

Can Circular Fashion Replace Fast Fashion? The Role of Emotional Durability Consumption, Sustainability and Design Behaviour

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Abstract:

This study examined whether circular fashion can effectively replace fast fashion, with particular focus on the concept of emotional durability. Secondary research was conducted using academic articles, industry reports and fashion studies to analyse circular practices such as repair, resale, rental and garment take back programmes. The findings indicated that while these systems contribute to reducing material waste, they do not sufficiently address ongoing patterns of overconsumption. The study identified emotional durability, defined as the capacity of a garment to foster long term user attachment, as a key factor in extending product lifespan. It is concluded that circular fashion alone is not adequate and that sustainable design must also prioritise emotional value in order to reduce consumption more effectively.

I. Introduction:

Fashion is one of the most resource intensive industries in the world, with fast fashion contributing significantly to environmental waste and overconsumption. Fast fashion refers to the rapid production of inexpensive clothing that follows short term trends, often encouraging frequent purchasing and disposal. In response to these issues, circular fashion has emerged as a proposed alternative. Circular fashion focuses on extending the lifecycle of garments through practices such as reuse, repair, resale and recycling.

However, while circular systems aim to reduce waste, they do not always address the underlying problem of consumer behaviour. High rates of consumption continue even within circular models, raising questions about their long term effectiveness. This has led to increasing interest in the concept of emotional durability, which refers to the ability of a garment to create lasting attachment between the user and the product.

This research explores whether circular fashion can realistically replace fast fashion, and examines the role of emotional durability in promoting more sustainable consumption patterns. This study aims to analyse the limitations of current circular systems and to evaluate how design strategies that prioritise emotional value may contribute to more meaningful and long lasting use of clothing.

II. Methodology:

This study was conducted using secondary research methods. Data was collected from credible sources including academic journals, industry reports, and publications from organizations such as Ellen MacArthur Foundation¹, which focuses on circular economy systems in fashion. Additional information was gathered from fashion industry platforms such as The Business of Fashion² and sustainability-focused resources including Fashion Revolution³.

The research focused on analysing key circular fashion practices including repair culture, resale economies, rental fashion, and garment take back programs. Concepts related to consumer behaviour and emotional durability were also examined through existing theoretical frameworks and case studies.

The collected data was analysed by comparing the effectiveness of circular systems in reducing waste and identifying their limitations in addressing overconsumption. This approach allowed for an evaluation of the role of emotional durability in extending garment lifespan and influencing sustainable consumption patterns.

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III. Results:

The findings indicated that circular fashion systems such as repair, resale, rental and garment take back programmes contribute to reducing textile waste and extending the physical lifecycle of garments. Repair culture was found to support longevity by encouraging maintenance and resume, while resale platforms increased the circulation of second hand clothing. Rental fashion was observed to reduce the need for single use purchases, particularly for occasion wear.

However, the results also showed that these systems do not significantly reduce overall consumption levels. High purchasing rates continued, with consumers often buying new garments despite access to circular alternatives. In some cases, circular models such as resale and rental were found to operate alongside fast fashion rather than replacing it.

The study further found that emotional durability plays a significant role in influencing garment lifespan. Clothing that holds personal, aesthetic or functional value was more likely to be retained or reused over time. In contrast, garments with low emotional attachment were more frequently discarded, regardless of their physical condition.

Overall, the results suggest that while circular fashion systems address material waste, they do not fully resolve the issue of overconsumption without changes in consumer behaviour.

IV. Conclusion And Discussion:

The findings of this study indicate that while circular fashion systems contribute to reducing textile waste, they do not fundamentally replace fashion. Practices such as repair, resale, and rental extend the physical lifecycle of garments, but they operate within existing consumption patterns rather than transforming them. As a result, overconsumption continues despite the presence of circular alternatives.

This highlights a key limitation within current sustainability approaches in fashion. Many circular models focus on material efficiency, but they do not adequately address the behavioural factors that drive frequent purchasing and disposal. Without a shift in consumer attitudes, these systems risk becoming supplementary rather than transformative.

Emotional durability emerges as a critical factor in this context. When garments hold personal meaning, aesthetic value or long term relevance, they are more likely to be retained and used over time. This suggests that sustainable design should move beyond durability in a physical sense and also consider how products create attachment and relevance for the user.

Therefore, while circular fashion plays an important role in reducing waste, it is not sufficient on its own to replace fast fashion. A more effective approach would combine circular systems with design strategies that prioritise emotional value and long term engagement. This shift has the potential to reduce consumption at its source and support more sustainable relationships between consumers and clothing.

References:

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