



Paper Circular Economy

Degree work

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GLOSARY

Behavioral Control: The extent to which customers think they have the capacity and chance to carry out a particular action, like buying sustainable goods.

Circular Economy (CE): An economic model that minimises waste by using reuse, repair, recycling, and regeneration to extend the useful life of goods, materials, and resources.

Circular Fashion: A sustainable strategy for the fashion industry that encourages the creation, manufacture, use, and reuse of apparel in order to lessen its negative effects on the environment and prolong its useful life.

Consumer Behavior: The decisions and behaviours people take when buying, utilising, and discarding goods.

Digital Marketing: using digital channels including social media, websites, email, and search engines to market goods and services in an effort to sway consumer choices.

Eco-Influencer: an influencer on social media who advocates for sustainable consumption and ecologically conscious lifestyles.

Fast Fashion: A business strategy that encourages repeated purchases and short product lifespans by producing inexpensive apparel quickly and in accordance with current trends.

Greenwashing: The act of deceiving customers by making false or inflated claims about how environmentally friendly a business or its products are.

Influencer Marketing: A digital marketing tactic that uses well-known social media figures to promote goods, services, or concepts in an effort to influence consumers' opinions and decisions to buy.

Intention–Behavior Gap: The discrepancy between customers' actual consumption or purchase behaviour and their positive aspirations to act sustainably.

Purchase Intention: Depending on attitudes, beliefs, and outside factors, a consumer's propensity to purchase a specific product.

Supply Chain: The network of businesses, operations, and assets used in the manufacturing, shipping, and delivery of goods to customers.

SUMMARY

The impact of social media and digital marketing on customer attitudes, purchasing intentions, and actual behaviour on the circular economy in the fashion sector is examined in this review of the literature. The study examines how digital communication may both promote more sustainable consumption by raising knowledge of circular practices and encourage excessive purchasing through rapid fashion techniques. It does this by analysing ten scholarly sources. The study emphasises the shift from linear to circular consumption patterns and the increasing significance of marketing in influencing consumer choices.

The paper illustrates how the circular economy provides an alternative based on reuse, repair, recycling, and longer product lifecycles while also addressing the environmental effects of rapid fashion. Additionally, it examines how consumers' perceptions of sustainability are influenced by social media, influencer marketing, and digital campaigns. It highlights that despite consumers' positive attitudes toward sustainability, obstacles like greenwashing, high costs, and mistrust frequently keep them from adopting circular behaviours.

318 students from Universidad del Rosario's Faculty of Administration participated in a survey to supplement the literature study. The results show that while the majority of participants are aware of the idea of rapid fashion, less are aware of its effects on the environment. While many respondents acknowledge sustainability challenges, only a tiny percentage actually participate in circular practices like clothes repair, according to the survey, which also supports the presence of an intention–behavior divide. Additionally, platforms like Shein and Temu as well as social media advertising were found to be significant causes of impulsive buying.

Overall, the assessment comes to the conclusion that when communication is clear, trustworthy, and concentrated on long-term sustainability rather than immediate sales, digital marketing has the potential to become an effective instrument for advancing the circular economy. However, changing consumer behaviour requires more than just increasing awareness. To promote the adoption of circular consumption habits in the fashion industry, stronger cooperation between companies, governments, and consumers is required, along with more successful digital strategies and reliable sustainability communication.

ABSTRACT

In order to comprehend how social media and digital marketing impact consumer perceptions, purchasing intentions, and behaviors in the circular economy of fashion industry, this paper reviews ten academic sources. The results demonstrate that while digital platforms promote awareness and engagement, sustainable choices are fueled by tactics like influencer marketing, recycled clothing industry campaigns, and indirect advertising.

FROM FAST FASHION TO CIRCULAR CONSUMPTION: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOR

Abstract

In order to comprehend how social media and digital marketing impact consumer perceptions, purchasing intentions, and behaviors in the circular economy of fashion industry, this paper reviews ten academic sources. The results demonstrate that while digital platforms promote awareness and engagement, sustainable choices are fueled by tactics like influencer marketing, recycled clothing industry campaigns, and indirect advertising.

Key words

Circular economy, digital marketing, social media, consumer behavior, sustainable fashion, impact.

INTRODUCTION

Since the fashion industry is one of the most polluting industries, the circular economy provides a solution through recycling, reuse, and repair. For this reason, marketing and communication are crucial in promoting sustainable practices. The main topic of this review is: *How do social media and digital marketing strategies influence consumer perceptions, purchase intentions, and actual behavior toward the circular economy in the fashion industry?* Ten academic works (nine

articles and one book chapter) are reviewed to provide insights. The general objective is to analyze how digital marketing influences sustainable consumer behavior in the fashion industry, specifically, seeking to identify barriers and opportunities that encourage the implementation of circular practices.

THE IMPACT OF FAST FASHION LED BY MARKETING

As one of the world's most polluting sectors, the fashion industry has been widely recognized for its large emissions of

greenhouse gases, high water consumption greenhouse gases, high water consumption greenhouse gases, high water consumption and pollution, accumulation of textile waste and high use of chemicals, according to the article *The environmental price of fast fashion* (Niinimäki et al., 2020). One of the main reasons for this problem is fast fashion, which has caused production and consumption cycles to accelerate, causing high pressure on the environment. Also, This culture promotes excessive consumption.

The high environmental cost of this consumption system is manifested not only in the large-scale extraction of natural resources and associated pollution, but also in the enormous volume of waste generated after consumption. In this sense, fast fashion garments are designed with the purpose of being discarded soon, seeking to generate a repurchase and thus feed mass consumption. These garments end up in landfills or even marine ecosystems, as happens in Ghana, a country with approximately 30 million inhabitants, where about 15 million "donated" garments enter weekly, according to the documentary *Buy Now! The Shopping Conspiracy* (Stacey, 2024).

Marketing has led consumers to think only about getting more and providing the means for

the same consumerism: now, with a single click, any momentary desire can be satisfied through platforms such as Amazon, Temu or Shein (Stacey, 2024). In turn, marketing is a key engine behind this consumer behavior, since it is not only about communicating the product, but it shapes the expectations and habits of the consumer in order to generate purchases (Vladimirova et al., 2023).

In fashion there are different strategies to encourage unrestrained consumption such as promotions/ discounts, social pressure and the constant rotation of collections giving the consumer a sense of status or sense of belonging, even if that means poor durability or limited use of the garments, since that awareness of the post purchase is generally sought to avoid in marketing strategies to continue having the attention of the consumer with each season of new clothing (Vladimirova et al., 2023; Stacey, 2024).

However, recent research shows that marketing as well as being used to encourage purchase could become an ally in promoting more sustainable consumer behavior (Vladimirova et al., 2023). Studies on the role of social media in responsible consumer consumption show that influencer

recommendations and environmental awareness messages can expand awareness and change consumer perceptions towards more conscious and regulated consumption (Vladimirova et al., 2023). Similarly, a research in Latin America, more specifically a study done in Guatemala on sustainability and buying behavior in Generation Z shows that the intention of Latin American consumers tend to consume clothes they really need having a high degree of awareness, especially among young people, but this conscious consumption is limited by factors such as the high price of certain sustainable brands and the credibility of sustainability claims that could come to be seen as "greenwashing" (a concept that defines companies or movements that claim to be environmentally responsible or exaggerate their sustainable practices) demonstrating that when sustainable marketing campaigns are not credible, the intention to buy responsibly is lost and consumers return to consumerism quickly (Guatemala Mariano et al., 2025).

Therefore, to bring together both concepts such as sustainable marketing and consumption, it is important to take into account the credibility of the message that is being transmitted and create awareness that the world no longer needs more clothing, there are already seas of clothes, as in

Ghana or mountains of textile waste, as in Chile (Vladimirova et al., 2023; Guatemala Mariano et al., 2025; Stacey, 2024). Situations like this highlights the real need to transition from fast consumption to circularity, where marketing plays an important role influencing consumer mindsets.

Now, do we really think about where it all ends up at the end of its cycle of use that we "donate" or discard? Have you ever wondered: what if those clothes that I no longer wear, instead of discarding them, could re-enter the supply chain and become a new product? From such questions arise the foundations of what is known as the circular economy, a concept that opens the door to new ways of looking at production and consumption with a mindset and acting more consciously in search of less impact on the environment (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

WHAT IS CIRCULAR ECONOMY?

The "extract-produce-discard" model, which is the traditional and linear one, has been directly challenged by the circular economy (EC), which has developed as a sustainability methodology. According to Geissdoerfer et al. (2017), the circular economy (EC) is

characterized as a system of production and consumption that aims to preserve the value of materials, products and resources in the market for as long as possible, reducing waste and the extraction of virgin resources. This method is based on practices such as recycling, recovery and repair (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017).

It is important to note that CE is a cultural shift towards sustainable lifestyles which in turn represents an economic opportunity for those industries seeking economic growth not based on the exploitation of resources (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017), the integration of circular principles involves redesigning garments to improve durability (avoiding recurring purchases and waste) and recyclability (facilitating their re-entry into the supply chain), in addition to restructuring supply chains to seek circularity, either within the same company (CE closed) or by partnering with other companies and their supply chains (CE open). Following the same idea, emerging economies have an important role in the transition in search of circularity. A bibliometric review by Uwuigbe et al. (2025) showed that both government and consumer interest in more sustainable practices towards a CE is growing significantly, this being especially relevant to

fashion, since much of its production is concentrated in these countries (emerging economies such as China, India and Vietnam) and the fact that interest is already evident and more sustainable practices are being sought by these economies would impact globally in a

positive way in environmental terms reducing the footprint that fast fashion has brought (Uwuigbe et al., 2025)

Thus, the circular economy is no longer just an idea, but today it is beginning to be seen as a practical guide to tackle the environmental problems that mass consumerism has brought us. This methodology sees waste as a useful resource and not something that is "the responsibility of others", looking for clothes to last longer to buy what you need and helping meet sustainability goals globally. However, several studies show that there are still obstacles to putting the EC into practice, mainly because changing the fast and linear consumption habits to which we as consumers are accustomed is not an easy task, since many marketing areas of leading companies in the market if they do not see an economic benefit behind a campaign that promotes sustainability then do not carry it out (Vladimirova et al., 2023), there are also

limitations of infrastructure and technology in some countries that are not yet ready for circular systems since they are based on linear systems as is the case of South America (Guatemala Mariano et al., 2025), Overcoming these challenges requires businesses, consumers and governments to work together to further raise awareness of the importance of opting for more circular models (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Uwuigbe et al., 2025).

PERCEPTIONS OF C.E. IN FASHION

One of the most effective platforms for influencing how consumers view circular practices in the clothing sector is social media, based in Instagram a conceptual framework was made by Almashaleh et al. (2025) shows that content emphasizing positive emotions, cost savings, and environmental benefits generates significantly higher engagement compared to other types of content or content

This means that companies can influence people's perceptions of circular clothing not only by providing information about its existence but also by demonstrating that sustainability is rewarding through positive content, cost savings, and environmental

benefits, since the sustainability of circular economy is related to these highly engaged topics, at the same time, a review of CE research in emerging economies made by Uwuigbe et al. (2025) shows that interest in the circular economy has grown in emerging economies, where communication trends highlight sustainability as a core value in both business and consumer practices taken together, these studies demonstrate that digital communication raises awareness and helps consumers associate circular clothing with positive lifestyle choices.

However, some studies say that social media marketing increases awareness and interest in more sustainable purchases, while other studies indicate that people's actions don't always align with their intentions. They may want to be more sustainable but do the opposite.

PURCHASE INTENTIONS

Digital marketing strategies play a direct role in fostering purchase intentions for circular products. For example, research in the United Arab Emirates conducted a survey of 246 participants and analyzed it using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to understand consumer behavior toward

refurbished furniture. The study was designed considering the rapidly growing furniture market in the UAE, but little was known about sustainable options in this context. The results showed a positive effect on purchase intentions due to perceived sustainability and economic.

motivation, while distance from the refurbishment system was not significant (Kaluvilla et al., 2025). This suggests that marketing should emphasize the benefits of sustainability and its existence, as sustainable or secondhand options are often not chosen due to misinformation. This can be applied to secondhand or recycled clothing.

In Colombia, a qualitative study made by interviews with young consumers in Medellín by Pereira et al. (2024) was useful to explore motivations for purchasing secondhand clothing. Researchers found two main consumer profiles: design lovers (motivated by uniqueness and creativity) and conscious professionals (motivated by economic and ethical reasons). Therefore, circular clothing marketing strategies can target different consumer groups based on their design preferences or ethical/economic reasons.

In India, another study used survey methods with 420 participants to investigate the factors

that influence the purchase of recycled clothing. The study revealed that promotional strategies, such as discounts and campaigns, had a greater effect than product-related factors (quality or durability) (Mukthar et al., 2024). This finding highlights that communication and marketing tactics can be more effective than product features in stimulating consumer interest in circular clothing. This is why it is important to understand how consumers can be drawn to more sustainable options by being attracted to discounts and campaigns.

ACTUAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Changing actual behavior is more difficult than shaping consumers' perceptions or intentions. In Hungary, researchers conducted a representative survey of 500 Budapest residents to understand post-purchase actions for clothing. The study revealed that while consumers generally expressed positive attitudes toward sustainability, their actions were primarily influenced by social norms and the behavioral control they receive from marketing campaigns (Kemi & Zilahy, 2025). This underscores the gap between what consumers intend to do and what they actually do, as their purchasing behaviors are influenced.

This may be largely because social media also plays a key role in actual consumer behavior. This conclusion is based on an exploratory case study in Italy that analyzed the work of eco-influencer "@Eco.narratrice" to observe how her communication influenced consumer attitudes. The study concluded that eco-influencers reduce knowledge barriers and facilitate access to circular practices, but they can also generate distrust if followers suspect greenwashing or excessive promotion (Conte et al., 2025). This study demonstrates that building credibility and trust is crucial for converting awareness into truly sustainable behaviors and can be achieved through people the consumer admires or follows. This distrust is also evident in a chapter (Regulatory Frameworks and Digital Compliance in Green Market Orientation, Dogbe, 2025) in the book "sustainable Business Practices in Green Marketing." This book explains that compliance tools such as AI and blockchain help ensure that sustainability communication is transparent and reliable. AI helps verify sustainability claims by analyzing high volumes of data in real time, and blockchain technology provides transparency by immutably recording every stage of the supply chain. These digital compliance systems reduce

consumer mistrust and foster alignment between marketing and true circular practices.

MARKETING STRATEGIES AND REGULATION

In Italy, a study of textile companies (Coppola et al., 2023) examined how companies develop dynamic capabilities for transitioning to circular practices. The research was useful to identify three key capabilities:

- 1) the ability to identify new trends, technologies, and consumer needs related to sustainability (opportunity spotting)
- 2) investing in new products, processes, or business models that enable circularity (seizing opportunities through innovation)
- 3) reorganizing internal structures and supply chains to support a circular business model (reconfiguring resources).

These are necessary for companies to improve their environmental performance and scale their circular business models. This suggests that circularity is not only about external communication with consumers, but also about transforming the company's internal processes and supply chains.

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SHEIN AS A CASE OF STUDY

The case of Shein is a good example of how ultra-fast fashion aggravates the environmental and social challenges. According to SHEIN, companies like this grow by attracting a large audience through a constant rotation of products at extremely low prices that encourage frequent purchases. This strategy has worked for companies such as Shein and Temu because they are the clear example of fast fashion and consumerism. However, everything comes at a price, and while in this case the consumer may not be paying it because of the very low prices, the true high price is paid in terms of the environment, labor practices, and even the consumer themselves, who experiences products with a short lifespan (Ivey Publishing, 2024).

Speaking of climate aggravating factors, companies like SHEIN rely on synthetic materials derived from fossil fuels and generate a high volume of waste due to their rapid inventory turnover. These problems translate into pollution, overproduction, and waste

accumulation in countries that receive secondhand clothing at an unsustainable rate. At the same time, although SHEIN has published ESG reports and announced circularity initiatives, several investigations have demonstrated inconsistencies in the company's communication regarding working conditions and environmental management, reinforcing public distrust and concerns about potential greenwashing (Ivey Publishing, 2024). This case enriches the paper by demonstrating once again how marketing and digital communication, while raising awareness about sustainability and generating positive changes, can also increase consumer spending and entice them to make negative changes in their behavior (in environmental terms). The Shein example shows that implementing circular models requires far more structural transformations than simply carrying out isolated marketing actions if companies truly intend to contribute significantly to sustainability and circularity.

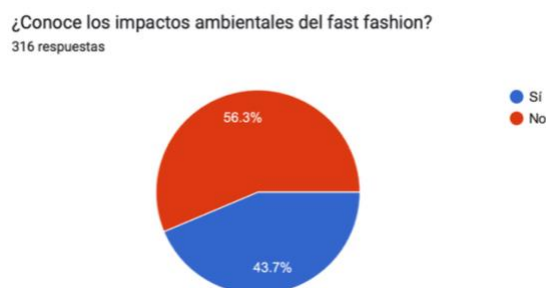
SURVEY MADE

To complement the literature review, a survey was conducted among 318 students

from the Faculty of Administration at Universidad del Rosario, representing approximately 20% of the total student population. The objective was to contrast theoretical findings with real consumer perceptions and behaviors within a young, digitally active demographic. The results reveal that 78.9% of respondents are familiar with the concept of fast fashion.

Figure 1

Fast Fashion knowledge, 2026



Note. The graphic is a result from the survey made in the university with 316 answers, 2026.

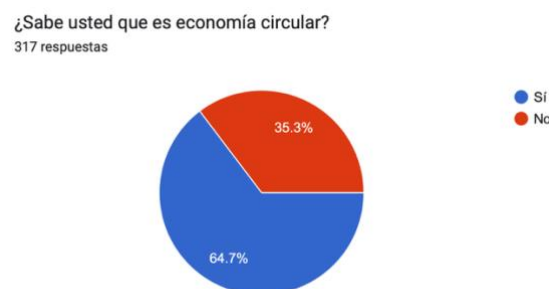
(The graph is from the survey conducted on Google Forms.)

perceptions and behaviors within a young, digitally active demographic. The results reveal that 78.9% of respondents are familiar with the concept of fast fashion.

However, only 43.7% reported being aware of its environmental impacts.

Figure 2

Circular Economy knowledge, 2026



Note. The graphic is a result from the survey made in the university with 316 answers, 2026.

(The graph is from the survey conducted on Google Forms.)

This gap highlights a key issue identified in the literature: awareness does not necessarily imply a deep understanding of sustainability consequences. While digital platforms may successfully introduce concepts such as fast fashion, they often fail to communicate the full extent of their environmental implications.

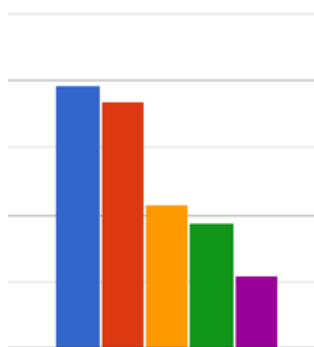
In terms of behavior, the findings reinforce the existence of the intention–behavior gap

discussed in previous studies.

Also, only 23% of participants indicated that they prefer repairing a garment instead of replacing it, suggesting that circular practices such as reuse and repair are still not widely adopted. This aligns with research indicating that although consumers may express positive attitudes toward sustainability, their actual behaviors are still driven by convenience, price, and social influence.

Figure 3

Repairing vs buying, 2026



Note. The graphic is a result from the survey made in the university with 316 answers, 2026.

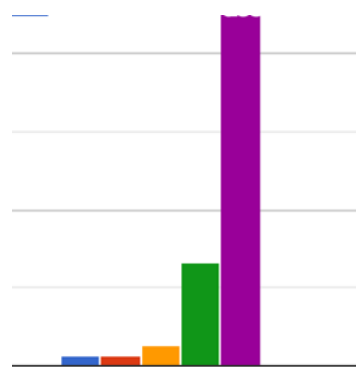
(The graph is from the survey conducted on Google Forms.)

Additionally, 56% of respondents acknowledged that social media advertising

influences their interest in purchasing new clothing.

Figure 4

Social media advertising, 2026

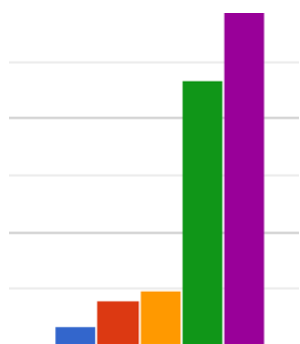


Note. The graphic is a result from the survey made in the university with 316 answers, 2026.

(The graph is from the survey conducted on Google Forms.)

This supports the argument that digital marketing plays a significant role in shaping consumer preferences and purchase intentions.

More importantly, 71% of participants believe that platforms such as Shein and Temu encourage impulsive consumption.

Figure 5*Platforms believing, 2026*

Note. The graphic is a result from the survey made in the university with 316 answers, 2026.

(The graph is from the survey conducted on Google Forms.)

This perception is consistent with the literature, which identifies these platforms as key drivers of accelerated consumption cycles due to their low prices, constant product rotation, and ease of access. These findings suggest on one hand that there is a growing level of awareness regarding fast fashion, on the other hand, this awareness does not translate into more sustainable consumption patterns. The influence of digital marketing appears to reinforce impulsive buying behaviors, even among consumers who recognize the issue.

Therefore, the results support the idea that increasing awareness alone is not sufficient to drive behavioral change.

Instead, more effective communication strategies are needed to deepen consumers' understanding of environmental impacts and promote practical alternatives aligned with circular economy principles. Bridging this gap between knowledge and action remains one of the main challenges for both researchers and practitioners in the field of sustainable fashion.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, digital marketing and social media strategies significantly influence perceptions, buying intentions, and behaviors within the fashion circular economy. Social media content increases awareness and engagement, while promotional strategies and influencer communication shape consumer intentions and actions. However, barriers such as distrust and the gap between intention and behavior persist.

The survey of 318 students from the Faculty of Management of the University of Rosario reinforces and enriches these theoretical findings with empirical evidence from a young and digitally active population.

Although 78.9% of respondents knew the concept of fast fashion, only 43.7% reported being aware of its environmental consequences, confirming that exposure to content on digital platforms does not automatically translate into a deep understanding of sustainability. This gap between recognition and understanding represents one of the central challenges that marketing strategies in the circular economy must address. Moreover, the low adoption of circular practices, reflected in only 23% of participants preferring to repair a garment rather than replace it, suggests that behaviors such as reuse and repair remain unconnected to most young people's consumption habits. despite his familiarity with the concept.

At the same time, 56% recognized that social media advertising influences their interest in buying new clothes, and 71% identified platforms like Shein and Temu as driving impulse consumption. which is consistent with the literature that points to these companies as accelerators of fast fashion cycles through low prices, constant product turnover and ease of access.

Taken together, these findings confirm that awareness alone is not enough to bring about real behavioral change. More effective communication strategies are needed, which

can deepen consumers understanding of environmental impacts and make circular alternatives more visible, accessible, and desirable. Future research should explore how digital tools can bridge the gap between intent and behavior, how regulations can strengthen trust in sustainable marketing, and how tailored digital strategies can promote long-term circular practices, especially in emerging economies where infrastructure and consumption habits still favor linear models of production and consumption.

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