

Threads of Tradition: How Heritage Fosters Sustainable Fashion Entrepreneurial Practices

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Abstract— This paper delves into the evolution of entrepreneurship, highlighting its migration towards sustainable practices and environmental accountability. The focal point of the study revolves around the incorporation of South Asia's rich cultural heritage, traditions, and values into the strategic framework of design and branding within the fashion industry. This merger holds the potential to facilitate the creation of products that deeply resonate with consumers. The research further examines the confluence of heritage, innovation, and market potential, offering valuable insights for fashion entrepreneurs endeavouring to establish purposeful and sustainable brands. By comprehending the historical significance of South Asian heritage, entrepreneurs can craft authentic narratives that appeal to contemporary consumers. Moreover, the paper endeavours to champion inclusivity and environmentally responsible practices, celebrating diverse cultural perspectives in the fashion community. By accentuating South Asian cultural sustainability, entrepreneurs can contribute to a more diverse narrative while addressing environmental concerns and steering the fashion industry towards a more conscious future. The research methodology involved using mixed methods, including case studies of fashion brands that have successfully integrated sustainable practices inspired by Asian culture, interviews with entrepreneurs, experts, and practitioners to gain insights into cultural sustainability, content analysis to assess visual communication and branding of fashion start-ups that integrate Asian cultural sustainability, and customer surveys to investigate consumer attitudes and behaviours towards cultural sustainability in branding. The results of the collected and analysed data, combined with a review of existing literature, yielded insights into the dynamics of the fashion industry. Identified characteristics such as lack of transparency, and limited customer awareness suggest the need for further research into methods for improvement and future directions to support the complexity of sustainable practices.

Keywords— heritage, sustainability, sustainable development goals, branding, fashion industry

1. PURPOSE

The fashion industry is presently confronting significant environmental and social challenges, necessitating innovative sustainability approaches. It is imperative to integrate sustainable strategies into the strategic design of fashion start-ups. Drawing inspiration from the holistic and eco-conscious philosophies of Asian cultures presents a promising approach. Nevertheless, further research is essential to explore how fashion start-ups can effectively leverage cultural sustainability strategies. Subsequently, a multidisciplinary analysis that incorporates cultural studies, sustainable fashion, and strategic design is warranted to address this gap. The primary objective is to identify the fundamental principles and practices that can be applied effectively in fashion entrepreneurship. The study will draw upon varied sources, including case studies, interviews, and theoretical frameworks derived from Asian cultures, to consolidate key findings. Ultimately, the aim is to empower fashion entrepreneurs to establish and expand their business ventures by identifying the most efficient strategies. This comprehensive study is expected to deliver practical insights for entrepreneurs and foster a thorough understanding of the critical elements

contributing to the success of fashion entrepreneurship. Furthermore, this work seeks to advance sustainability within the fashion industry by elucidating the transformative potential of culturally informed design strategies. This research endeavours to equip fashion entrepreneurs to establish more environmentally and socially responsible businesses by offering actionable recommendations based on empirical evidence and theoretical insights.

The fashion industry exerts a substantial influence on the environment, society, and consumer behaviour, as elucidated by a number of esteemed scholars. The fashion industry is accountable for an estimated 10% of global carbon emissions, surpassing the combined emissions of international flights and maritime shipping (Fernie-Jones, 2021). It is approximated that the fashion industry ranks as the second-largest global consumer of water, thus contributing to water pollution and scarcity (Bailey, Basu, and Sharma, 2022). Textile dyeing stands as the second-largest pollutant of clean water sources globally, following agriculture (Jasrotia, Darda, and Pandey, 2022). Annually, the fashion industry yields around 92 million tons of solid waste (Igini, 2023; Beall,

2020). Notably, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation reported that the equivalent of one garbage truck of textiles is landfilled or incinerated every second (n.d.). Many individuals employed in the fashion industry, particularly in developing nations, endure substandard working conditions, meagre wages, and exploitation. An estimated 75 million individuals are employed directly in the fashion and textile industries, with a significant portion not receiving a living wage (Chowdhury and Shumon, 2020; International Labour Organization, 2023). The proliferation of fast fashion has engendered heightened consumption and shorter product life cycles. On average, consumers now purchase 60% more clothing items and retain them for approximately half the duration compared to 15 years ago (Mayer, 2023). It is worth noting that consumers are progressively cognizant of sustainability issues in the fashion industry, precipitating a surge in demand for eco-friendly and ethically produced fashion merchandise.

This study investigates the integration of South Asian cultural sustainability into the strategic design and branding initiatives of fashion start-ups. It adopts a methodical approach and conducts a thorough literature analysis to establish a substantial understanding of sustainable fashion, South Asian cultural traditions, strategic design, and branding. Furthermore, it examines successful companies and campaigns that demonstrate the convergence of sustainability and cultural heritage preservation in the fashion industry. Through a comprehensive examination of these case studies, the thesis uncovers crucial techniques used by fashion businesses to harness South Asian cultural sustainability for competitive advantage and societal impact. The conclusion reflects on the implications of the study and recommends areas for future research, highlighting the need for a deeper exploration of the transformative potential of cultural sustainability in fashion entrepreneurship. This research seeks to explore methods for fashion start-ups to effectively integrate South Asian cultural sustainability into their design and branding. It utilizes case studies and best practices to identify successful strategies, foster innovation, encourage further research, and positively influence society within the fashion industry.

The study's objectives include:

1. To comprehensively review relevant literature to understand the concepts of sustainable fashion, South Asian cultural traditions, strategic design, and branding.

2. To investigate successful brands and strategies employed by fashion entrepreneurs to utilize Asian cultural sustainability for competitive advantage and social impact.
3. To identify the implications of integrating cultural sustainability into fashion entrepreneurship and suggest potential paths for further research and exploration.

2. LITERATURE BACKGROUND

2.1 Sustainable fashion

Sustainable fashion represents a holistic strategy aimed at mitigating the environmental and social impacts of the fashion industry. This multifaceted approach integrates innovative design, materials, and supply chain management practices to minimize carbon emissions, waste, and resource depletion, thereby fostering ethical production. A number of scholars investigate the phenomenon of sustainability in fashion, resulting in identifying key trends and practices. Fletcher (2017) underscores the significance of incorporating sustainable design approaches and supply chain management to diminish the fashion industry's environmental impact. Niinimäki et al. (2020) delves into the concept of eco-clothing and the practice of upcycling, highlighting sustainable design strategies aimed at reusing existing materials. Black (2008) delves into the conflict between consumer demand for fashionable, cost-effective clothing and the environmental consequences of large-scale production.

2.2 South Asian cultural traditions

The South Asian cultural heritage is characterised by an emphasis on craftsmanship, textile traditions, and sustainable living practices, serving as a significant source of inspiration for the development of sustainable fashion. In Chaudhuri's (2020) work, the interconnection between South Asian artistic traditions, markets, and sustainable livelihoods is explored, demonstrating the potential for these traditions to influence sustainable fashion practices. Begum and Dasgupta's (2015) research delve into the cultural landscapes of South Asia, providing insights into how religious beliefs and societal values can contribute to sustainable fashion initiatives. South Asia boasts a rich history of sustainable practices within the textile and fashion industries. Vighnesh et al. (2022) have investigated the influence of Indian cultural values on sustainable fashion consumption. Additionally, Shakya (2008) discusses sustainability practices in the Nepalese fashion industry, particularly highlighting endeavours to

preserve traditional techniques while embracing eco-friendly approaches.

2.3 Opportunities and challenges in becoming a sustainable fashion brand

The fashion industry has a considerable impact on the environment and society, with South Asia holding a pivotal role in global textile production. Although the region encounters challenges in embracing sustainable practices, it also presents innovative solutions that can pave the way for a more sustainable future in fashion. This review delves into sustainable practices within the South Asian fashion industry, identifying key themes, examples, and challenges that warrant attention and resolution.

The South Asian region boasts a rich heritage of traditional crafts and techniques, including handloom weaving, natural dyeing, and upcycling. These practices often leverage locally sourced materials and prioritize waste reduction, thereby contributing to environmental and social sustainability (Singh and Rani, 2021). Notably, the use of natural dyes like indigo in India diminishes reliance on synthetic chemicals (Kabish et al., 2022). The adoption of sustainable materials such as organic cotton, bamboo, and recycled polyester is gaining momentum in South Asia (Voorra and Sarmiento, 2023). Furthermore, ongoing studies are exploring the potential of bioplastics and other innovative materials (Provin et al., 2021). Circular economy principles, including garment recycling and upcycling, are progressively gaining traction. Initiatives like reverse logistics and take-back programs serve to prolong the life cycles of garments (Nasrin and Alam, 2023; Awan and Sroufe, 2022). Ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions is paramount for sustainable fashion in South Asia (Chugh, 2023). Certification schemes such as Fairtrade are aimed at promoting ethical production practices within the region (Voorra et al., 2023).

Notable examples of sustainable fashion practices encompass brands such as Fabindia (India), which champions sustainability by utilizing handloom textiles and natural dyes while also supporting rural artisans; Bareeze (Pakistan), employing organic cotton and traditional weaving techniques to ethically produce sustainable clothing; and Aranya (Bangladesh), a social enterprise empowering women artisan through fair trade practices and innovative upcycling of textile waste into new products.

In spite of the positive initiatives, South Asia encounters noteworthy challenges in upscaling sustainable practices. Both infrastructure development and government support are deemed necessary to integrate sustainable practices into the mainstream (Hariram et al., 2023). An essential aspect involves raising consumer awareness regarding the significance of sustainable fashion to stimulate demand (Albella et al., 2022). Additionally, maintaining transparency throughout the production chain is imperative for fostering consumer trust (Sunny et al., 2020).

2.4 Strategic design and branding in the fashion industry

The comprehension of strategic design and branding is imperative for successful fashion entrepreneurship, especially in a competitive market that increasingly prioritizes sustainability. Kapferer and Bastien (2009) centre their examination on luxury strategy, accentuating the significance of brand positioning and differentiation. Kapferer (2004) provides comprehensive frameworks for establishing enduring, sustainable brands that deeply resonate with consumers. In addition, Brown and Katz (2011) along with Lockwood (2010) underscore the importance of amalgamating design thinking with business strategy, thereby fostering user-centric innovation and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Furthermore, Fillis and Rentschler (2010) delve into the potential of creativity to propel business success and instigate social change within the fashion industry. Branding signifies one of the most influential dimensions of how a company expresses itself and with which it can be identified (Drzewiecka, 2024). This concrete manifesto of a brand's identity is the face of a company and "a system of visual identifiers" that benefits organisations' points of differentiation and recognition (van den Bosch, 2005).

The fusion of cross-cultural design and branding cultivates innovation and market differentiation, thereby enabling brands to reach a broader audience while advancing sustainability.

2.5 Themes in sustainable fashion

Sustainable fashion is a dynamic and intricate field that encompasses various themes, including the circular economy, ethical consumerism, technology, climate change, and gender perspectives. It draws insights from a wide range of studies and research. Below is a breakdown of the key themes to provide a clearer understanding of sustainable fashion. The concept of a

circular economy is essential to sustainable fashion. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation has played a pivotal role in promoting regenerative practices within the fashion industry through its work on circular economy principles (n.d.). This approach focuses on design for longevity, resource efficiency, and closed-loop systems, aiming to transform the traditional linear fashion model into one that minimizes waste and fosters innovation across the value chain. Understanding consumer attitudes towards ethical fashion is crucial for fostering sustainable consumption. Research conducted by White et al. (2019) delves into consumer motivations and behaviours, emphasizing the role of moral considerations, such as labour conditions and environmental impact, in shaping purchasing decisions. This work provides insights into how ethical concerns can drive consumer choices, informing strategies to engage and empower consumers as agents of change. Furthermore, a comparative analysis by Stringer et al. (2022) explores sustainable materials in fashion, focusing on environmental performance, social implications, and economic feasibility. This study identifies criteria for assessing sustainability, such as resource availability, biodegradability, and supply chain transparency, serving to assist fashion designers and brands in selecting sustainable materials for their practices. In addition, technology plays a significant role in advancing sustainability in fashion. Ahmed and MacCarthy (2021) have examined innovative solutions such as blockchain traceability, digital design tools, 3D printing, and textile recycling technologies. Leveraging technology allows fashion stakeholders to enhance transparency, efficiency, and sustainability throughout the supply chain, driving positive change in the industry. Moreover, considering the significant environmental impact of the fashion industry, particularly its contribution to climate change, comprehensive research by Niinimäki et al. (2020) analyses the industry's carbon footprint and explores mitigation strategies. Insights from this study offer practical guidance for policymakers and businesses to address the industry's climate-related challenges through measures such as energy efficiency, renewable energy adoption, and circular economy approaches. Furthermore, gender dynamics play a crucial role in sustainability. International Labour Organizations' (2023) research examines issues such as gendered labour, representation, and consumption patterns in the fashion industry, advocating for more inclusive approaches to promote gender equality as a pathway to sustainability. Additionally, in emerging markets, there are unique

opportunities and challenges in transitioning towards sustainability. Through their exploration of leveraging local resources, cultural heritage, and entrepreneurial innovation to drive sustainable fashion in developing countries, Hur and Beverley (2023) underscore the importance of capacity-building initiatives and market access strategies to support sustainable fashion in emerging economies. Lastly, supply chain transparency is vital for ensuring accountability in the fashion industry. Bhandari et al. (2022) investigate current practices and future directions, identifying barriers to transparency, such as information asymmetry and globalized production networks. This study calls for collaborative action among brands, suppliers, governments, and civil society to address risks in the fashion supply chain by advocating for greater transparency.

2.6 Regenerative fashion: beyond sustainability

In Gibbons' (2020) work, the concept of regenerative fashion is introduced as an advanced form of sustainability that emphasizes holistic approaches to ecosystem restoration and community empowerment. Smith's framework for a more resilient and regenerative fashion industry incorporates principles such as biomimicry, permaculture, and regenerative agriculture. Understanding the psychological factors that influence sustainable fashion consumption is essential for promoting environmentally conscious behaviours. Ritch and Siddiqui's (2023) research delve into cognitive dissonance, social identity, and moral licensing within the context of sustainable fashion. Their insights inform marketing strategies and communication campaigns aimed at encouraging sustainable consumer behaviour. Education plays a pivotal role in promoting sustainable fashion practices. Sala (2019) explores the integration of ethics into the design curriculum, advocating for interdisciplinary learning experiences that incorporate perspectives on environmental stewardship and social justice. This approach equips future designers with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to the transformation of fashion education in favour of sustainability. Prudham's (2009) study on fashion activism examines the potential for consumer activism to drive social and environmental change. Through case studies and qualitative analysis, Green examines various forms of activism and their impact on industry practices. This research underscores the influence of collective action and advocacy in shaping a more sustainable and equitable future for the fashion industry. The promotion of fair-trade practices is vital to establishing ethical sourcing and trade relationships within the fashion

industry. Le Mare's (2008) work explores the implications of fair-trade certification schemes, ethical labelling, and community-based partnerships aimed at improving labour conditions and livelihoods. This research underscores the importance of advocating for fair trade principles to foster social justice and human rights within the global fashion system. Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir's (2020) examination of the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting sustainable fashion highlights the diverse strategies and interventions employed by NGOs to drive sustainability. NGOs play a critical role in promoting sustainable fashion practices across the industry by engaging with stakeholders and leveraging advocacy efforts.

2.7 Literature conclusions

The scholarly findings pertaining to sustainable fashion offers an in-depth understanding of the diverse approaches for addressing environmental and social challenges within the fashion industry. It underscores the potential of traditional crafts and cultural heritage, providing a distinctive viewpoint on integrating sustainability into contemporary fashion. This suggests that the amalgamation of traditional and innovative practices could pave the way for a more sustainable industry, brimming with historical significance and prospects for the future. Key trends in sustainable fashion, such as the circular economy, ethical fashion, technology adoption, and supply chain transparency, exemplify a growing dedication to sustainability across the industry. Nonetheless, challenges such as consumer awareness, the expansion of sustainable practices, and the assurance of fair labour conditions still necessitate resolution. Initiatives such as fair trade, fashion activism, and technological innovations like blockchain present promising avenues towards fostering a more transparent and equitable fashion industry. Emerging themes, including regenerative fashion, gender perspectives, and sustainable fashion education, further enhance the dialogue, intimating that sustainability in fashion mandates a comprehensive and intersecting approach. The involvement of NGOs and the potential for fashion activism underscore how collective action and advocacy can instigate meaningful change, reinforcing the concept that sustainability is not merely the responsibility of industry insiders, but a collaborative endeavour that encompasses consumers, educators, and policymakers. This emphasizes the potential for each individual to contribute to a more sustainable fashion industry.

3. APPROACH

The research methodology encompassed a variety of techniques, including the use of mixed methods. This involved conducting case studies of fashion brands that have effectively incorporated sustainable practices inspired by Asian culture, conducting interviews with entrepreneurs, experts, and practitioners to gain insights into cultural sustainability, and administering a customer survey to explore consumer attitudes and behaviours toward cultural sustainability in branding.

3.1 Case studies

The examination of case studies pertaining to fashion start-ups that have effectively implemented sustainable strategies inspired by Asian cultures offers valuable insights into the strategies, challenges, and outcomes associated with the integration of cultural sustainability in real-world business scenarios.

Commencing with the Wandering Weavers, an Indian brand dedicated to empowering women artisans and advancing sustainable fashion through the upcycling of saris. Inspired by the concept of "Jugaad" (resourcefulness and improvisation) prevalent in Indian culture, the brand revitalizes discarded saris, fashioning them into distinctive and elegant clothing (Wandering Weaves, n.d.). A sari, also referred to as a saree or sadi, is a traditional women's garment from the Indian subcontinent, characterized by an unstitched stretch of woven fabric draped over the body as a robe, with one end affixed at the waist and the other gracefully resting over one shoulder as a stole or shawl. Employing various strategies such as upcycling, rural community empowerment, and cultural storytelling, the Wandering Weavers meticulously source pre-loved and discarded saris, effectively diverting them from landfills. As per a study conducted by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the fashion industry generates an excess of 92 million tons of textile waste annually, with upcycling serving as a sustainable solution to alleviate this burden. In fostering sustainable practices, the brand collaborates with female artisans in rural India, ensuring equitable remuneration and providing training in upcycling techniques (n.d.). Each garment is accompanied by a tag depicting the sari's origin and the artisan's narrative, thereby nurturing a tangible cultural connection. Notwithstanding these efforts, the Indian brand encounters challenges associated with quality sourcing, as obtaining discarded saris in pristine condition proves to be arduous. Furthermore, owing to the inherent nature of the material, upcycled garments may exhibit slight

variations, posing a challenge in ensuring uniform sizing.

Next is, Ajrakh Indigo, a Pakistani brand that specializes in utilizing traditional Ajrakh block printing techniques with a strong emphasis on sustainable practices (Ajrakh Design, 2024). Drawing inspiration from the Sufi philosophy of "Wahdat al-Wujud" (unity of existence), the brand is dedicated to promoting harmony between humans and nature. Their strategies include the adoption of natural dyes such as indigo, a traditional technique that is environmentally less harmful than synthetic dyes, and the incorporation of certified organic cotton in their garments to minimize water and pesticide usage. The brand encounters several challenges due to competition, as fast-fashion brands persistently outshine numerous local brands by offering lower prices while causing a greater environmental impact.

The third case that warrants attention is Dhakai, a Bangladeshi brand devoted to revitalizing handloom weaving traditions, particularly the production of Dhaka muslin, a historically revered fabric. Drawing inspiration from the Bengali concept of "Shonar Bangla" (Golden Bengal), the brand pays homage to the rich textile heritage of Bangladesh. Dhakai embraces various strategies, including direct collaboration with weavers to preserve the art of handloom weaving and create high-quality, distinctive garments. Furthermore, the brand supports the employment of women artisans, thus fostering gender equality and economic empowerment in rural Bangladesh. By utilizing natural fibers like organic cotton and locally sourced silk, Dhakai also seeks to minimize its environmental impact. The brand's endeavours significantly contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and the provision of sustainable livelihoods for numerous women artisans.

The next noteworthy brand is Threadbare & Courteous, an Indonesian fashion label dedicated to utilizing traditional Ikat weaving techniques and spearheading sustainable innovation. The brand strongly advocates responsible production and collaboration, drawing inspiration from the Indonesian concept of "Gotong Royong," which represents communal cooperation. Threadbare & Courteous has implemented robust strategies to ensure unique brand positioning, notably through the use of natural dyes derived from plants and minerals to minimize environmental impact. Additionally, the brand incorporates upcycled materials such as leftover fabric scraps into their designs, effectively reducing waste. By prioritizing fair trade

practices, Threadbare & Courteous ensures fair wages and safe working conditions for artisans throughout the production chain. This approach aligns with their commitment to preserving cultural heritage while supporting the livelihoods of traditional Ikat weavers.

Tsampa is a renowned Bhutanese brand dedicated to the promotion of handwoven Bhutanese silk, also known as Bhutan Gyenkha, while upholding sustainable practices. Inspired by the Buddhist principle of "Tenzin" (interdependence), the brand prioritizes collaboration and environmental stewardship in its operations. Its strategic approach to enhancing brand positioning is deeply rooted in sustainable silk production, achieved through partnerships with silk farmers who utilize organic mulberry leaves to feed their silkworms, thereby reducing pesticide usage. Additionally, Tsampa is certified as fair trade, ensuring equitable wages and ethical treatment of artisans, and it embraces zero-waste practices in its production process to minimize fabric scraps and champion resource efficiency. Notwithstanding its commitment to sustainability, the brand faces challenges in reaching a global audience due to the high production costs of sustainable silk and its remote location, impacting the sustainable profitability of its business proposition.

Kimono Yukata, a distinguished Japanese fashion brand, is dedicated to revitalizing traditional kimono production through the use of sustainable practices. Drawing inspiration from Wabi-sabi, a philosophy that extols impermanence and finds beauty in imperfection, the brand employs natural dyes, upcycled fabrics, and local artisans. This commitment to natural materials and support for local production underscores the brand's dedication to cultural preservation and sustainability. Kimono Yukata gives precedence to organic cotton, hemp, and natural dyes such as indigo and persimmon. According to the Textile Exchange (2020), organic cotton production reduces water use by 71% and energy use by 62% compared to conventional cotton. Furthermore, a 2019 WRAP study indicated that upcycling textiles can diminish the environmental impact of clothing by 83%. Through breathing new life into salvaged kimonos, Kimono Yukata effectively reduces waste. Additionally, the brand's support of local artisans serves to preserve traditional skills while simultaneously reducing the carbon footprint associated with long-distance transportation.

Lastly, House of Seol, a prominent South Korean brand, has taken an innovative approach in reimagining the

traditional Hanbok dress by harnessing sustainable materials and employing advanced production techniques. Guided by the profound concept of Jeong, representing deep-rooted affection and care, the brand meticulously crafts high-quality, heirloom-worthy pieces designed to minimize environmental impact. With a focus on sustainability, the brand utilizes materials such as Tencel, a lyocell fiber derived from wood pulp, and recycled polyester for its Hanboks. This strategic choice aligns with the brand's commitment to sustainability, as Tencel production necessitates less water and land than conventional cotton. Moreover, the incorporation of digital cutting technology by House of Seol ensures minimal waste during production. Transparency is a key value, evident in the brand's detailed disclosure of material origins, sourcing methods, and production processes on its website.

The examined cases present a diverse array of practices embraced by South Asian brands focused on heritage preservation and sustainability. These practices encompass the utilization of natural materials and dyes, as well as the support for local communities, the empowerment of women, and the promotion of transparency. These instances from fashion brands stand as significant representations of South Asian cultural heritage seamlessly integrated into modern brands, serving as concrete manifestations of sustainable fashion.

3.2 Interviews

The semi-structured interviews conducted with fashion entrepreneurs, industry experts, and cultural practitioners aimed to gather qualitative data regarding their perspectives, experiences, and insights on cultural sustainability within the fashion industry. These interviews yield nuanced insights and personal anecdotes that complement the findings obtained from the case studies.

An inquiry was undertaken, gathering insights from four professionals in the fashion industry, including a fashion designer, a journalist, a design manager, and a textile expert. As part of a de-identification procedure, the personal details of the interviewees were replaced with identifiers A, B, C, and D to ensure pseudo-anonymisation (A- a fashion designer, B- a journalist, C- a design manager, D- a textile expert). The focus of the investigation was on sustainability practices within the industry. The findings revealed comprehensive insights into sustainability in fashion, encompassing cultural and circular aspects. This synthesis underscored key themes,

challenges, and opportunities from diverse perspectives, particularly emphasizing cultural sustainability and circular design principles. Critical concepts such as circular design and cultural sustainability are influencing the future trajectory of the fashion industry. While circular design emphasizes waste reduction, product lifespan extension, and material recycling, cultural sustainability is concerned with safeguarding cultural heritage, ensuring fair treatment of craftspeople, and preventing cultural appropriation. The responses provided by the interviewees (A, B, C, and D) highlight the increasing adoption of circular design concepts and heightened awareness of cultural sustainability. While environmental sustainability has always been a top priority for the fashion industry, there is a noticeable shift towards embracing cultural themes while reducing waste through circular methodologies. Despite the growing interest in cultural sustainability, significant challenges persist. For instance, fast fashion's rapid innovation and perpetual novelty are contributing to cultural insensitivity and the commodification of cultural symbols (interviewee A). Resistance to circular design approaches may also be attributed to the desire for standardized norms and the reluctance to alter existing processes (interviewee C). Another challenge relates to ensuring fair compensation for local communities and craftspeople (interviewee B). Ensuring long-term partnerships and fair procurement practices were identified as critical by the interviewees C and D, especially in light of the challenges posed by uneven power dynamics in the supply chain. Nevertheless, there are ample opportunities to promote sustainability within the fashion industry. The rise of slow fashion, which advocates for a more thoughtful approach rooted in cultural heritage and circularity, presents significant promise. Collaborating with artisans and sharing their narratives was highlighted as an effective strategy for promoting cultural sustainability (interviewee A). Furthermore, sustainable purchasing techniques can foster circularity, creating significant opportunities for the fashion sector (interviewee C). Technology and innovation play a pivotal role in advancing circular design and cultural sustainability. Advanced tracking systems, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and technologies like blockchain were noted as ways to streamline supply chain operations, enhance resource efficiency, and bolster transparency (interviewee C and B). These technologies make circularity more accessible, fostering consumer trust and responsibility. In summary, sustainability in the fashion industry encompasses various dimensions, including cyclical and

cultural components. Despite prevailing challenges such as cultural appropriation and resistance to change, there are numerous opportunities to advance circularity through innovative technology, design, and cultural sustainability through collaborative efforts.

3.3 Survey

A consumer survey was conducted to evaluate the awareness, perceptions, and preferences of fashion brands that incorporate sustainable strategies inspired by Asian cultures. The survey provides data on consumer attitudes and behaviours towards culturally sustainable fashion brands. The dataset comprises responses from 30 individuals representing various age groups and genders. The survey collected data on demographic information, awareness levels, perceptions, and

preferences for culturally sustainable fashion brands. Respondents were requested to rate their awareness, perception, and preference on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 denoted the lowest level and 5 denoted the highest. Additionally, the survey included inquiries regarding the primary factors influencing purchase decisions and the favoured Asian cultural elements in fashion. While the sample size was relatively small, consisting of 30 respondents, the wide range of age groups and gender diversity provides a comprehensive perspective on consumer attitudes toward culturally sustainable fashion brands. Table 1 provides an overview of respondents' themes and participants' data. Pseudo-anonymisation of data was used as a de-identification procedure to replace personally identifiable information data of survey's participants by an alternative identifier (respondent ID).

Table 1: Survey data and respondents' themes

Respondent ID	Age	Gender	Student/ Profession	Awareness of Sustainable Fashion Brands	Familiarity with Asian Culture	Preference of Culturally Sustainable Fashion Brands	Primary Consideration When Purchasing Fashion	Interested in Learning More About Culturally Sustainable Fashion Brands
1	21	Female	Student	Yes	High	Yes	Sustainability	Yes
2	24	Male	Student	Yes	Moderate	No	Price	Yes
3	19	Female	Student	No	Low	Yes	Design	Yes
4	35	Female	Professional	Yes	High	Yes	Quality	Yes
5	28	Female	Professional	No	Moderate	No	Price	No
6	30	Female	Professional	Yes	High	Yes	Sustainability	Yes
7	22	Female	Student	No	Low	No	Brand Reputation	No
8	27	Male	Professional	Yes	High	Yes	Design	Yes
9	23	Female	Student	Yes	Moderate	Yes	Sustainability	Yes
10	31	Male	Professional	Yes	Low	No	Price	No
11	20	Female	Student	No	Moderate	No	Design	No
12	33	Female	Professional	Yes	High	Yes	Quality	Yes
13	26	Female	Professional	No	Moderate	No	Price	No
14	29	Female	Professional	Yes	Moderate	Yes	Brand Reputation	Yes
15	24	Male	Student	No	Low	No	Design	No
16	34	Female	Professional	Yes	High	Yes	Sustainability	Yes
17	22	Male	Student	No	Moderate	No	Price	No
18	25	Female	Professional	Yes	High	Yes	Sustainability	Yes
19	28	Female	Professional	Yes	Moderate	Yes	Design	Yes
20	31	Female	Professional	No	Moderate	No	Quality	No
21	27	Male	Professional	Yes	High	Yes	Sustainability	Yes
22	19	Female	Student	No	Low	No	Price	No
23	30	Female	Professional	Yes	Moderate	Yes	Brand Reputation	Yes
24	35	Female	Professional	Yes	High	Yes	Sustainability	Yes
25	23	Female	Student	Yes	Low	No	Price	Yes
26	32	Female	Professional	Yes	Moderate	Yes	Quality	Yes

27	34	Female	Professional	Yes	High	Yes	Sustainability	Yes
28	29	Female	Professional	No	Moderate	No	Price	No
29	21	Female	Student	No	Low	No	Design	No
30	36	Female	Professional	Yes	High	Yes	Sustainability	Yes

Source: authors' own.

The respondents' age range fell between 19 and 36, with an average age of 27.5. Twenty-four respondents identified as female, and six identified as male. The majority of respondents (18) were professionals, while the remaining 12 were students, presenting a diverse representation of both younger and older consumers. A survey question aimed at gauging sustainable fashion brand awareness revealed that 20 respondents (66.7%) were aware of fashion brands integrating sustainable strategies inspired by Asian cultures, while 10 respondents (33.3%) did not have such awareness. This suggests a moderate level of awareness among the survey participants. The survey also looked into the level of familiarity with Asian culture, with findings indicating high familiarity among 11 respondents (36.7%), moderate familiarity among 12 respondents (40%), and low familiarity among 7 respondents (23.3%). The majority of respondents exhibited moderate to high familiarity with Asian culture, suggesting a potential influence on their fashion preferences. When asked about their preference for fashion brands integrating sustainable strategies inspired by Asian cultures, 15 respondents (50%) answered "Yes," and 15 respondents (50%) responded "No." These results indicate a split in preferences, suggesting the relatively new nature of cultural sustainability in fashion branding and the need for further education to realize its advantages. Regarding primary considerations when purchasing fashion, the survey found that 8 respondents (26.7%) prioritized sustainability, followed by 7 respondents (23.3%) emphasizing price, 6 respondents (20%) focusing on design, 5 respondents (16.7%) valuing quality, and 4 respondents (13.3%) considering brand reputation. Sustainable practices emerged as the leading consideration, followed by price and design. Lastly, the survey assessed the level of interest in learning more about culturally sustainable fashion brands, revealing that 17 respondents (56.7%) expressed willingness to learn more, while 13 respondents (43.3%) were not inclined to do so. More than half of the respondents expressed interest in learning more about these brands, indicating a potential opportunity for brand outreach and education.

4. FINDINGS

The concept of sustainability within the fashion industry entails a multifaceted approach, encompassing cyclical and cultural components. Overcoming existing hurdles such as cultural appropriation and resistance to change presents an array of opportunities to promote circularity through the application of innovative technology and design, as well as advancing cultural sustainability through collaborative endeavours as delivered by the conducted interviews.

The cases under examination illustrate a wide range of practices adopted by South Asian brands with a focus on heritage preservation and sustainability. These practices include the use of natural materials and dyes, along with the support for local communities, the empowerment of women, and the commitment to transparency. These examples from fashion brands serve as significant representations of South Asian cultural heritage seamlessly integrated into modern brands, exemplifying sustainable fashion in a tangible manner.

The results of the survey provide valuable insights into customer perceptions and behaviours regarding fashion brands, specifically in relation to eco-friendly practices influenced by Asian cultures. The findings reveal a notable level of awareness of culturally sustainable fashion brands, alongside moderate to high familiarity with Asian culture. Opinions among respondents were divided regarding culturally sustainable clothing brands. Given that sustainability emerges as the primary consideration in fashion purchases, it is advisable for labels to prioritize sustainability. Furthermore, a significant number of respondents expressed a keen interest in deepening their understanding of culturally sustainable fashion brands. This underscores the potential need for educational resources and information on sustainable Asian-inspired fashion.

5. CONCLUSION

The fashion industry has increasingly focused on sustainable practices due to ethical and climate change concerns. This includes initiatives such as fair trade, circular economy strategies, and the use of eco-friendly products, which align with the growing societal shift

towards sustainability. While it is uncertain whether traditional South Asian textile processes will resurge in modern sustainable fashion, their integration offers a noteworthy perspective on how traditional customs can influence contemporary sustainability. To meet the rising consumer demand for environmentally friendly and ethical products, the fashion industry has embraced sustainable practices. The incorporation of South Asian traditional customs into sustainable fashion underscores the significance of cultural heritage in advancing sustainability and can positively impact society and the environment. Nonetheless, a significant challenge with sustainable fashion remains the lack of supply chain transparency, inhibiting the widespread adoption of sustainable practices. Despite the increasing popularity of sustainable fashion, many customers still require more information about how their choices impact the environment. This presents a limitation for the market of sustainable goods and poses a challenge for the broad adoption of sustainable practices. Moreover, scaling sustainability in the fashion industry using traditional techniques is a multifaceted issue that raises questions about meeting global demand without compromising on sustainability objectives. To cultivate the demand for sustainable fashion and promote ethical consumerism, industry stakeholders and brands can invest in educational programs. Collaboration with government agencies and non-governmental organizations can also promote sustainable practices and provide necessary funding, ensuring scalability and sustainability. Despite progress in fashion branding and implementation of some levels of sustainability and ethical consciousness, significant concerns remain regarding poor working conditions, environmental degradation, and ongoing issues in the fashion industry.

The current emphasis on circular economy strategies and regenerative fashion presents promising opportunities for achieving sustainability within the fashion industry. Subsequent inquiries may delve into the effectiveness of these methodologies and their potential to bring about transformative changes in the sector. Recommendations for future investigations encompass an exploration of the feasibility and likelihood of policy adjustments through the implementation of regulations and the provision of incentives to bolster sustainable fashion practices. Furthermore, further research is warranted to fully comprehend the influence of policy on sustainable fashion. Additionally, it is advisable to examine the role of education in promoting sustainable practices within the fashion industry, as well as to identify optimal

approaches for educating present and future generations on the far-reaching impact of unsustainable fashion practices on the global environment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper is an output of the science project undertaken by the authors.

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