashion greenwashing	Consumers showed awareness and scepticism toward greenwashing and used social media to challenge claims, seek evidence and demand greater transparency.	Trust and greenwashing
17	Zhang (2025)	China; consumer study	Second-hand clothing	Second-hand intentions reflected sustainability motives but depended on perceived value, familiarity and market conditions.	Attitude-behaviour gap
18	Chakraborty and Sadachar (2022)	Consumer experiment	Sustainable apparel advertising	User-centred sustainability advertising strengthened positive affect and purchase intention when environmental benefits were made personally relevant.	Trust and communication
19	Marcella-Hood (2023)	Instagram/digital context	Sustainable-fashion communication	Digital presentation increased the salience of sustainable fashion, but clarity and consumer relevance were more important than visibility alone.	Trust and communication
20	Badhwar et al. (2024)	International systematic review	Green marketing/greenwashing	Credible green marketing can support engagement, whereas vague or exaggerated claims generate scepticism and weaken trust across fashion and textiles.	Trust and greenwashing

N o.	Study	Context/design	Sustainability focus	Principal finding	Primary theme
21	Pires et al. (2024)	Consumer study	Sustainable fashion	Environmental concern and perceived value supported interest, but willingness to pay remained conditional on price and expected product benefits.	Values and decisions
22	Ahmed et al. (2024)	China; survey	Online fashion rental	Behavioural and ESG-related evaluations jointly shaped rental intention, showing that circular consumption depends on both sustainability beliefs and service conditions.	Circular consumption
23	Hatzithomas, Margariti and Boutsouki (2026)	USA and Greece; cross-national study	Sustainable-fashion habits	Consumption values, gender and cultural context were associated with different sustainable-fashion habits, confirming consumer heterogeneity.	Values and decisions
24	Zhang, Zhang and Zhou (2021)	United Kingdom	Fast-fashion sustainability	UK consumers showed meaningful sustainability awareness and positive feelings, but behavioural commitment was less consistent and remained sensitive to price and other purchase determinants.	Attitude-behaviour gap

N o.	Study	Context/design	Sustainability focus	Principal finding	Primary theme
25	Hong et al. (2024)	China; survey	Sustainable-fashion consumption	Values influenced ecological worldview and awareness; norms and trust supported intention, while intention and trust were associated with reported sustainable behaviour.	Values and decisions
26	Ngo et al. (2024)	Vietnam; survey	Sustainable clothing	Value, quality, price, social influence, design, environmental concern and knowledge shaped attitudes, which in turn supported Gen Z purchase intention.	Values and decisions
27	Tran et al. (2022)	Vietnam; mixed methods	Eco-friendly fashion	Price-value image and customer fulfilment strengthened satisfaction; perceived behavioural control was a stronger predictor of intention than environmental concern alone.	Barriers
28	Sharma et al. (2025)	India; survey	Second-hand clothing	Environmental concern supported positive attitudes; attitude was the strongest intention driver, with subjective norms and perceived control also contributing.	Values and decisions

N o.	Study	Context/design	Sustainability focus	Principal finding	Primary theme
29	Abdelmeguid, Afy-Shararah and Salonitis (2025)	Multinational Gen Y/Z survey	Circular fashion	Awareness supported circular behaviour, yet sustainability ranked below several conventional purchase factors and did not automatically increase willingness to pay.	Attitude-behaviour gap
30	El-Shihy and Awaad (2025)	Gen Z survey	Social-media sustainable-fashion content	Brand- and user-generated content increased purchase intention, with social-media engagement partially mediating the effects.	Trust and communication
31	Mobarak et al. (2025)	Consumer survey	Second-hand fashion	Affordability and sustainability benefits encouraged thrift shopping, while hygiene, quality, sizing, returns and retailer reliability remained barriers.	Barriers
32	Lee, Kim and Yang (2015)	USA; consumer survey	Values and business stewardship	Environmental and altruistic values and perceived business stewardship, including eco-labelling and CSR, were associated with more sustainable clothing practices.	Practices and value
33	Lang (2018)	USA; consumer survey	Fashion rental	Enjoyment, frugality and favourable attitudes encouraged renting, while perceived performance and social risks reduced acceptance.	Barriers

N o.	Study	Context/design	Sustainability focus	Principal finding	Primary theme
34	Lang, Armstrong and Liu (2016)	USA; consumer study	Alternative sustainable retail models	Creative choice counter-conformity increased openness to innovative sustainable retail models, showing the relevance of identity-based segmentation.	Circular consumption
35	Nam, Dong and Lee (2017)	Consumer survey	Green sportswear	Product expectations, attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control contributed to green sportswear intention, with differences by prior green-product experience.	Practices and value
36	Boyer et al. (2025)	United Kingdom; qualitative focus groups	Circular garments	Choice between new, recycled and used garments was shaped by the accessibility and normality of shopping practices, indicating that changing attitudes alone is insufficient.	Circular consumption
37	Kemi and Zilahy (2025)	Hungary; representative survey	Post-purchase clothing behaviour	Second-hand buyers showed somewhat more sustainable post-purchase practices, while social norms and perceived control were more influential than attitudes for repair and giving-away behaviour.	Circular consumption

N o.	Study	Context/design	Sustainability focus	Principal finding	Primary theme
38	Kang and Badal (2025)	USA; Gen Z consumer study	Sustainable vs fast fashion	Attitudes predicted both sustainable and fast-fashion consumption; perceived control, price and scarcity helped explain switching, and the study did not find a simple universal attitude-behaviour gap.	Attitude-behaviour gap
39	Toebast-Wensink et al. (2025)	International systematic review	Sustainable-fashion purchasing	Prior experience emerged as an important condition that can transform barriers into motivators and change how consumers evaluate sustainable-fashion options.	Attitude-behaviour gap
40	Song et al. (2025)	International systematic review	Fashion rental	Rental adoption reflected external service cues and internal psychological states, particularly value, trust, convenience and risk rather than environmental concern alone.	Circular consumption
41	Hong and Kang (2019)	South Korea; survey	Sustainable textile/apparel products	Idealism increased moral intensity and moral intensity directly predicted sustainable apparel purchase behaviour, linking ethical evaluation with reported action.	Values and decisions

N o.	Study	Context/design	Sustainability focus	Principal finding	Primary theme
42	Klaka and Schlittmeier (2026)	Consumer experiment	Material, production and price cues	Consumers responded to sustainability cues, but low price could still increase consumption intention even when perceived sustainability was lower.	Barriers
43	Schiaroli, Dangelico and Fraccascia (2025)	Italy; survey n=768	Sustainable garment materials/context	Knowledge, availability, influencer effects and environmental concern predicted intention; material, visibility and skin contact changed the strength of determinants.	Practices and value
44	Klemm and Kaufman (2024)	Australia; discrete-choice study	Circular product attributes	Price was the strongest overall choice factor, but circular attributes exceeded style and material in importance; durability was the most valued circular attribute.	Barriers
45	Dieguez et al. (2024)	Brazil; survey	Sustainable clothing	Socio-environmental awareness supported purchase intention, while prejudice and reservations toward second-hand clothing remained barriers.	Attitude-behaviour gap
46	Jimenez-Fernandez, Aramendia-Muneta and Alzate (2023)	Consumer study	Circular-fashion principles	Awareness of circular principles was positively related to attitudes, while perceived benefits and practical enablers influenced readiness to participate.	Circular consumption

N o.	Study	Context/design	Sustainability focus	Principal finding	Primary theme
47	Magwegwe and Shaik (2024)	South Africa; survey n=123	Sustainable fast-fashion purchasing	Perceived behavioural control mediated the link between sustainability awareness and behaviour and interacted with attitude; awareness alone was insufficient.	Attitude-behaviour gap
48	Ries and Rese (2025)	Two empirical consumer studies	Sustainability information	Information quality and channel preferences mattered, but information alone did not remove the attitude-behaviour gap and effects varied by age.	Trust and communication
49	Johnstone and Lindh (2022)	Europe; survey n=448 millennials	Influencer-mediated sustainable fashion	Purchase processes were partly non-linear and unplanned; trust in influencers could condition behaviour more strongly than retailer CSR positioning.	Trust and communication
50	Park and Kim (2016)	USA; consumer survey	Customer-centric sustainability/fast fashion	Environmental, social and economic sustainability dimensions shaped consumer perceptions and brand outcomes, with different effects across fast-fashion and sustainability-oriented contexts.	Practices and value

Source: Author's evidence-extraction matrix. Full open-access DOI links are provided in the reference list.

4.4. Theme 1: Sustainability Practices and Consumer Value

The first theme demonstrates that when the consumers can apply sustainability practices to real value, it is the most consistent determinant of buying behaviour. Product-level practices (e.g. recycled materials, durability and lower impact design) can be more easily assessed when purchasing than improvements in the supply chain. Circular-fashion studies also show that second-hand, upcycled, recycled and rental is not perceived as a substitute by consumers. Kim, Jung and Lee (2021) revealed varying value and risk profiles for different circular product types, and Sueda and Seo (2024) demonstrated that the perception of recycled and second-hand products was different in terms of a combination of environmental consciousness, uniqueness, interest in fashion and perceived value. This implies a sustainability label will not necessarily result in a consistent response from consumers.

The durability aspect was a strong link between sustainability and traditional consumer value. As Klemm and Kaufman (2024) discovered, price still outweighed the other factors as the most important overall product-choice factor, but circular factors had a greater influence than style and material, with durability as the most valued circular factor. Schiaroli, Dangelico and Fraccascia (2025) also found that material type and use context had an impact on behavioural determinants. The results suggest that sustainability is more convincing when it is linked to an obvious consumer gain, like extended lifespan, quality or utility, and not just seen as an environmental good.

When business level practices are credible and consumer facing, they also have an impact. Lee, Kim and Yang (2015) recognised the relationship between sustainable values and perceptions of business stewardship such as the eco-label and corporate responsibility and sustainable clothing behaviour. In this regard, Park and Kim (2016) determined that the dimensions of environmental, social and economic sustainability influenced consumer perceptions and the results in terms of the brand, but the influences varied depending on the brand situations. Overall, these findings imply that the most germane practices are those that have some substance and also the potential to be understood, compared and utilized by consumers in the buying process. Leading towards

Objective 1, but also qualifying it: relevance is not just about environmental impact but the relationship of the practice to value.

4.5. Theme 2: Consumer Attitudes, Values and Purchase Decisions

The second theme reinforces the notions of environmental concern and positive attitudes, but it is within a larger system of values and decision rules. Hong et al. (2024) revealed that values had a significant impact on ecological worldview and awareness, whereas personal norms, social norms and trust had a significant impact on intention and reported behaviour. Ngo et al. (2024) also found that in addition to price and product quality, environmental concern and knowledge were also factors. Thus, sustainable fashion choices are made with moral and ecological aspects as well as functional, social and aesthetic aspects.

The results also suggest that the theoretical value of perceived behavioural control is supported. Tran et al. (2022) found the perceived behavioural control is more influential than environmental concern only on eco-fashion intention. Sharma et al. (2025) discovered that attitude was the highest predictor and subjective norms and perceived control still played a significant role in predicting second-hand purchase intention. Magwegwe and Shaik (2024) took it one step further by demonstrating that sustainability awareness was linked to sustainable fast-fashion purchasing behaviour through the mediator of perceived behavioural control. These studies indicate that familiarity with, and concern for sustainability has a lesser impact when consumers do not feel that they have a concrete choice in terms of purchase price or access and/or alternatives to purchasing.

Another finding that is quite common is consumer heterogeneity. Hatzithomas, Margariti and Boutsouki (2026) demonstrated that different sustainable-fashion habits were related to consumption values and demographic/cultural context in younger consumers in the U.S. and in Greece. Lin and Chen (2022) indicated the differences between generations with respect to the relationship between environmental consciousness, perceived value, perceived risk and purchase intention. Hong and Kang (2019) demonstrated that the moral intensity was able to predict sustainable apparel purchase behaviour whilst others highlighted the functional and social value. The overall conclusion is that there is no one stable 'sustainable consumer'. Relying solely on general environmental concern for

segmentation may fail to consider variations in price sensitivity, fashion involvement, moral commitment, experience and perceived control.

4.6. Theme 3: Price, Style, Convenience and Availability

The third theme identifies the market conditions that most often weaken the influence of sustainability. Price is the clearest recurring barrier. Klemm and Kaufman (2024) found price to be the strongest overall choice factor even when circular attributes were valued. Pires et al. (2024) similarly showed that willingness to pay more is conditional rather than automatic. This pattern explains why consumers can value sustainable products yet still choose a cheaper conventional alternative. Sustainability therefore competes with a reference price established by mainstream and fast-fashion markets.

Product and service risk provide a second barrier. Lin and Chen (2022) found perceived risk to reduce purchase intention for rental and second-hand clothing, while Tymoshchuk, Lou and Chi (2024) showed that service quality could reduce functional, aesthetic and sanitary risk. Mobarak et al. (2025) identified hygiene, quality, sizing, return and retailer-reliability concerns in thrift shopping. Lang (2018) also found perceived risks to weaken fashion-rental acceptance. These findings show that circular models create additional uncertainty because consumers may not know the product's history, condition, hygiene or fit, and may have less confidence in returns or service processes.

Convenience and availability connect these barriers to perceived behavioural control. Xu et al. (2022) found that cost performance and convenience supported second-hand clothing-sharing, while hygiene and cleaning concerns became more salient after the pandemic. Schiaroli, Dangelico and Fraccascia (2025) identified availability as an important determinant of sustainable-garment intention. Kang and Badal (2025) also showed that price and scarcity can shift Gen Z consumers between sustainable and fast-fashion options. The theme therefore supports a practical interpretation of the attitude-behaviour problem: many consumers do not reject sustainability itself; they reject a combination of higher cost, lower convenience, uncertainty or perceived compromise in the purchase situation.

4.7. Theme 4: Trust, Greenwashing and Sustainability Communication

Trust emerged as a central condition linking sustainability communication to buying behaviour. Lu et al. (2022) found that perceived greenwashing reduced green purchase intention and increased perceived risk among young fast-fashion consumers. Li, Cavender and Lee (2025) found that social-media users actively questioned green claims, exchanged evidence and expressed scepticism when brand communication appeared inconsistent. The systematic review by Badhwar et al. (2024) reinforces this pattern by showing that green marketing can support consumer engagement only when claims are credible, whereas vague or exaggerated communication damages trust.

But communication can have an impact on sustainable purchasing – when it is relevant and trusted. Chakraborty and Sadachar (2022) established that the user-centred advertisements can boost the affective responses as well as intention to purchase (IP) sustainable apparel. The positive effect of the brand generated and user generated social-media is revealed by El-Shihy and Awaad (2025) partially by engagement. Johnstone and Lindh (2022) demonstrated that the sustainable fashion choices of the European millennials may not be linear and that trust in the influencers may have a stronger impact on behaviour than positioning of the retailers' CSR. Ries and Rese (2025) show the extent of the possibilities of an information-only solution: Information quality and choice of communication channel had an impact, but in itself there was no effect on the attitude-behaviour gap.

This research is put into practical context by the UK regulatory framework. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has issued guidance on fashion such that environmental claims must be clear, accurate and substantiated, and “cautionary factors” include the use of wide-ranging claims or a range of ‘sustainable’ clothing that isn't substantiated by evidence. This regulatory guidance is in line with the evidence that vague claims make people more likely to be at risk and more sceptical. It also implies that the potential for communications with respect to sustainability is more than just a marketing opportunity, it is a matter of complying with law, in many cases consumer law. To the benefit of UK fashion companies, the responses indicate a preference for specific

information that signals the nature of the materials, processes and/or life cycle stage – over a more general statement that suggests a product or brand is sustainable.

4.8. Theme 5: The Attitude-Behaviour Gap

The fifth theme is the most uniform one that cuts across. Positive feelings of sustainability are, sadly, not always converted to decisions to buy. The UK study by Zhang, Zhang and Zhou (2021) is particularly relevant as although consumers were found to be sustainable aware and have positive attitudes towards fast-fashion sustainability, their behavioural intention was less stable and subject to various influences including price. Much the same applies on the international level. Yet, sustainability was not found to be a top priority for even younger consumers, as found by Abdelmeguid, Afy-Shararah and Salonitis (2025), or to lead directly to "sustainability" behaviours when there is no perceived behavioural control, as found by Magwegwe and Shaik (2024).

There is evidence to suggest the disparity cannot only be attributed to consumer hypocrisy, either. According to Johnstone and Lindh (2022), sustainable fashion action can occur in a non-linear, and somewhat a non-planned way. Ilgavskaite et al. (2020) demonstrated that after the pandemic, second-hand adoptions were affected by hygiene and service issues. Toebast-Wensink et al. (2025) found that previous experience is a key determinant of how barriers can become motivators – indicating that even barriers to the same consumer can be met with different solutions following repeated exposure to sustainable choices. With this, the space is generated by the relationship between attitudes, habit, Product Experiences and Market Availability/Decision Making Context.

There are also some good counterevidences. Kang and Badal (2025) did not observe any universal attitude-behaviour dichotomy in their sample of college students (Gen Z), found that attitudes predicted sustainable and fast-fashion consumption and found perceived control and market conditions helpful in explaining the dichotomy. This will avoid a too-deterministic conclusion as it is not always “good, sustainable attitudes” that fail. A better understanding of the word is that attitude is a component of the decision system. Consumers' behaviour is more stable when they have positive attitudes, control, available alternatives and a value proposition that is able to successfully compete with fast fashion.

4.9. Theme 6: Circular Consumption and Post-Purchase Behaviour

The sixth theme broadens consumer buying behaviour beyond the purchase of a newly labelled 'sustainable' garment. Second-hand purchasing, rental, repair, reuse and giving away clothes all extend product life and change demand for new production. The studies show that these behaviours have their own motivations and barriers. Halicki, Zaborek and Meylan (2024) found that second-hand choice combines economic, hedonic and environmental motives. Tymoshchuk, Lou and Chi (2024) showed that perceived hedonic, utilitarian and environmental value can all strengthen second-hand purchase intention. Lang and Zhang (2024) similarly identified perceived benefits and risks in fashion-rental intention.

Post-purchase behaviour is particularly important because a sustainable purchase does not guarantee sustainable use. Kemi and Zilahy (2025) found that second-hand buyers displayed somewhat more sustainable post-purchase practices, but social norms and perceived control were more influential than attitudes for behaviours such as repair and giving away. Jimenez-Fernandez, Aramendia-Muneta and Alzate (2023) found that awareness of circular-fashion principles supported positive attitudes, while practical enablers affected participation. This again demonstrates the importance of infrastructure and convenience.

The UK qualitative evidence provides an additional important behaviour explanation. Boyer et al. (2025) discovered that the selection of new, recycled and used clothing from consumers was related to the availability of circular shopping and the degree of social acceptability. This moves the dialogue about the attitudes of consumers from just whether or not they have the 'right' attitudes. It recommends that behaviour can also be influenced by businesses and policy actors by making repair, re-use, rental, 'as a service' options accessible, trusted and acceptable. Thus, circularity stretches the sustainability-consumer dynamics beyond product attributes to retail/post-purchase systems design.

4.10. Cross-Theme Synthesis

Overall, the evidence on the six themes fails to take the leap from behaviour to a so-called obvious link between sustainability practices and buying behaviour. Another more uniform

pattern is called conditional influence. Sustainability practices can enhance consumer value if they offer a credible environmental and/or ethical benefit, but they can have an even greater impact if they also offer a benefit in terms of durability, quality, identity, price-value or convenience. On the other hand, the impact diminishes if consumers have to pay high prices, availability is limited, there is a compromise in aesthetics, hygiene issues, or if they do not know what the service is like and/ or they do not trust the green claims.

There are three ways the themes are connected by means of mechanisms. First, when consumers' values and attitudes are conducive to sustainable choices, receptiveness to sustainable options can be achieved. Secondly, for that receptiveness to turn into action, it needs to be supported by perceived behavioural control, and the market offering. Thirdly, trust is the key to whether the sustainability information is accepted that accompanies the offer. These mechanisms account for variations in response to the same practice by consumers and in different contexts. They also offer a unified view of the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 that does not seek to be statistical causal.

This interpretation is further supported by the context in the UK. WRAP's 2024 market report documents continuing pressure within the UK clothing and used-textiles system, while the UK Textiles Pact update shows that operational sustainability improvements coexist with continued growth in the volume of textiles placed on the market (WRAP, 2024; WRAP, 2025). This illustrates the difference between improving individual products and changing overall consumption patterns. At the same time, CMA regulation increases the cost of vague green communication and places greater emphasis on substantiation. The combined evidence therefore suggests that UK fashion businesses require alignment between operational sustainability, credible claims and a competitive consumer proposition.

4.11. Findings by Research Question

The thematic findings can be consolidated directly against the three research questions. This step does not introduce new evidence; it shows how the analysed patterns answer the questions established in Chapter 1.

Table 7. Synthesis of findings by research question

Research question	Finding	Main supporting themes
RQ1: What sustainability practices are most relevant to the UK fashion industry?	The most consumer-relevant practices are sustainable/recycled materials, durability, ethical and transparent business practices, credible product claims and circular options such as second-hand, repair, resale and rental. Their relevance is strongest when environmental benefit is connected with quality, utility or accessibility.	Themes 1, 4 and 6
RQ2: How does existing literature explain the influence of sustainability practices on consumer buying behaviour in fashion?	Sustainability can improve attitudes, perceived value, trust and intention, but influence is conditional on consumer values, norms, perceived control, prior experience, product value and trusted communication. No single psychological or marketing mechanism fully explains the relationship.	Themes 1, 2 and 4
RQ3: What barriers prevent sustainability concern from becoming actual buying behaviour among fashion consumers?	The dominant barriers are price, limited availability, style/fit compromise, convenience, product/service risk, hygiene concerns, weak perceived control, habit and distrust caused by vague or misleading green claims. The attitude-behaviour gap is therefore both psychological and structural.	Themes 3, 4 and 5

Source: Author's thematic synthesis of the 50 selected journal articles.

4.12. Discussion of Results

The results corroborate the major theoretical line of the discussion presented in Chapter 2 which states that although sustainability can have an impact on fashion purchasing behaviour, it is not necessarily a single or all-important purchasing factor. In all 50 articles, attributes such as sustainable materials, circularity, ethical practice and credible communication were correlated with positive attitudes, value and intention, whilst price, style, convenience, availability, lack of trust and lack of habit consistently inhibited the

actions of converting. What that translates to is that Sustainability is only beneficial to business when it is joined with the larger Consumer offering. The discussion thus relates the thematic evidence into consumer theory, marketing concepts and regulation and industry practice.

4.12.1. Sustainability Practices and Consumer Value

The first, sustainability therefore having the greatest influence when conveyed in recognisable consumer value, is in line with the distinction made in Chapter 2 between practices of product sustainability, supply-chain sustainability, circular sustainability and communication practices (Mukendi et al., 2020; Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico, 2024). The evaluation of recycled materials, durability, second-hand and rental was done focusing on quality and utility and uniqueness and convenience and risk, not environmental benefit. The same holds true in the industry practice. How durability could be operationalised as an on-going service and not just as a product claim may be seen in the 145,446 product repairs reported in FY24 by Patagonia (2025). The bottom line is that sustainability is more convincing for consumers if they can see a tangible benefit, like the longer lifespan of a product, or guaranteed service.

Consumption values theory (Sheth et al., 1991) provides a good explanation for the above pattern. Functional, social, emotional, conditional and epistemic benefits are supposed to work conjointly in the fashion decision making process. The evidence thus adds to the literature which does not have a narrowly environmental interpretation: sustainability is more likely to impact buying if it is a complete value proposition. This is also why any benefits experienced in the supply chain, that is far removed, will have less behavioural salience, unless the company is able to make this tangible, credible and relevant.

4.12.2. Attitudes, Perceived Control and the Intention-Behaviour Divide

The second big finding relates to the bounds of positive attitudes. TPB suggests that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991) are all determinants of behaviour and results were found to have significant relationships with control. Tran et al. (2022), Sharma et al. (2025) and Magwegwe and Shaik (2024) demonstrate that a lack of confidence in sustainable alternatives, availability and price can undermine high attitudes. It is a managerial meaning that a business can also

influence boosting behaviour by decreasing practical obstacles in addition to only persuading.

Further, this finding is consistent with the research on ethical intention-behaviour gap. Carrington, Neville and Whitwell (2010) stress the disruption of the situation and Rausch and Kopplin (2021) list the risks of control and of the product. Achieving the same conclusion on a larger evidence base, the present one does not assume a universal gap, as does Kang and Badal (2025). Toebast-Wensink et al. (2025) go on to point out that for some; experience can even help make some obstacles become motivators. Thus, the most tenable conclusion is that attitudes lead to readiness, and experience, control and the purchase environment led to readiness to action.

4.12.3. Price, Style, Convenience and the Marketing Mix

There is a direct connection between the findings and the marketing mix due to aspects of price, style, convenience and availability. However, it is not possible to assess the promotion of sustainability without taking into account the product, price and place aspects of the offer. It supports the fundamental integrative importance of the marketing mix, even though it is limited in its communication function, as this evidence suggests that even if "environmentally friendly" goods are attractive to the environment, they cannot compete with their unattractive aesthetics, price or poorly accessible and inconvenient service process.

This is backed up by evidence from industry. H&M Group (2026) reported that 17,808 tonnes of garments were collected in the resale programme in 2025, with turnover in resale increasing by 31% compared to the previous year to account for 0.8% of turnover. It is a testament to the fact that circular businesses can be successful and even be scaled up to become profitable businesses, but if on the one hand it is evident that the share of the turnover realized through the circular business is still small, it also reveals the extent to which it is challenging to secure a profitable scale replacement of conventional selling of new products. But sustainable alternatives should be perceived as mainstream and not as side projects — they have to be feasible. This is in line with McNeill and Moore (2015) and Harris, Roby and Dibb (2016) that indicate that the broader retail landscape is important to choosing a sustainable option.

4.12.4. Trust, Greenwashing and UK Regulatory Relevance

Trust is a precondition gate of sustainability communication. As illustrated in chapter 2, vague language and selective disclosure and mismatch of claims and performance can lead to greenwashing risk (Delmas and Burbano, 2011; de Freitas Netto et al., 2020; Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla and Paladino, 2014). Evidence from Chapter 4 is very supportive of this concern, with Lu et al. (2022) revealing how the perception of greenwashing generated an increased perception of risk and decreased purchase intentions, and Li, Cavender & Lee (2025) demonstrating how consumers actively attack claims made in the digital environment.

This finding has implications on the organisation, as has been seen in the UK, with the case of ASOS, Boohoo and George at Asda. In 2024, the three businesses have assisted the Competition and Markets Authority investigation by giving undertakings to reform the way that green credentials are displayed or described, for example, in respect of material claims and environmental ranges. There was no admission of wrongdoing by the CMA but the undertaking of the businesses is "a touchstone for the sector" as CMA said it would need to report on compliance. The stakeholder effect is not limited to the firm(s) in question, but also to millions of consumers who now have better information, regulators have a compliance mechanism and (non-participating) competitors are now subject to a higher level of communication. Thus, AIDA only accounts for the first step of response; whether the response goes on to meaningful action is through trust and substantiation.

4.12.5. Segmentation, STP and Consumer Heterogeneity

The results also challenge the notion of one "sustainable consumer. The differences in generations, culture values and forms of products are identified by Hatzithomas et al. (2026), Lin and Chen (2022) and Sueda and Seo (2024). As mentioned in Chapter 2, things such as a message about durability could be the one that resonates with value conscious customers, transparency might be the one attracting ethically conscious customers and price might be the most appealing for price-conscious customers.

The managerial implication is certainly not to remain in a small niche of ethics. Companies should take into account credible minimums that are part of the overall offer and then deprioritize sustainability and make it relevant for a segment by presenting it as a benefit.

This will enable STP to make more relevant products without sacrificing products that are less sustainable in the mainstream.

4.12.6. Circular Consumption and Post-Purchase Behaviour

The results on repair, on second hand use and on renting extends sustainable consumption ideas beyond the purchase of a new 'label' product. This aligns with the view on the life-cycle perspective as noted in Chapter 2 (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016; Vehmas et al., 2018; Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico, 2024). As well as environmental concerns, infrastructure, familiarity, trust and social normality is a key aspect of circular participation.

In industry examples, implications for stakeholders are shown. To achieve a quantifiable social impact, Marks and Spencer Group plc (2024) reported that its Shwopping has helped over 36 million items to be given away and create a estimated £23m for Oxfam, while its customers participate. Leaving an impact not just on consumers but also on those changes in the supply chain, Patagonia reported over US\$32 million in cumulative Fair-Trade benefits and premiums to factory workers spanning 82,815 workers in FY24. While these are not necessarily evidence of sustainability leading to profit, they are evidence of the operational programmes leading to outcomes in service, social and stakeholder. The overall practical takeaway is that sustainable fashion strategy needs to ensure systems are put in place that make repair/reuse, as well as sustainable sourcing, the norm.

Table 8. Relationship between Chapter 2 literature and Chapter 4 findings

Area	Chapter 2 position	Chapter 4 finding	Discussion implication
Consumer motivation	Positive attitudes and values can support sustainable choice, but intention may not become action.	Attitudes were important, but perceived control, experience and market conditions repeatedly shaped conversion.	TPB and value theories are useful but insufficient without situational and market factors.
Market offer	Product, price, place and promotion jointly influence the feasibility of sustainable choice.	Price, style, availability, convenience and service risk were recurring barriers.	Sustainability should be integrated with competitive product and service value rather than promoted in isolation.
Communication and trust	Greenwashing and unclear terminology can weaken trust and create uncertainty.	Credible, specific communication supported intention, while perceived greenwashing increased risk and scepticism.	Trust operates as a gatekeeper between sustainability information and behavioural response.

Area	Chapter 2 position	Chapter 4 finding	Discussion implication
Consumer heterogeneity	STP suggests that consumers differ in values, fashion involvement and price sensitivity.	Different generations, cultures and circular product types produced different value and risk profiles.	A single green-consumer assumption is not supported; segment-specific value propositions are more appropriate.
Circular behaviour	Sustainable consumption extends across acquisition, use and post-use stages.	Repair, resale, rental and second-hand behaviour depended on access, service quality, norms and familiarity.	Behavioural change requires supportive systems as well as favourable attitudes.

Source: Author's synthesis of Chapter 2 literature and Chapter 4 findings.

4.12.7. Overall Interpretation of the Conceptual Framework

The discussion as a whole reinforces the basic conceptual framework, but alters the interpretation of the basic relationship. Sustainability practices can impact consumer purchasing decisions, but there is no clear pathway. Influences are stronger when practices are functional or emotional, align with consumer priorities, are easily accessible and are credible; they are weaker when there is price pressure, aesthetic compromise, inconvenience, uncertainty, greenwashing and fast fashion habit. TPB provides an explanation of attitudes and control, consumption-value theory provides an explanation of competing benefits, STP provides an explanation of heterogeneity, and the marketing mix provides an explanation of the complete offer, while AIDA provides an explanation of the limits of communication. The integrated conclusion is that sustainable fashion buying

is a result of the interplay between psychological, commercial and regulatory conditions and not just environmental concern.

4.13. Chapter Conclusion

The study of 50 open access journal articles reveals that sustainability practices can have an impact on consumer buying behaviour, but it is not automatic. Sustainable materials, durability, transparency in business practices and circular options are value-adding factors, if consumers can see the benefits. Positive attitudes, environmental concern, moral values and social influence are factors that can help to make sustainable decisions, but price, style, convenience, availability and perceived risk often hinder the conversion of behaviour. Trust is especially relevant as greenwashing can lead to scepticism and perceived risk, and specific and substantiated communication can help to make choices with greater confidence.

The results also indicate that consumer behaviour is not limited to the purchase of a sustainable product. The repair, reuse, resale, rental and post-purchase practices rely on accessible systems and social normality and on consumer attitudes. The integrated pattern is a pattern that answers the three research questions: sustainability is most important when operational practice, credible communication and consumer value are aligned. It has been demonstrated that this pattern is consistent with, but also qualifies, the theories and wider literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 summarizes the conclusions, practical and theoretical recommendations, limitations and priorities for future research.

Chapter 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

This chapter draws together the conclusions from the secondary qualitative analysis of 50 peer-reviewed journal articles and the UK regulatory and industry evidence used to interpret them. It summarises the main findings, answers the three research questions, sets out practical and theoretical recommendations, acknowledges the limitations of the research and identifies priorities for future work. The conclusions are based on the thematic evidence presented and discussed in Chapter 4 and therefore avoid claims of statistical causality or universal representation of UK fashion consumers.

5.2. Summary of Main Findings

The dissertation concludes that sustainability practices can influence fashion buying behaviour, but only conditionally. Sustainable materials, durability, ethical practice and circular options were evaluated most favourably when their benefits were visible, credible and compatible with quality, utility, identity, affordability and convenience.

Consumer attitude and environmental concern was a factor but not enough. Favorable attitudes did not necessarily result in actions; perceived control, experience and social norms and market conditions had a great influence. Again, the level of price was the most salient obstacle, as was availability, further supporting that the attitude behaviours gap is related to motivation but also to the structure.

The other key condition was trust. Detailed, supported claims can engender trust, however, whereas an ambiguous message can spark doubts and leave you vulnerable to regulation. The industry cases highlight the practical relevance of the findings – M&S' circular case demonstrates how participation in circular initiatives can bring benefits for Oxfam, H&M' circular case exhibits the beginnings of the commercial scale (and yet small proportion) of circular initiatives, Patagonia's circular case highlights measurable results in those working in the repair and results for Patagonia, and CMA's circular case emphasises how limited green communication can require organisational change. Also, the sustainable behavior of repair, resale, rental and post-purchasing practices,

conditions of easy access systems, and consumer attitudes are also part of sustainable behaviour.

5.3. Conclusion Based on the Research Questions

5.3.1. Research Question 1: What sustainability practices are most relevant to the UK fashion industry?

The evidence shows that practices that most resonate with consumers, include the use of lower impact materials, recycled materials, durability, ethical and transparent business, and concrete practices of circularity (repair, resale, rental and second-hand buying). All these practices don't have the same impact in every circumstance. Product level practices are much more likely to be immediately relevant as the consumer can link them to a tangible aspect of the product, such as its quality or its durability or usefulness. In addition, supply-chain and ethical practices can also impact evaluation, and they rely much more heavily on a credible communication and trust.

The conclusion of RQ1 therefore is that the degree of relevance should be evaluated, not only in terms of sustainability substance, but also from the clothing consumer perspective. When consumers understand the change a practice brings, its impact and the benefit, the practice can impact buying behaviour. This is especially critical for the UK context as the regulatory guidelines on environmental claims emphasize the need for specificity and substantiation of claims (Competition and Markets Authority, 2024).

5.3.2. Research Question 2: How does existing literature explain the influence of sustainability practices on consumer buying behaviour in fashion?

The influence is described in the existing literature based on the attitudes, values, perceived control, social influence, product evaluation and communication. We can use the Theory of Planned Behaviour as people with positive attitudes will not act if they do not have much perceived control (Ajzen, 1991). Consumption value theory also provides clues as to how the environmental and ethical values can be in conflict with functional, social and emotional value when making fashion choices (Sheth, Newman and Gross, 1991).

The results of the evidence reveal that whilst sustainability may affect the perceived value, trust and brand evaluation as well as purchase intention, the behaviour influence is greatest when the overall market offer is perceived as attractive. This translates into sustainability existing beyond the price, design and convenience. It's just a part of the value proposition. The dissertation thus ends by saying that an integrated explanation which takes into account consumer psychology, marketing conditions and trust is the best explanation to understand consumer buying behaviour.

5.3.3. Research Question 3: What barriers prevent sustainability concern from becoming actual buying behaviour among fashion consumers?

The greatest barriers are price, lack of availability, style or fit compromises, inconvenience, product and service quality uncertainty, hygiene concerns (in some circular models) and a lack of trust due to low or inaccurate communication of their role/situation as a circular model' as habits to stick to fast fashion. These barriers are why there is a gap between attitudes and purchase intentions and actual purchase.

The dissertation thus retailers a conclusion that the attitude-behaviour space isn't universal nor is it solely psychological in nature. Situational factors are highlighted as a component in ethical purchasing by Carrington, Neville and Whitwell (2010) and this is supported by the 50-study synthesis. Even if consumers have a care over sustainability, they opt for conventional ones, when the sustainable one comes with a significant sacrifice in, say, price, convenience or style. In order to reduce the gap, it is essential management would face a change of the surroundings as well as the efforts to change the attitude.

5.4. Recommendations

5.4.4. Practical Recommendations for UK Fashion Businesses

UK fashion businesses should integrate sustainability into the core consumer proposition rather than treat it as a separate promotional message. Claims should be specific, verifiable and proportionate to the evidence, following CMA expectations for clear material descriptions and substantiated environmental ranges (Competition and Markets Authority, 2024). The ASOS, Boohoo and George at Asda undertakings show that unclear

green communication can trigger formal compliance commitments and sector-wide scrutiny, so claim governance should involve legal, sustainability and marketing teams rather than promotion alone.

Sustainable options should also compete on conventional fashion criteria. Firms should connect lower-impact materials and circular models with durability, quality, design, price-value and convenience. M&S's Shwopping programme demonstrates how a simple in-store participation mechanism can create customer engagement and stakeholder value, while H&M Group's growing resale share shows that circular channels can become measurable revenue streams even though they remain small relative to conventional sales (Marks and Spencer Group plc, 2024; H&M Group, 2026). Repair, take-back and resale services should therefore be designed as dependable retail propositions with clear grading, returns and service standards.

Communication and positioning should reflect consumer heterogeneity. Environmentally committed consumers may value detailed impact evidence, while value-oriented consumers may respond more strongly to durability and cost-per-wear. Patagonia's large-scale repair activity illustrates how a sustainability promise can be reinforced through a tangible service and supply-chain stakeholder outcomes (Patagonia, 2025). Firms should therefore monitor behavioural indicators such as repeat use, repair, resale participation and product-life extension rather than relying only on awareness or stated purchase intention.

5.4.5. Theoretical Recommendations and Implications

The findings suggest that future analysis of sustainable fashion buying should avoid relying on a single behavioural theory. The Theory of Planned Behaviour remains useful for attitudes, norms and perceived control, but it should be combined with value-based perspectives and market-level explanations. The theory of consumption values helps explain why sustainability competes with quality, price, identity and convenience, while STP and the marketing mix clarify heterogeneity and the design of the market offer. AIDA is useful for analysing communication stages but should not be treated as a linear prediction of purchase.

Theoretical work should also distinguish more clearly between purchase intention, reported behaviour and observed behaviour. The evidence base contains many intention studies, but the dissertation shows that conclusions become less certain when actual buying and post-purchase practices are considered. Future conceptual models should therefore include the purchase environment and post-purchase context as part of sustainable consumer behaviour rather than treating sustainability concern as the main explanatory factor.

5.5. Limitations of the Research

There are a number of limitations to the study. It relies entirely on secondary evidence and the conclusions are therefore dependent on the quality of the studies included, their definitions and measurement options. There is a significant body of evidence in the form of 50 peer-reviewed journal articles, but there is geographical diversity and only some of these articles directly focus on UK consumers. International evidence was thus viewed as an explanation that could be applied to the UK market, not necessarily as a direct reflection of the UK market.

The underlying research methods and samples also vary as well as their fashion and outcome. Many use cross sectional surveys and purchase intention, fewer look at actual purchases or behaviour over time. This restricts the strongness of causal conclusions. The review was done by one researcher and screening and thematic interpretation might involve subjective judgement despite the use of transparent criteria and an extraction matrix. The exclusion of relevant evidence in non-English language and inaccessible full-text research and publication bias towards studies that show more clearly or statistically significant relationships may have occurred. Industry and regulatory documents are useful for UK context, but can't be considered comparable to empirical studies that have been peer-reviewed and often have different reporting purposes.

5.6. Recommendations for Future Work

Future research should place greater emphasis on actual behaviour in the UK fashion market. Longitudinal studies could examine whether sustainable purchase intentions persist over time and whether consumers continue to use, repair or resell garments after

purchase. Transaction or panel data would also help distinguish stated preference from observed buying behaviour.

Further research should compare price-sensitive, fashion-oriented and sustainability-oriented consumers to establish whether the same practices influence them differently. UK studies should also test how specific green-claim wording and evidence affect trust and choice as regulation develops, and examine rental, resale, repair and take-back participation under different convenience and quality conditions.

Comparative research across fast fashion, premium brands and second-hand platforms would clarify when sustainability becomes a decisive purchase criterion rather than a secondary preference.

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