



## **Fast Fashion's Waste Crisis: A Systematic and Bibliometric Review of Global Evidence (2015–2025)**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** The rising prominence of the fast fashion business model has generated significant concerns regarding textile industry waste and the availability of mitigation strategies. Analysing the consumption patterns driven by fast fashion is essential to determining their long-term environmental impacts.

**Objective:** This study aims to synthesise existing research on fast fashion, textile waste, and sustainability to identify the principal areas of academic inquiry and research trends over the last decade.

**Methodology:** The research analysed 124 articles indexed in Scopus between 2015 and 2025. Following the PRISMA protocol, a bibliometric analysis was conducted to determine publication trends, key authors, and dominant thematic clusters within the identified literature.

**Results:** Three primary research domains were identified: 1) consumer behaviours, motivations, and psychological drivers; 2) environmental impacts of fast fashion; and 3)

circular economy principles and sustainable consumption strategies, including industrial interventions.

**Unique Contribution:** This study provides a comprehensive overview of the fast fashion and textile waste literature, filling an existing gap by establishing a wide-ranging research agenda that bridges the divide between consumer psychology and waste management.

**Conclusion:** While sustainable fashion is an accelerating research field, a significant gap remains between theoretical research and the practical application of sustainable consumption and waste disposal models in the fast fashion sector.

**Key Recommendation:** Future research should explore the interconnectedness of consumer purchasing habits, textile disposal behaviours, and the efficiency of existing waste management infrastructures to foster a truly circular economy.

**Keywords:** bibliometric analysis, circular economy, consumer behaviour, fast fashion, sustainable fashion, systematic literature review, textile waste, waste management.

## Introduction

The fast fashion industry has undergone remarkable expansion over the past two decades, propelled by accelerated production cycles, aggressive pricing, and heightened responsiveness to trends (Elgeka, 2025; Mim et al., 2025). This swift development has heightened the availability, as well as the diversity, of fashion but has also contributed significantly to the pressures facing the environment, particularly due to the rise in the levels of post-consumer textile waste (PCTW) and the issues associated with the management of waste in a sustainable manner (Ong & Koay, 2025). In this regard, it has been widely acknowledged globally that the issue of waste in the textile industry no longer remains as the result of over-production but rather has assumed the form of a challenge associated with sustainability, waste in landfills, microplastic discharge, as well as the massive emission of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, as confirmed in the studies of Balcarová et al. (2025). Specifically, there has been growing scholarly attention directed at waste management issues, moving beyond the confines of just the logistical issues related to waste disposal but also issues related to consumer waste generation, efficiency in production, as well as potential interventions related to the circular economy (Rafiq et al., 2025).

Furthermore, there remain some research gaps in this regard. Firstly, the viability of industrial-scale textile recycling when competing in international markets against cheap raw fibres has yet to be ascertained (Tan & Yeoh, 2024). Secondly, there is a lack of longitudinal research on changes in post-EPR waste generation as they pertain to the proposed targets set forth in existing environmental frameworks (Millward-Hopkins et al., 2023). Moreover, interventions toward overconsumption behaviour remain unstudied in terms of observable long-term effectiveness in varied cultural settings. Finally, the use of blockchain technology, along with the Internet of Things, has the potential to transform fashion supply chains for traceability, but there are few applications in the domain of waste management.

This research investigates the following challenges using a systematic literature review methodology, supplemented by bibliometric mapping, to compile the current state of research

on fast fashion and waste management. Specifically, it aims to answer the following three key research questions:

**RQ1.** What developments have there been in the literature on fast fashion and textile waste between the years 2015 and 2025 concerning a) the theoretical perspectives, research context, and methodology, and b) the precursors, decision-making, process, and outcomes concerning fast fashion consumption, as well as the generation of textile waste?

**RQ2.** Based on the identified issues in achieving the goal of sustainable fast fashion, what future research directions can be explored?

Through the integration of the bibliometric approach and the methodology of thematic synthesis, this review offers a thorough insight into the representation of waste in the fast fashion industry as it has been conceptualised, researched, and addressed in existing literature. This review aims to build upon existing scholarship to uncover the intellectual structure and the transformation pathways of the fast fashion industry.

## **Materials and Methods**

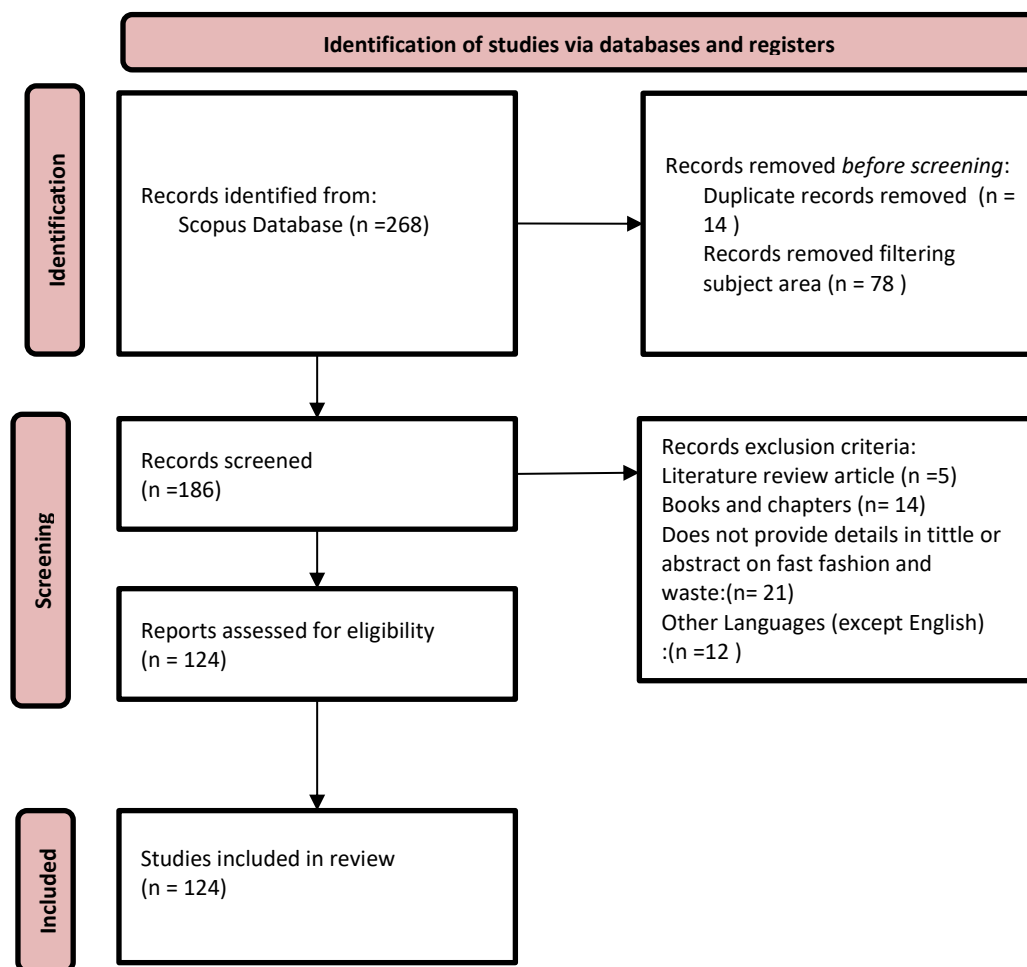
### ***Data source and search strategy***

This literature review adhered to the PRISMA 2020 protocol to guarantee rigorous methodology and ease of replication. The Scopus bibliographic database was selected as the sole bibliographic resource for the search, as it provides the most comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature on sustainability, waste, and the textiles sector. The search term was designed based on iterative trial and error to optimise precision and recall rates. Boolean operators were employed to search using the concept groups defined by the first search term, associated with the fashion industry, and the latter associated with the environmental angle. The search term specified in the end was ("fast fashion" OR "disposable fashion") AND ("waste" OR "waste generation" OR "waste disposal" OR "textile waste" OR "environmental impact").

The search was executed in the title, abstract, and key terms, yielding an initial set of 268 results between the years 2015-2025. The fields were set to include title, authors, year of publication, sources, key terms authored, abstracts, affiliations, and citation counts in the resulting bibliographic file.

### ***Screening and Inclusion Criteria***

As shown in Figure 1, 124 records met the criteria, reducing the search results to the final review set. This thorough selection process allowed the selection of peer-reviewed, original research, English-language articles that were directly related to the topics of fast fashion and waste management.



**Figure 1.** PRISMA methodology was used for the systematic review of the literature. Source: Authors' illustration

### Bibliometric Analysis

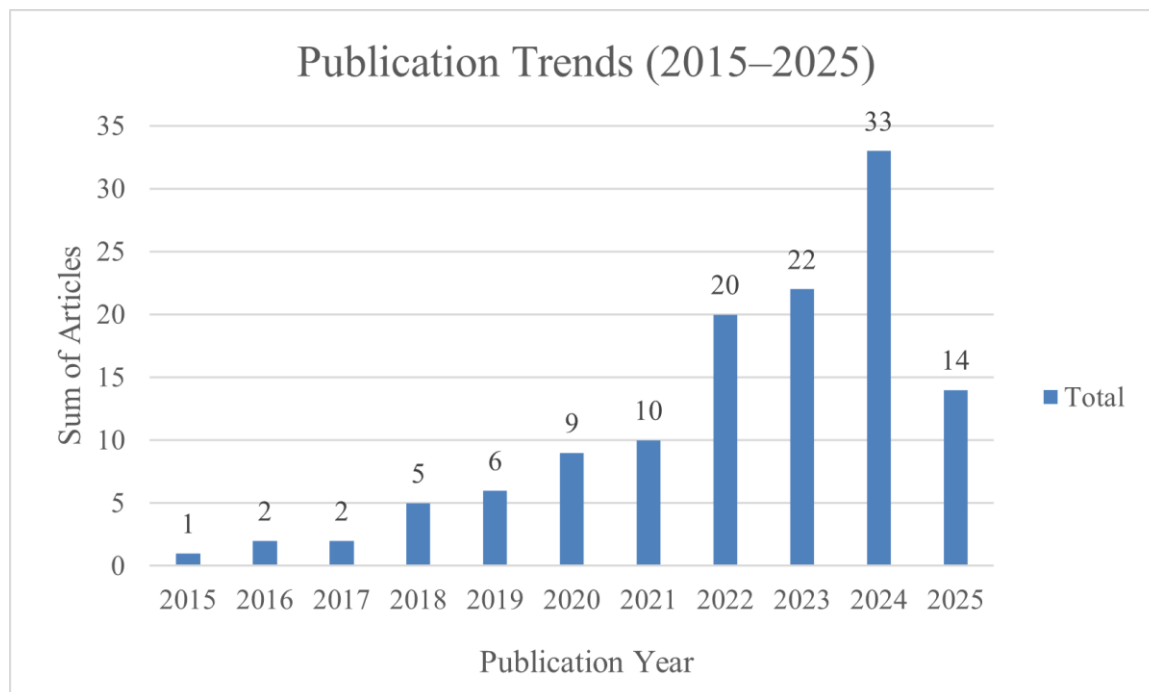
These were complemented by bibliometric mapping and qualitative synthesis in the study of the final set of 124 articles. The bibliometric mapping facilitated the exploration of trends, intellectual structures, and thematic interrelationships in the body of research. These were analyzed using VOSviewer software as well as the Biblioshiny interface of the Bibliometric R-package, which allowed the visualization of research networks based on co-authorship networks of authors, institutions, and countries, as well as the use of keywords to explore important themes, as well as mappings related to citation/co-citation, which allowed the exploration of important research papers and the conceptual bases important in the research.

## Results

### **Publication Trends (2015–2025)**

As shown in Figure 2, the number of publications on fast fashion and waste management as a research topic has increased significantly over the last decade. The number of publications was quite small between 2015-2019, ranging from 1 to a maximum of 6 in a single year. The upward movement began in 2020, coinciding with the rise in international debates on sustainability and the circular economy, peaking at 9 in 2020 and 10 in 2021. A significant spike has been observed in publications since 2022, more than doubling previous levels to reach 33 in 2024, peaking at 22 in 2023, and 20 in 2022. Although it looks small in the year 2025, contributing to just 14 publications, it can be easily verified as the result of the partial consideration of the year in question at the time of collection.

Figure 2. Publication trends 2015 – 2025. Source: Authors' illustration using Excel



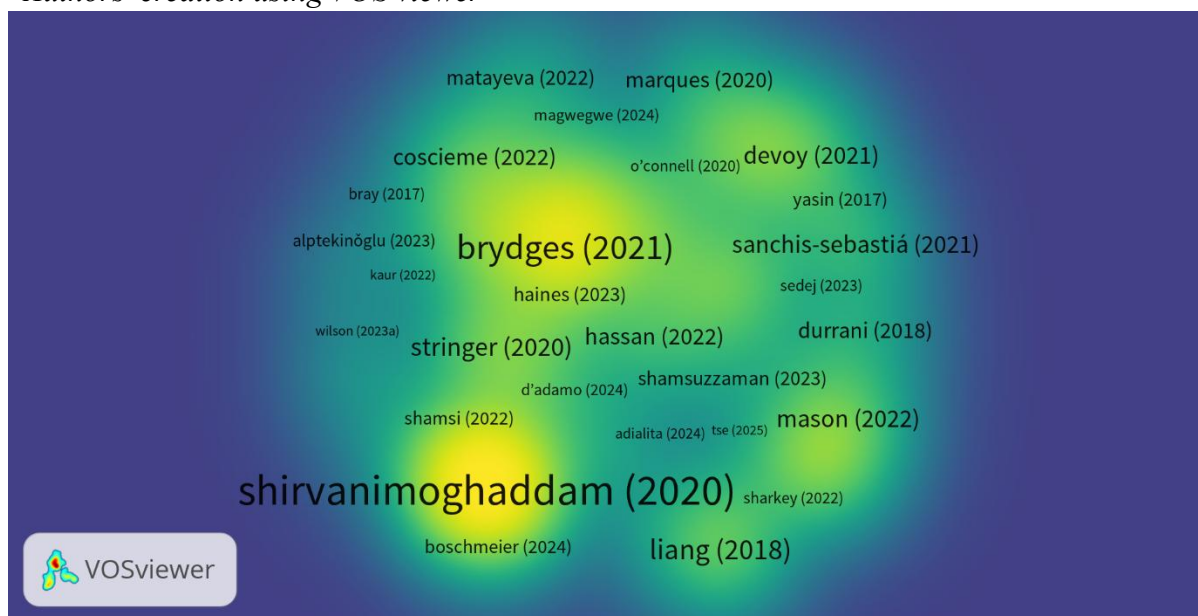
### **Influential authors and collaborations**

Moreover, the VOSviewer density map, a graphical illustration of the most significant contributions to research on fast fashion and waste management, is shown in Figure 3. The nodes correspond to cited authors and years, while the labels are based on measures of frequency and citation centrality in the research literature. The most popular names, such as Brydges and Shirvan Moghaddam, are identified by larger font sizes, which represent a seminal contribution to this discourse on matters that most likely relate to research on circular economy initiatives and textile recycling technology, respectively.

Other important authors are Liang and Xu (2018), studying intergenerational differences in second-hand clothing attitudes, and Mason, investigating behavioural aspects of sustainable fashion. The presence of authors such as Sanchis-Sebastiá on chemical recycling and Coscieme on similar aspects indicates interest is being shown on these fronts.

The shades blue to yellow correspond to publication dates via citations, such as newer studies, such as (e.g., (Tse & Xiao, 2025), (Adialita et al., 2024), (D’Adamo et al., 2024) are denoted by yellow colours.

*Figure 3. Key influential works in fast fashion and waste management research. Source: Authors’ creation using VOS viewer*



### **Keywords Cloud Trend and Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis**

The keyword cloud analysis was performed using Biblioshiny for Bibliometric in RStudio to extract the key themes and conceptual frameworks underlying research on fast fashion waste management. The word cloud, as described in Figure 4, represents the most frequently appearing keywords in the Scopus dataset. Figure 5 also shows the Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis, which reveals a conceptual evolution in the literature, shifting from an early emphasis on recycling and waste management toward broader discussions of circular economy frameworks, business model innovation, and consumer behaviour in recent years.

The predominance of terms like “sustainability”, “fast fashion”, “circular economy”, “recycling”, and “sustainable development” in this list represents the key thematic area covered by the literature, establishing the relevance of the area to environmentally responsible practices. The industry specificity in the list can be identified through terms like “textile industry”, “clothing industry”, and “fashion industry”, while terms like “waste management”, “waste disposal”, and “textile waste” emphasise the challenge level.

Emerging themes are apparent in the use of terms like 'climate change', 'consumption behaviour', 'business models', and 'circular fashion', which reflect a developing body of research aimed at the intersection of behavioural science, policy, and innovative business models in relation to sustainability. Technical terms related to the material aspects of waste management include 'polyester', 'cotton', 'life cycle assessment', and 'textile recycling'. From the keyword distribution, it's clear that the field of study encompasses well the

multidisciplinary nature of research, ranging from environmental science, engineering, consumer behavior, sustainable business practices, through to the influence of fast fashion and the growing emphasis on the concept of the circular economy.



Figure 4. Keywords cloud. source: Author's creation using Rstudio.

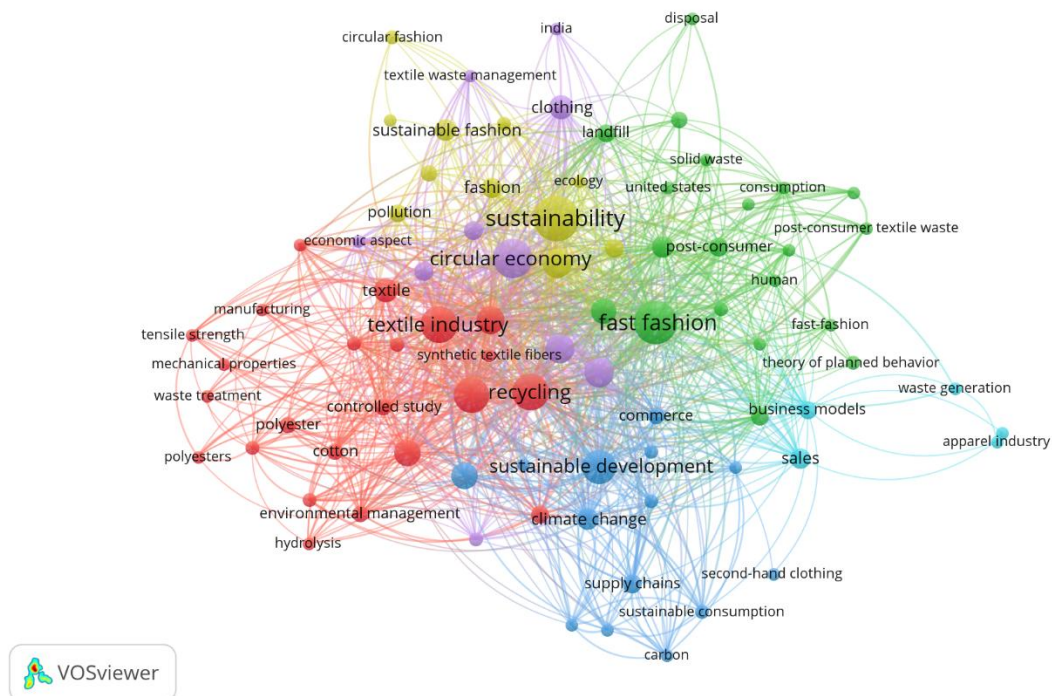


Figure 5. Keyword co-occurrence analysis. Source: Authors' creation using VOS viewer



## **Discussion**

### ***Research Focus and Evolution***

The research literature on fast fashion and textile management has increasingly recognised a worldwide imperative for sustainability, circularity, and responsible consumption practices. In the early stages, the research was primarily directed at establishing cultural and other behaviour-related issues that contributed to the lack of adoption of textiles in a responsible manner. For example, the generational study of the use of second-hand clothing in China, as ascertained by (Liang & Xu, 2018), showed that the deeply ingrained cultural issue of aversion to the use of the same materials, along with the environmental impact associated with the production of fast fashion, made it extremely difficult for any form of change to transpire.

Importantly, the literature demonstrates that consumer motivations are not independent of industrial circular economy outcomes. Impulsive purchasing, low perceived garment value, and trend-driven consumption patterns shorten garment use phases and weaken consumer engagement in repair, reuse, and take-back schemes. These behaviours reduce the quality and predictability of post-consumer textile waste streams, thereby limiting the effectiveness and scalability of industrial circular economy strategies such as textile recycling, material recovery, and producer-led take-back systems.

These early studies paved the way for a more general, diversified research agenda that has since been explored across the natural, social, technological, and policy sciences. For example, research on spatiotemporal modelling has been used to create geospatial mappings of the Post-Consumer Textile Waste (PCTW) process, in which demographic variables shape decision-making towards waste recycling practices, as described in the work of Mim et al. (2025). In a similar fashion, research has also explored the role of European sustainability normative frameworks, as highlighted in the work of Arimany Serrat et al. (2025), which details the necessary transformation in production structures, from linear models to circular supply chains. Additionally, other studies also explored the adoption of the zero-waste concept in the sphere of light manufacturing.

As sustainability targets intensified, technological innovation became a significant driving force in bridging the gap between the environmental issue of textile waste management and the economic challenge. Fletcher (2025), researched the use of mycelium materials in upcycling textiles, presenting biologically inspired alternatives for non-sustainable materials. The hypothesis regarding the use of biochemical processes to produce glucose from waste polyester was proposed by Vera et al. (2024), demonstrating the viability of technologies for material recovery.

Within this stream of research, several technological innovations are identified, including chemical and enzymatic polyester recycling, thermo-chemical treatment of textile waste, and biotechnological valorisation pathways that convert discarded garments into secondary resources such as glucose or bio-based materials. These interventions reflect growing industry efforts to address textile waste through material recovery and industrial-scale recycling solutions.

However, these technological advancements would most likely fail to have a significant effect unless coupled with a shift in consumers' attitudes and behaviours, a realisation that has led



research in this area to emphasise the need to study both psychological and sociological aspects. Ilmalhaq et al. (2024) and Zhou et al. (2025) used behavioural models such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the Stimulus-Organism-Response Model, respectively, to analyse motives for clothing donation and conscious consumer behaviour.

Several studies further highlight a temporal gap between fast fashion purchases and disposal, whereby garments remain unused for extended periods as inactive wardrobe items. This time lag delays material circulation and disrupts circular flows. While existing research largely emphasises shortening loops such as recycling and waste recovery, comparatively fewer studies address prolonging loops, including repair, reuse, and resale, despite their greater potential to prevent waste generation at source.

Together, this body of research shows a clear evolution from descriptive research to the formulation of a solution-focused, interdisciplinary research agenda. Fashion has increasingly drawn on perspectives from design, policy, economics, technology, and behaviour, developing a well-rounded approach to one of the most pressing environmental issues facing the fashion industry today.

### **Research Gaps**

Notwithstanding the existing body of literature, there are several important research gaps in the current study related to fast fashion and textile waste. According to Arimany Serrat et al. (2025), the scalability of existing mechanical recycling technology, as well as its suitability for meeting the standards of the Environmental, Social, and Governance movement, has been largely overlooked. Moreover, inefficiencies in textile production systems in the country of Bangladesh, as discussed in the study by Rafiq et al. (2025), as well as the role of the used garment trade in the pursuit of greater sustainability. Despite the existing body of literature, the current study identifies several important research gaps. A study by Millward-Hopkins (2024) can also exist as an important research gap.

Although fast fashion operates within global supply chains, waste management capacities differ significantly across regions. Studies highlight that high-consumption regions such as the EU and the USA benefit from relatively formalised collection systems and emerging regulatory frameworks, whereas several regions in Africa and Asia function as disposal hubs for second-hand clothing, often lacking adequate recycling infrastructure. This imbalance shifts environmental burdens toward the Global South and constrains the realisation of globally equitable circular economy outcomes.

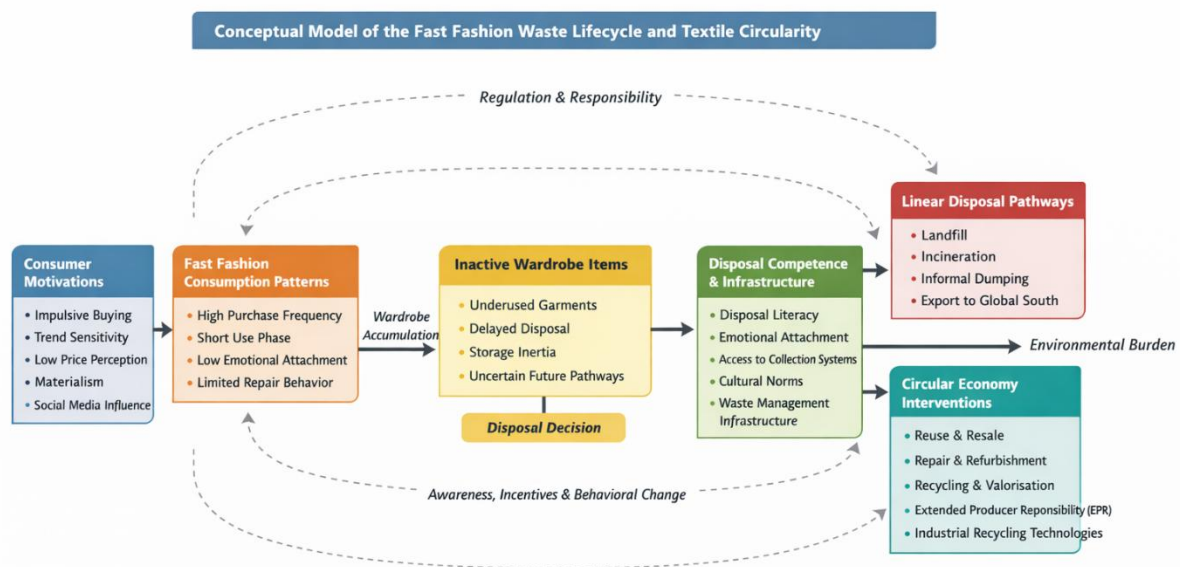
The demographic and behavioural gaps are also important in this regard, particularly regarding gender diversity and consumer behaviour. According to Abdallah et al. (2024), people under the age of 18, who will greatly influence future consumption behaviour, are inadequately represented in the existing literature on textile waste. According to McQueen et al. (2022), there are striking levels of gender inequality in the process of repairing clothing, which is shaped by cultural practices, the availability of know-how, and personal choices. This inequality in repairing behaviour can be related not only to repairing but also to other consumption-related practices, emphasising how gendered choices, fashion, and sustainability shape consumption habits.

Tse and Xiao (2025) problematize Eurocentric understandings of circularity in relation to “inactive” fashion items consumed by Hong Kong consumers, uncovering groundbreaking notions of consumption and retention practices that lie outside current models. The importance of systemic stakeholder communication in the transition toward circularity was elucidated in the research by Mahanty and Doménech (2024), urging the fashion industry to promote stakeholder communication models in this transition. Such research outlooks emphasise the need to construct models that bridge the gaps among gendered behaviour, cultural diversity, and consumption behaviours in the pursuit of lasting positive change. Gaps within existing policies and infrastructure only serve to thwart progress. Policy change, called for by Owusu-Wiredu (2024), must include change within textile dumping in the Global South. Obstacles within the chemical field, as noted by Sharkey and Coggins (2022), were identified, highlighting the gap between goals for environmental protection and the possibilities offered by technological progress. The lack of a unified approach in research on consumer behaviours, especially those with a gendered outlook, may lead to the forces influencing waste creation and recycling behaviours being ignored in the models constructed.

There is a growing body of literature expressing concerns about the rebound effect in fashion sustainability. In particular, the promotion of “sustainable” or “eco-friendly” fashion brands may unintentionally encourage consumers to buy more often by reducing consumer guilt. This is because sustainability strategies may have a rebound effect of encouraging rather than disrupting fast fashion.

Recent studies have also used the concept of disposal competence to explain the challenges consumers face in disposing of clothing. Factors include a lack of knowledge about disposing of clothing, an emotional connection to clothing, uncertainty about disposal methods, and limited infrastructure for disposal.

Based on these strands of evidence, this systematic review proposes a conceptual framework for the lifecycle of fast fashion waste as a continuum that includes consumer drivers and consumption patterns at one end of the spectrum and ends at disposal patterns that are shaped by competencies for disposing of waste and infrastructural support for such disposal, as shown in Figure 6 below.



**Figure 6.** Conceptual model of fast fashion waste lifecycle and textile circularity. Source: Authors' creation

Taken together, these needs underscore the importance of research that is both transdisciplinary and inclusive, integrating technological innovation with a focus on gender issues related to consumption. It is only with a broad approach, considering the intersections of gender roles, behaviours, and consumption patterns within an environmental and economic framework, that a fully sustainable textile industry can be encouraged.

### Practical Implications

The literature review offers a broad spectrum of strategies for industry stakeholders, policymakers, and educators, underscoring the relevance of multi-level interventions for advancing sustainability in the fashion industry. While Mim et al. (2025) shed light on the use of data in waste management strategies in the fashion industry, focusing on improved efficiency and accountability, Magwegwe and Shaik (2024) share insights based on the importance of altering consumer behaviour related to the disposal of, as well as over-production of, garments.

Design innovation appears to be a particularly important factor in reducing waste. The examples of zero-waste pattern making, multifunctional children's wear, and aesthetic "surgery" to make textiles suitable for reuse (Shen & Sethi, 2021). At the same time, the role of biomaterials research, as discussed by Fletcher (2025) in thermochemical waste recycling technology, also becomes apparent.

Policy, as well as education, is equally important in facilitating innovation in this area. While Arimany Serrat et al. (2025) promote the use of incentives in supply chain innovation, and emphasise the importance of stricter regulation in the mitigation of the ill-effect of 'greenwashing' in the fight against climate change. The importance of sustainability in fashion education was highlighted in research by Shen and Sethi (2021), which emphasises the equal importance of this issue for future fashion innovation.

In today's policy framework, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) has become a crucial mechanism between 2015 and 2025, placing the burden of responsibility for post-consumer textile waste on producers. This strategy is promising and has shown effectiveness in increasing collection rates; however, it has been implemented unequally and places a strong focus on recycling rather than on waste prevention and prolonging the life of garments.

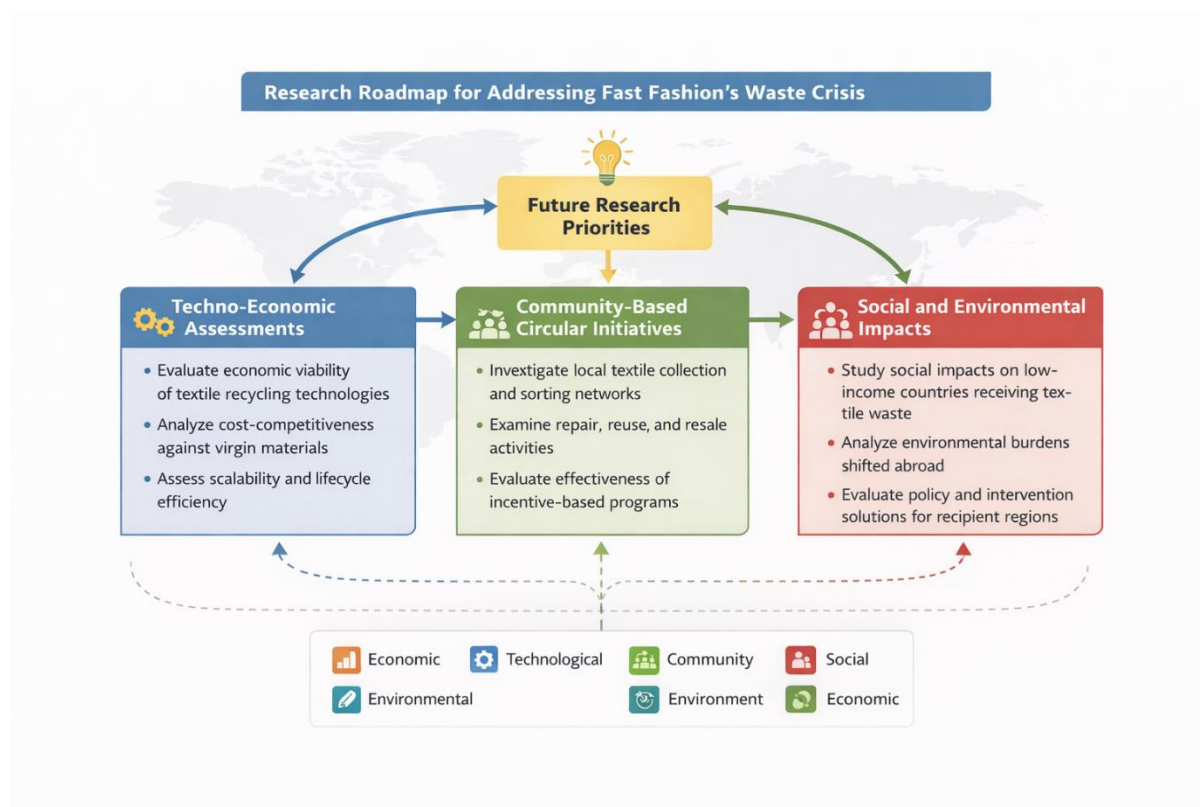
According to Shen and Sethi (2021), where business model innovation can help disrupt the fast fashion industry model could be in the area of leasing models sharing economy models, as well as resale models that, apart from prolonging the life span of textiles, can also promote ethical work practices as well as greater consumer engagement, if it provides consumers a value proposition of affordability, innovativeness, as well as sustainability.

Strategies for meeting environmental concerns emphasise the importance of a holistic approach. A longer lifespan of garments can directly reduce the need to produce clothes, whereas technological advancements to counter the effects of microplastic pollution in the marine sector and the development of construction materials from cloth waste can be seen as potential outcomes of a sustainable environment strategy.

Taken together, these implications underscore the complex nature of sustainable transformation in the fashion industry. The transition from disparate initiatives to a circular fashion industry is a challenge that requires simultaneous convergence across design innovation, technological development, policy change, consumption patterns, and environmental management.

## **Conclusion**

This systematic literature review provides a wide-ranging overview of the dynamic and growing body of research from 2015 to 2025 on the need for waste management in the fast fashion industry. This paper points out (See Figure 7) the difficulties within the industry concerning textile waste, reckless consumption patterns, and the short lifespan of products offered. Technological advancements in waste management, such as mechanical and chemical recycling, and the concept of Extended Producer Responsibility, have been found to be significant in reducing waste output. There is a wide range of specific implications for making the fashion industry sustainable, such as zero-waste pattern cutting, flexible clothing design, and developing a repair-mentality society.



**Figure 7.** Research road map. Source: Authors' creation

Based on these findings, the next wave of research should focus on techno-economic analyses of garment-recycling technologies, on investigating grassroots circular-economy projects, and on the social-environmental consequences of fast-fashion trash in receiving countries.

### Author Declarations

**AI Use Statement:** The authors confirm that no Artificial Intelligence tools were used in the writing or production of this manuscript.

**Data Availability Statement:** The bibliometric data supporting this study were retrieved from the Scopus database and are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

**Funding Statement:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

**Ethical Approval:** Ethical approval was not required for this study as it was based on secondary bibliometric data.

**Authors' Contributions:** ND and SG conceptualised the study in such a way that they spearheaded the formulation of the objectives, scope, and general design of the study. ND, DS, SG, and AR took part in the research design, where databases, search strategy and PRISMA-based screening process were selected. AR, ND, DS, and SG screening and curation of the Scopus literature. Thematically and bibliometric analysis was done mainly by ND, with methodological and interpretative help of SG. AR engaged in visualisation and mapping with the use of the VOS viewer. The first manuscript version was done by ND, DS, SG, and AR. Critical revision, editing, and refinement of the manuscript were done by all authors, who then consented to the final version to be published.

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