

7 - 9 November 2025

Munich , Germany

Can Recycled Fiber Apparel Win over the Mass Market in Emerging Countries?

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Abstract

The fast-fashion industry's slow progress toward sustainability calls for a redesign of business models. Particularly advocated are those facilitating a transition to a circular economy, such as using recycled fibers. The dominance of overconsumption in the industry, along with the distinct characteristics of recycled fiber garments, poses major challenges for scaling circular business models and securing consumer acceptance. These challenges are further amplified in emerging countries, where mass-market consumers have limited sustainability education and financial constraints. To address the knowledge gap regarding consumer behavior in emerging economies, this paper investigates the role of multifaced Perceived Consumer Value in shaping the attitude towards recycled fiber garments, by proposing and testing a conceptual model. Data were collected through an online survey conducted among Romanian fast-fashion consumers with infrequent purchases of recycled fiber apparel. The PLS-SEM technique, applied via SmartPLS 4 program, was used to assess the relationships among constructs. Findings revealed that consumers' attitudes toward purchasing recycled fiber apparel are positively influenced, with similar intensity, by the emotional, quality, and price perceived values of the product; however, the social value is not a significant predictor. Additionally, fashion environmental impact awareness is an antecedent for all four dimensions of Perceived Consumer Value. These insights may guide marketers in developing strategies across all elements of the marketing mix, while also highlighting the importance of tailored educational initiatives in supporting sustainable fashion consumption. Consequently, the paper reinforces previous assertions that sustainability in fast fashion is achievable - regardless of the business model - through the coordinated efforts of industry, policy makers, and consumers.

Keywords: Circular Fashion; Consumer Attitude; Fast-Fashion Sustainability; Perceived Consumer Value; Recycled Fiber Garments.