
The Role of Branding in Developing Sustainable Fashion Brands: A Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract:

This study examines Generation Z's behavior in purchasing second-hand clothing on Instagram, focusing on socio-environmental awareness, preconception, frugality, brand awareness, social prestige, need for uniqueness, scarcity, and perceived competition. Using a quantitative method with 312 respondents aged 17-27, the findings reveal that socio-environmental awareness, social prestige, scarcity, and perceived competition positively influence purchase intention, while brand awareness and preconception have negative effects. Need for uniqueness and frugality are not significant factors. Purchase intention positively affects purchase behavior. The study suggests that sellers should emphasize environmental aspects and scarcity to attract Generation Z consumers.

Keywords: *Purchase intention, purchase behavior, second-hand clothing, Generation Z*

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1. Introduction

Globalization has introduced new opportunities in international markets, and companies in the fashion system have capitalized on this by employing diverse strategies: on one hand, establishing corporate ownership through mergers and acquisitions, and on the other, integrating fashion with other production sectors. This approach has created space within consumer culture for integrated lifestyle propositions, ranging from clothing to food (Belfanti, 2023). Fashion is classified among activities that recent economic literature refers to as "Creative Industries," "Cultural Industries," or more comprehensively, "Cultural and Creative Industries," as defined by UNESCO: "Sectors of organized activities whose primary purpose is the production, reproduction, promotion, distribution, or commercialization of goods, services, and activities containing content derived from cultural, artistic, or heritage sources."

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Marketing materials in the fashion industry are as abundant as its production but do not always generate the desired engagement in the form of clicks or purchases. While grappling with sustainability requirements, the industry also struggles to align with the emerging agendas of diversity and inclusion (Bøilerehaug, 2023).

Sustainable fashion has become one of the most frequently discussed terms in the industry. It not only refers to socially responsible brands offering eco-friendly products or implementing regulatory policies but also addresses the growing demand from conscious consumers for sustainable fashion practices (Khandual & Pradhan, 2019). The role of branding in building sustainable fashion brands has become a focal point in the modern fashion industry. As awareness of sustainability issues rises, consumers are increasingly drawn to brands that integrate environmentally friendly practices into their marketing strategies (Khandual & Pradhan, 2019). Branding not only provides identity to a product but also builds an emotional connection with consumers, fostering brand loyalty and trust (Chen et al., 2024). In this context, branding approaches emphasizing sustainability play a pivotal role in supporting the long-term goals of the fashion industry.

The fashion industry faces significant challenges in adapting its business models to sustainability principles, including the use of eco-friendly materials and effective waste management (Behre & Cauberghe, 2024). In the digital era, platforms like social media have become instrumental in enabling brands to communicate their sustainability messages and engage directly with consumers, positioning social media as a crucial tool in branding strategies (Patel et al., 2024). Furthermore, the metaverse has emerged as a new space for brands to innovate in fashion marketing, offering opportunities to expand their consumer networks through virtual experiences (Park & Lim, 2023).

Effective branding strategies require a deep understanding of consumer preferences. According to Bøilerehaug (2023), visual and aesthetic aspects play a significant role in capturing the attention of fashion consumers, while compelling and creative storytelling is essential in building a strong brand image. Fashion brands that successfully establish a sustainable image are adept at communicating strong social and environmental values, thereby enhancing consumers' positive perceptions of the brand (Chong, 2024).

Beyond visual elements, previous research indicates that branding strategies involving sustainability have a more substantial impact on timeless fashion brands compared to fast-fashion labels (Behre & Cauberghe, 2024). Brands such as Uniqlo and Allbirds, for instance, leverage sustainable branding approaches to create an authentic and relevant impression among consumers who are increasingly concerned about the environmental impact of their fashion choices (Lascity, 2022).

Meanwhile, a bibliometric approach in this study enables the identification of clusters and key trends in research related to branding and sustainability in the fashion

industry, with VOSviewer employed to map networks of relevant topics (van Eck & Waltman, 2023). This analysis not only provides insights into current research foci but also opens avenues for a more systematic approach to developing sustainable branding strategies in the future (Kirby, 2023).

In the context of halal tourism, fashion plays a crucial role in attracting Muslim travelers who prioritize sharia-compliant lifestyles. Halal tourism encompasses not only food, places of worship, and Muslim-friendly facilities but also fashion that adheres to Islamic values. The rise of Muslim fashion trends that meet sharia criteria has become a unique attraction in the halal tourism industry, particularly for countries aiming to promote Muslim-friendly destinations. Fashion industry players are increasingly focusing on branding that highlights not just aesthetics but also product compliance with sharia principles, which are highly valued by Muslim travelers (Razzaq et al., 2018).

Furthermore, integrating the concept of halal fashion into halal tourism can strengthen the image of Muslim-friendly destinations, creating synergy between the fashion and tourism industries. Muslim fashion trends in halal tourist destinations allow travelers to experience local culture while maintaining their religious principles. From a branding perspective, incorporating elements of sharia fashion into halal tourism promotion can enhance international market appeal, particularly among Muslim-majority countries. With effective branding strategies, the fashion and tourism industries can establish brands that merge halal lifestyles with a strong global image (Henderson, 2016).

2. Theoretical Background

Globalization and the Fashion Industry

Globalization has created significant opportunities for the fashion industry in international markets. Companies leverage various strategies to remain competitive, such as mergers and acquisitions and integration with other sectors to offer integrated lifestyle proposals (Belfanti, 2023). In economic literature, fashion is classified as part of the creative and cultural industries, which UNESCO defines as activities aimed at producing, promoting, and distributing goods containing cultural, artistic, or heritage-based content. These strategies enable fashion companies to expand their markets and enhance their brand image on a global scale.

Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

Sustainability has become a key issue in the modern fashion industry. Khandual and Pradhan (2019) define "sustainable fashion" as a combination of environmentally friendly business practices, supportive regulatory policies, and responses to the growing demand from eco-conscious consumers. Sustainability in fashion also involves using eco-friendly materials, effective waste management, and integrating

ethical principles into supply chains (Behre & Cauberghe, 2024). Thus, sustainability is not only a social responsibility but also a competitive advantage for brands.

The Role of Branding in the Fashion Industry

Branding plays a crucial role in creating product identity while fostering emotional connections with consumers. Effective branding not only enhances brand loyalty but also strengthens consumer trust in companies (Chen et al., 2024). In sustainable fashion, branding strategies emphasizing social and environmental values significantly improve consumer perceptions of brands (Chong, 2024). Additionally, aesthetics, compelling brand stories, and authenticity are critical elements in building a strong brand image (Bøilerehaug, 2023).

Digital Media and Marketing Innovation

In the digital era, social media has emerged as a central platform for branding strategies. It enables brands to communicate their sustainability messages directly to consumers and foster interactive relationships (Patel et al., 2024). Beyond social media, the metaverse has emerged as a new space for brands to create virtual experiences, opening opportunities to expand market reach through innovative approaches (Park & Lim, 2023).

Halal Fashion and Halal Tourism

Halal fashion plays a significant role in the development of halal tourism. Halal tourism encompasses not only food and Muslim-friendly facilities but also fashion that adheres to Islamic principles (Razzaq et al., 2018). Integrating halal fashion into halal tourism creates a synergy between local culture and religious values, ultimately enhancing the appeal of tourist destinations for global Muslim consumers. Branding strategies highlighting Islamic fashion elements can expand international markets and establish a strong brand identity among Muslim consumers (Henderson, 2016).

Bibliometric Approach in Branding Studies

The bibliometric approach is an essential tool for identifying trends and clusters in branding and sustainability research. Using tools like VOSviewer, such analyses allow for mapping relevant topic networks, providing new insights for systematically developing branding strategies (van Eck & Waltman, 2023). Moreover, bibliometric analysis helps understand current research directions and identify future research opportunities (Kirby, 2023).

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach that combines bibliometric analysis and a systematic literature review (SLR). This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of branding in building sustainable fashion brands. It enables the exploration of both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously, offering deeper insights into trends, patterns, and research clusters in this field (Creswell, 2014; Tariq & Woodman, 2015).

In the quantitative method, bibliometric analysis is conducted using VOSviewer. Bibliometrix is a comprehensive mapping analysis tool that supports three phases of bibliometric analysis: (i) importing and converting data into an R format, (ii) conducting bibliometric analysis on a dataset, and (iii) constructing matrices. These matrices can be customized and enable high-resolution mapping, serving as input data for network analysis, multiple correspondence analysis, and other data reduction techniques, including domain visualization (van Eck & Waltman, 2023). VOSviewer provides access to three types of visualizations: network visualization, overlay visualization, and density visualization. The network and density visualizations make VOSviewer an excellent tool for mapping scientific knowledge. Using this network for various objects based on modified metrics (such as user comments, keywords, geographic locations, and affiliations), relationships and correlations between items are displayed in an easily understandable way (Bukar et al., 2023).

The qualitative component involves systematic literature review (SLR), defined as a methodical process for identifying, collecting, and analyzing a large number of research studies. SLR allows for the systematic review and identification of journals, adhering to a protocol at every step (Triandini et al., 2019).

In bibliometric analysis, VOSviewer is used to map relevant literature and highlight relationships between key concepts in branding and sustainable fashion. It is widely utilized in bibliometric studies for its ability to visualize networks clearly through network visualization, overlay visualization, and density visualization (van Eck & Waltman, 2023). The analysis is conducted by incorporating keywords such as "branding strategy," "sustainability," and "fashion branding," extracted from the Scopus database, to identify dominant clusters in related research (Bukar et al., 2023). Bibliometric analysis provides an overview of publication trends and key topics, enabling the identification of research gaps in sustainable fashion branding (Donthu et al., 2021).

The systematic literature review complements bibliometric data by systematically identifying, selecting, and analyzing relevant studies. The SLR process follows a strict protocol where irrelevant articles or those with methodological biases are excluded, resulting in more valid and reliable data (Triandini et al., 2019). Each selected article is critically evaluated for relevance and quality, then grouped into major themes related to branding and sustainability in the fashion industry (Snyder, 2019). This

allows the researcher to systematically collect information and compile evidence supporting the findings from bibliometric analysis (Moher et al., 2009).

The initial stage of this method involves collecting data by extracting references from various related articles in RIS format, processed using VOSviewer. The data is then analyzed to generate research clusters and identify interrelated topics. This process aids in understanding consumer perceptions of sustainability-oriented fashion brands and identifying effective branding strategies to promote environmentally friendly brands (Belfanti, 2023; Patel et al., 2024).

The data for this study is sourced from Scopus and processed into RIS files using VOSviewer. Keywords such as "branding strategy," "sustainability," and "fashion branding" are utilized. Data processing involves refining the keywords and discarding those deemed less effective to narrow the number of resulting clusters and items.

4. Empirical Findings/Result

Bibliometric Analysis Results Using VOSviewer

In this bibliometric analysis, VOSviewer was utilized to map the relationships between topics in the literature on branding and fashion sustainability. The data analyzed included publications from the Scopus database with the keywords "branding strategy," "sustainability," and "fashion branding." These keywords were chosen to capture the primary and sub-topics relevant to research on branding and sustainability in fashion (van Eck & Waltman, 2023). The analysis results from VOSviewer displayed a network of clusters showing interconnected key concepts, providing insights into research trends, influences, and potential gaps for further exploration (Bøilerehaug, 2023).

The network visualization produced by VOSviewer identified approximately 22 clusters with over 500 items relevant to sustainable fashion branding. Each cluster represents distinct yet interconnected themes, such as branding strategies, consumer behavior, brand loyalty, and the influence of social media on brand image (Behre & Cauberghe, 2024). For example, key clusters include terms like "brand engagement," "consumer behavior," "fashion branding strategy," and "sustainability marketing," highlighting the focus on consumer engagement and sustainability strategies in branding research (Chen et al., 2024).

Cluster 8: 28 items (e.g., brand strategy, brand communication, customer loyalty, sales).

Cluster 9: 24 items (e.g., city branding, modernization, marketing).

Cluster 10: 24 items (e.g., brand marketing, sustainability marketing, industrial development).

This cluster analysis also highlights several key trends emerging in the literature. One notable trend is the growing number of studies linking branding with sustainability strategies to build customer loyalty and enhance brand value (Patel et al., 2024). Additionally, the relationship between branding and environmental awareness has become a dominant theme, indicating a shift in consumer preferences toward environmentally friendly and ethical products (Khandual & Pradhan, 2019). These trends reflect the increasing market demand for sustainable fashion and emphasize the importance of branding strategies that create social and environmental value (Donthu et al., 2021).

Density visualization in VOSviewer shows that certain items have stronger connections, represented by darker colors on the visual map. This indicates that topics such as “social media branding,” “customer loyalty,” and “eco-fashion” appear more frequently in the literature. These trends demonstrate that social media plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion brands, particularly in promoting environmental values (Lascity, 2022). By understanding the patterns and trends from this analysis, researchers and practitioners can develop more effective branding strategies that are responsive to shifting consumer preferences, which increasingly prioritize sustainability issues (Kirby, 2023).

5. Discussion

Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

The systematic literature review (SLR) aims to systematically and transparently collect, assess, and synthesize relevant research to gain a deep understanding of the role of branding in creating a sustainable fashion brand. This SLR process begins with the establishment of clear protocols, such as keyword selection, inclusion-exclusion criteria, and analysis methods, all aimed at ensuring the validity and reliability of the results obtained (Snyder, 2019). The strict protocols in this SLR enable researchers to avoid selection bias and provide a strong theoretical foundation for understanding branding strategies for sustainable fashion brands (Moher et al., 2009).

This SLR identifies several key themes in the branding and sustainability literature of fashion, such as the relationship between branding and consumer perceptions of brand sustainability. Several studies show that consumers are increasingly considering ethical and sustainability aspects when choosing fashion products, so brands that successfully communicate these values through effective branding strategies are more likely to gain consumer support (Khandual & Pradhan, 2019; Chen et al., 2024). In this context, sustainability communication via social media becomes highly relevant,

as it allows more personal interactions with consumers and can influence their perceptions of an environmentally-friendly brand image (Patel et al., 2024).

Moreover, this SLR identifies the importance of storytelling in sustainable fashion branding. Research shows that consumers are not only interested in the product itself but also in the story behind the product, such as eco-friendly production processes or a company's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint (Chong, 2024). This storytelling not only provides additional information but also creates an emotional connection between consumers and the brand, thus increasing their loyalty to the products offered (Behre & Cauberghe, 2024).

Another theme emerging from this SLR is the role of innovation in branding and sustainability in fashion. Brands that innovate by offering sustainable products, such as using recycled materials or energy-efficient production processes, are seen as more competitive in the global fashion market (Donthu et al., 2021). This indicates that innovation in branding is not limited to visual or aesthetic aspects but also includes business process innovations that address social and environmental factors (Belfanti, 2023).

Furthermore, this SLR emphasizes the importance of collaboration between fashion brands and local communities in developing sustainable products. Such collaborations not only enhance the brand's image as a socially responsible company but also strengthen the relationship between the brand and local consumers. In other words, an effective branding strategy not only promotes products but also reflects social values relevant to its target audience, which in turn can increase consumer loyalty and commitment (Bøilerehaug, 2023).

Creativity and novelty emerge as key elements for effective brand communication, highlighting the importance of innovative storytelling and visually compelling presentations. Moreover, targeted engagement and brand interest are emphasized, underlining the importance of tailored messages and loyalty-building initiatives. However, challenges arise in aligning luxury with the mass-market associations perceived on TikTok, requiring skill to navigate the tension between accessibility and exclusivity (Chong, 2024). Brand attributes that shape the distinct image of each retail tier include a range of intrinsic and extrinsic attributes. Additionally, the holistic nature of multi-tier retail brands is shaped by the reciprocal relationship between the image of various tiers, reflected in the presence of common extrinsic attributes and their interaction at the levels of attributes, benefits, and attitudes (Chen et al., 2024). Identifying and targeting the relevant brand equity elements is highlighted as crucial for successful marketing communication. In terms of originality and value, this study contributes to the discourse on social media marketing and brand imaging by carefully examining the mediating impact of brand equity in the culturally distinct landscapes of Spain and Colombia (Patel et al., 2024). Fashion brands have begun exploring the metaverse as a new marketing platform, expected to bring substantial changes to the fashion and retail industries (Park & Lim, 2023).

In their research, Barbara and Verolien concluded that brand attitudes are more positive when fashion items are presented with environmental sustainability cues (social). Specifically, this effect is stronger for timeless basic fashion styles (based on modern trends). However, sustainability cues related to the environment increase the social brand value for modern fashion styles. This study offers valuable contributions to the sustainable fashion literature and recommendations for online fashion sellers (Behre & Cauberghe, 2024). This aligns with the views of Uniqlo and Allbirds owners, who stated that both fashion and brands are created through public discourse, with this paper taking a critical discourse approach to executive statements, related press coverage, and their brand messages (Lascity, 2022).

In efforts to deepen the analysis of key elements in sustainable fashion branding, the systematic literature review (SLR) also identifies the importance of utilizing digital technologies such as social media and the metaverse as brand communication platforms. The use of social media, particularly platforms like TikTok, allows brands to expand their reach and create more personal engagement with their audience, although challenges arise in balancing brand exclusivity and accessibility (Chong, 2024). Furthermore, the metaverse is seen as capable of providing a unique, immersive experience that can help brands build a more dynamic and relevant image in the global market (Park & Lim, 2023). This literature review also highlights that effective brand image should include both intrinsic and extrinsic elements that create emotional and functional value, thus fostering more significant consumer loyalty (Chen et al., 2024).

5. Conclusion

Overall, this study concludes that branding strategies through social media to influence consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion brands are indeed effective. Additionally, key branding elements in building a fashion brand include marketing systems or processes, modernization, and the distinctive image of the fashion itself. This study has limitations in terms of the scope based on the data obtained. However, it does pave the way for future researchers regarding sustainable fashion brands and the role of branding strategies.

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