UNDERSTANDING FASHION CONSUMPTION BETWEEN SUSTAINABLE INTENTIONS AND ACTUAL BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

The article explores and discusses how fashion consumers interpret sustainability today, highlighting the gap that often exists between stated intentions and actual purchasing behaviour. Through a participatory workshop, the research reconstructs the attitudes, motivations, and obstacles that influence daily choices regarding fashion products. The activities carried out (based on scenarios, narratives, and visual tools) made it possible to outline a series of archetypes that represent both current practices and aspirations towards more responsible models, focused on transparency, quality, and circularity. The results offer useful insights for small and medium-sized enterprises to better understand new consumer profiles and orient strategies, communication and services towards greater sustainability and inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

The global fashion industry is characterised by elevated levels of production and consumption, shaped by a predominantly linear *take-make-dispose* model (Battisti & Spennato, 2024). In response to the environmental and social degradation inherent in this paradigm, the European Union's Circular Economy (CE) Agenda has introduced rigorous regulatory frameworks, including Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and the Digital Product Passport (DPP), designed to enforce corporate accountability across the product lifecycle (European Parliament & Council, 2024). Central to this policy-driven transition is the promotion of Collaborative Fashion Consumption (CFC). By encompassing practices such as

resale, rental, and swapping, CFC reconfigures the consumer-product relationship, prioritizing access over ownership to extend garment lifespans (Arrigo, 2021; Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018; Iran & Schrader, 2017).

Theoretically, these alternative models are rooted in Product-Service Systems (PSS), which aim to decouple economic growth from resource usage (Tukker, 2015; Vezzoli, 2017). However, the practical efficacy of CFC is frequently undermined by the *intention-action gap*: a persistent discrepancy between consumers stated environmental values and their actual purchasing behaviours (Park & Joyner Armstrong, 2019) .This gap is sustained by the continued dominance of price sensitivity, convenience, and entrenched consumption routines

(Singh & Giacosa, 2019). This study defends that for collaborative models to achieve meaningful impact they must evolve beyond transactional service offerings toward community-driven systems. In these *social-collaborative loops* consumers function as active co-creators rather than passive end-users (Fehrer & Wieland, 2021).

However, while large-scale corporations can leverage economies of scale to absorb the high operational and compliance costs associated with CFC models, DPP and EPR, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) often find themselves at a disadvantage (Neri et al., 2023). For many smaller brands, the technological and logistical requirements of circularity represent significant barriers to entry rather than opportunities for growth. Furthermore, the market dominance of major fast-fashion players (Eric, 2014), who are now entering the resale and rental spaces, can marginalize independent circular businesses that lack the marketing capital to compete. In the absence of tailored strategic frameworks, SMEs may encounter challenges in adapting to regulatory contexts that are more readily navigated by organizations with greater infrastructural capacity to operationalize sustainability.

This paper presents a participatory workshop that functions as a behavioural mapping tool for fashion consumption. By translating qualitative and quantitative data into six future-oriented archetypes, the study assesses consumer intentions and practical capability regarding Collaborative Fashion Consumption (CFC) and Sustainable Product-Service Systems (S.PSS). These archetypes provide a diagnostic framework for SMEs to develop retail strategies based on observed behavioural drivers rather than standard sustainability assumptions. This endeavour is part of the PRIN 2022 PNRR 'RHITA' project, where the author serves as a junior researcher.

SYSTEMIC CRISES, REGULATORY DRIVERS, AND BEHAVIOURAL BARRIERS: A BRIEF CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The global fashion industry remains dominated by an unsustainable linear *take-make-dispose* model that has driven systemic overproduction and overconsumption (Saccani et al., 2023). The widespread fast fashion phenomenon, marked by rapid trend cycles and low-cost production, has attracted considerable scholarly interest due to its environmental and social consequences, which often contribute to global ecological imbalances and socioeconomic inequalities (Battisti & Spennato, 2024; Bick et al., 2018; Brewer, 2019). Within this context, regulatory intervention has emerged as a key driver of systemic change, particularly through the European Union's Circular Economy Agenda (European Commission, 2022). Central to this framework is Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), which reallocates financial and operational responsibility for end-of-life management from municipalities to producers. By extending accountability across the product life cycle, EPR incentivises brands to prioritise durability, repairability, and recyclability at the design stage (Carlsson et al., 2021). Complementing this measure, the Digital Product Passport (DPP), mandated under the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), provides transparent and verifiable data on product composition, origin, and end-of-life pathways via digital identifiers such as QR codes(Garcia-Torres et al., 2022). Additional regulations, including the ban on the incineration of unsold fashion goods, further compel brands to adopt circular strategies such as donation and resale, collectively reducing opportunities for greenwashing and reinforcing industry-wide transparency.

Within this regulatory context, Collaborative Fashion Consumption (CFC) has gained prominence as a mechanism to counter linear consumption by privileging access over ownership (Akbar & Hoffmann, 2023; Arekrans et al., 2022; Arrigo, 2021). Practices such as swapping, renting, leasing, and reselling seek to extend garment lifespans and decelerate consumption cycles (Gopalakrishnan & Matthews, 2018; Jain et al., 2022). These models are conceptually grounded in Product-Service Systems (PSS), which integrate products and services to fulfil user needs (Goedkoop et al., 1999). However, existing research indicates that PSS models do not inherently produce sustainability outcomes unless they are explicitly aligned with Circular Economy principles (Tukker, 2004). In their absence, service-based models may generate only incremental environmental benefits. The shift toward Sustainable Product-Service Systems (S.PSS) therefore aims to align value creation with resource efficiency across environmental, economic, and social dimensions (Vezzoli et al., 2022). Despite their potential, the effectiveness of CFC and

S.PSS remains constrained by the *intention-action gap* (Camacho-Otero et al., 2019; Catulli et al., 2013). While consumers frequently express pro-environmental values, actual participation in collaborative models is more strongly driven by economic and hedonic motivations, including cost savings and novelty (Lang & Armstrong, 2018; Tunn et al., 2021)which include sale of redesigned clothing, clothing repair/alteration service, clothing renting, clothing swapping and style consultancy service. Design/methodology/approach: The present study examined the causal relationship between fashion leadership and intentions to engage in CPSS. By applying the theory of planned behavior (TPB. At the point of purchase, factors such as price, convenience, and habitual behaviour tend to outweigh ethical considerations (Won & Kim, 2020).

To analyse this gap, research often employs the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which attributes behavioural intention to attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). In S.PSS contexts, sustainable attitudes often fail to produce action when social standards favouring ownership or limited infrastructure for rental and repair act as barriers. Consequently, despite favourable intentions, these constraints restrict a consumer's practical capability to engage in Collaborative Fashion Consumption (CFC).

This misalignment can result in rebound effects, whereby practices such as resale facilitate further consumption, thereby reinforcing overproduction (Munten et al., 2024). Overcoming these limitations requires a shift from awareness-based strategies toward the design of systems that account for behavioural biases while making sustainable practices competitively desirable and accessible. Simultaneously, the retail landscape is evolving toward community-driven consumption models that challenge traditional transactional structures (Akbar & Hoffmann, 2023). In these participatory ecosystems, consumers act as co-creators of value, assuming roles traditionally held by retailers, including authentication, pricing, and logistical coordination (Fehrer & Wieland, 2021; Roussat et al., 2023). Evidence links community engagement to better sustainability. P2P models often outperform B2C frameworks environmentally (Philip et al., 2015). Mobilizing active consumers fosters emotional durability and shared value during sustainability transitions.

METHODOLOGY

This paper presents an integrated qualitative and quantitative research approach aimed at developing a refined understanding of contemporary consumer profiles within the fashion industry. Qualitative insights were generated through a participatory workshop, in which fashion consumers explored their attitudes, behaviours, and expectations toward Collaborative Fashion Consumption (CFC) services. These participatory methods were employed to identify adoption barriers and motivations within collaborative consumption contexts and to facilitate co-creation and stakeholder engagement, in line with established participatory design principles (Muratovski et al., 2022).

Data collected from these activities (including field notes, photographic documentation, and participant-produced materials) were systematically analysed to reveal patterns of behaviour, motivation, and engagement. Ethical procedures followed institutional and academic requirements, participants provided informed consent and were informed of their rights, including confidentiality and withdrawal. Full interview transcriptions are securely stored and available on request, ensuring participant privacy.

These qualitative findings informed the development of preliminary consumer archetypes, which were subsequently refined and validated through a structured quantitative survey. While general models such as the Sinus-Milieu (SINUS Markt- und Sozialforschung GmbH, 2023) provide broad lifestyle context, they may lack the specific detail needed to address the *intention-action gap* within circular fashion. The fashion-specific archetypes proposed here differentiate consumers based on distinct intentions and practical capability, variables that general milieus often conflate. The synthesis of participatory workshop outcomes and survey data resulted in the identification of six future-oriented consumer archetypes. These archetypes function as a critical and practical interpretative framework for understanding consumer motivations, expectations, and the persistent challenges associated with engagement in CFC services.

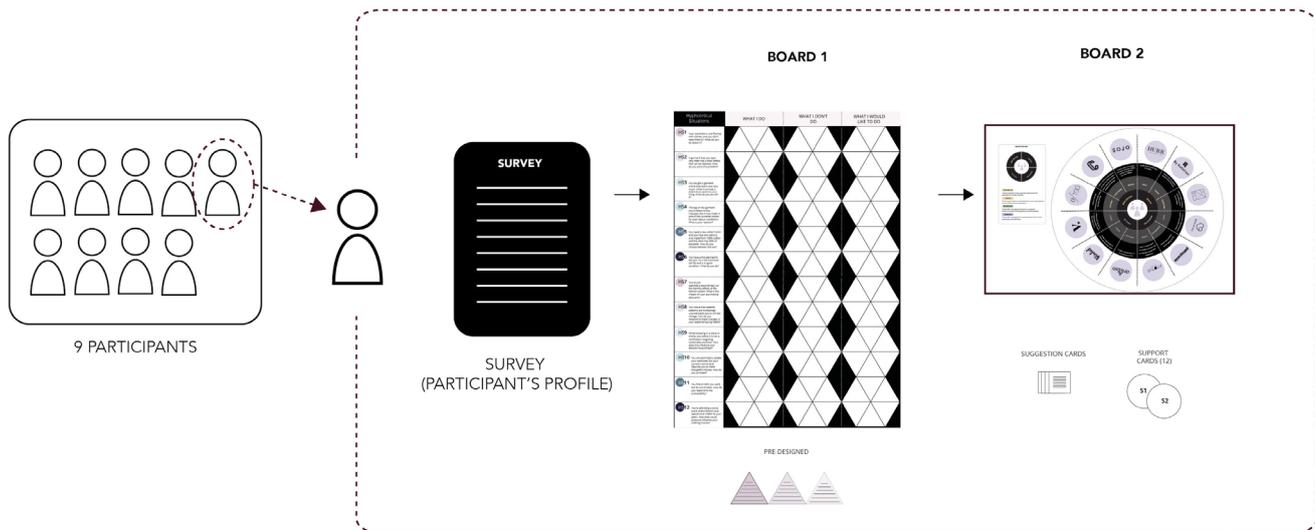The study was conducted in two linked phases.

Fig. 01

In the initial qualitative phase, the study utilized a Research Through Design (RtD) framework to engage a group of nine consumers in a participatory workshop (Muratovski et al., 2022). These participants, drawn from professional backgrounds in fashion, design, and the arts, were chosen for their high literacy in circularity discourse, which allowed the research to probe deeply into the psychological friction points where professional ideals meet personal consumption routines. Through a three-hour session of generative mapping and visual elicitation, participants visualized their own wardrobe lifecycles, this process served to externalize implicit behavioural patterns and provided the foundation for a series of draft consumer profiles.

The second phase sought to validate and refine these emerging profiles through a quantitative survey distributed to a broader demographic of 100 fashion consumers. This stage was essential for ensuring that the insights harvested from the specialist group possessed wider market relevance. The survey instrument evaluated participants on a multi-dimensional scale, measuring the gap between their stated ethical intentions and their actual participation in collaborative practices, such as rental, subscription, and resale, over the preceding year. By subjecting this data to cluster analysis, the research was able to synthesize the findings from both phases into a final framework of six future-oriented consumer archetypes, balancing the deep human narrative of the workshop with the empirical weight of quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

PHASE 1: QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION THROUGH A PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP

The initial phase, conducted in May 2025, featured an interactive, collaborative workshop generating tangible consumer observations. This iterative process enabled participants to introspect on personal habits while increasing awareness of sustainable fashion contexts.

The workshop was structured around three core objectives:

- To construct future-oriented consumer archetypes that address the *intention-action gap* prevalent in sustainable fashion
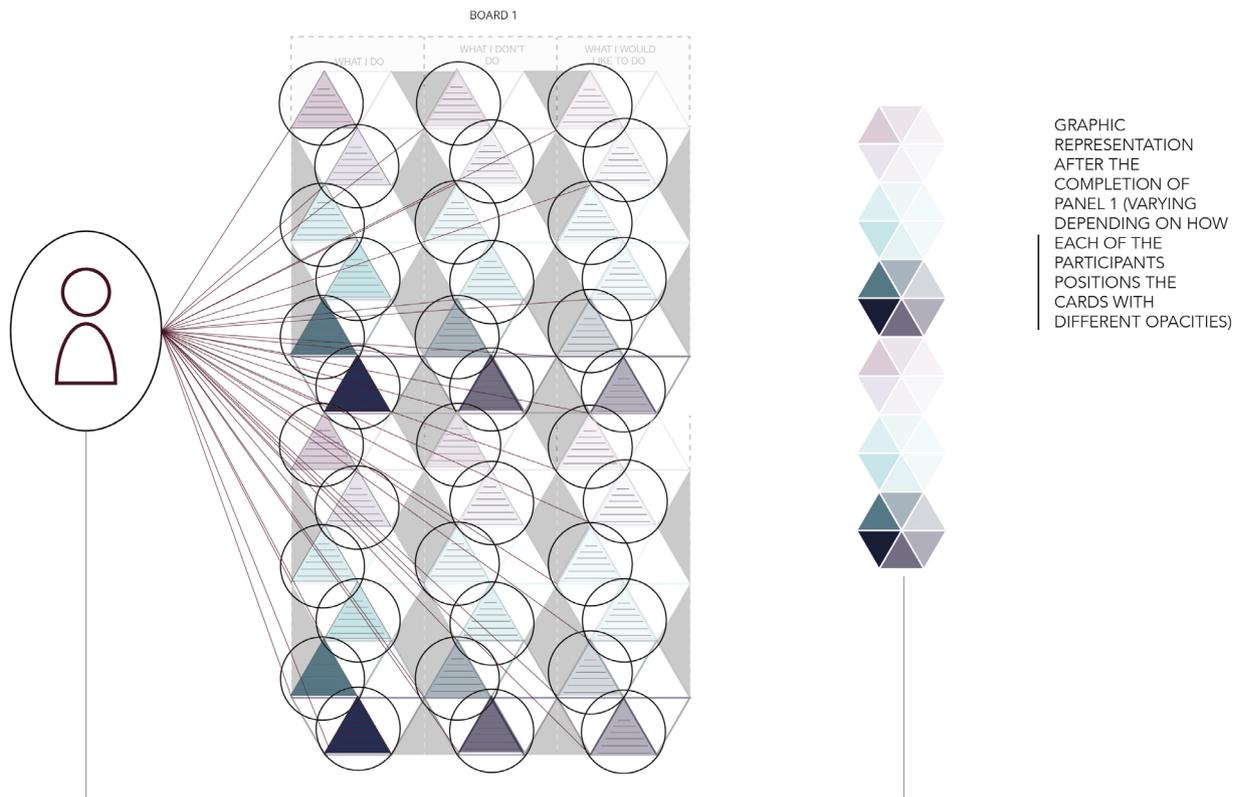
BOARD 1

WHAT I DO   WHAT I DON'T DO   WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO DO

GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION AFTER THE COMPLETION OF PANEL 1 (VARYING DEPENDING ON HOW EACH OF THE PARTICIPANTS POSITIONS THE CARDS WITH DIFFERENT OPACITIES)

Fig. 02

consumption, thereby creating profiles that are more predictive than merely descriptive.
- To establish a foundation for practical guidelines to support not only well stablished fashion services, but also SMEs in redesigning their retail strategies, ensuring that these strategies are responsive to actual consumer needs and behaviours.
- To enhance consumer awareness of collaborative and alternative retail models, both locally and globally, by directly exposing them to different business models and encouraging critical reflection.

The session was divided into two broad sections [Fig. 01]. The initial, *Personal Consumption Mapping*, involved participants filling out a scenario-based card exercise and visual mapping tool to describe their consumption patterns across three categories: "What I Do" (current habits), "What I Don't Do" (things they don't currently do), and "What I Would Like to Do" (things they wish to do in the future). This activity was not only meant to provoke individual contemplation but also facilitate peer-to-peer discussion since

the discussions among participants elicited shared challenges and aspirations. However, participants maintained full agency over the distribution of these cards; there were no mandatory quotas or required balances across the three categories. Using the support cards, the researcher guided participants through the 12 rows of Board 1, with each row representing a different hypothetical scenario (e.g., "Your wardrobe is overflowing with clothes, and you don't wear them all. What do you do about it?"). Each card included a pre-designed response, such as "I pass them on to someone I'm sure will use them (e.g., a friend or family member).". These cards were used to visually express their individual consumption behaviours by placing them along three designated columns labelled: "WHAT I DO," "WHAT I DON'T DO," and "WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO DO."

The triangular cards are also colour-coded to distinguish each and every one of the twelve rows, with each group having a unique colour [Fig. 02]. The three triangles within each group are distinguished through varying levels of transparency (25%, 50%, and 100%) that signify

a spectrum of sustainability. The highest level of opacity triangles signifies very sustainable practices, the low-level transparency for less sustainable options, and the middle level of transparency for intermediate practices. By the end of the exercise, each participant has Board 1 as a personalized graphical map of their own fashion consumption habits. Both self- and comparative analysis of sustainable behaviour across the group are supported by this visualization.

The second part of the activity, **Sustainable Landscape Exploration**, was designed to enhance participants' understanding of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the sustainable fashion sector. By spotlighting lesser-known initiatives, it encourages critical engagement with alternative retail models and their connections to mainstream industry practices. Participants start by going through a deck of support cards, each one presenting an SME that is either well known or not so well known, i.e.: Rifò, Tulerie, Loom, Older, Armorie, ThreadUp, depop, Sustainably Chic, Nicoletta Fasani, Worn Wear, Cotopaxi, Drexcode. The cards summarize the SME's service model, main values, and field of operation. Based on this information, players are asked to position each card in the most suitable spot on a pre-structured board. It is structured by category, type of service, or defining feature and incorporates other existing fashion brands as a point of reference. By doing this, the participants are able to conceptually anchor potential future SMEs in relation to current market actors, creating a more cohesive vision of the pluralistic field of sustainable fashion services.

Once the cards have been positioned, participants are asked to select a service they would consider using and place a post it notes within the corresponding category. On the post it, they are invited to share their reflections, such as their reasons for choosing the service, any reservations about its appeal or accessibility, or suggestions for improvement. By prompting this critical reflection, the activity not only educates participants about sustainable fashion alternatives but also empowers them to consider their role as consumers in shaping a more equitable and circular fashion system. Due to word count constraints, a detailed account of each board, support card, and the corresponding survey of participant interactions cannot be

provided. The description focuses on the key elements and outcomes most relevant to the study's objectives.

FINDINGS

The workshop group consisted of nine participants [Tab. 01] with a focus on design, fashion, and the arts, bringing a range of academic and professionals backgrounds to the discussion. This diverse composition was instrumental in generating a spectrum of perspectives. Analysis of the workshop revealed a significant overlap in participant behaviours and aspirations, particularly highlighting a persistent gap between their sustainable intentions and their actual purchasing practices. This gap was a central theme throughout the findings.

PART 1 - PERSONAL CONSUMPTION MAPPING FINDINGS

Seven of the nine participants demonstrated a common core consumption profile, marked by behavioural patterns that are not overtly unsustainable yet reveal inconsistencies between expressed commitments and enacted practices, as outlined below.

Reactive Wardrobe Management: A recurring theme was the struggle with overflowing closets or garments requiring minor repairs. Participants often viewed these issues as *"inevitable burdens"* or future chores, leading to a physical accumulation of items. This passive approach directly contradicts their stated desire for a more intentional and organized relationship with their clothing.

Aspirational Circularity: Participants admitted to letting unused or damaged items sit idle in storage, despite expressing a strong drive to participate in the circular economy. While they recognized the ideal actions, such as donating, reselling, or organizing, their reality often involved holding onto poorly fitting online purchases. This gap between the intent to return items and the failure to do so within a timeframe highlights a significant intention-action discrepancy.

Price Over Ethics: Sustainable intentions were frequently overridden by financial considerations. Participants admitted to purchasing from regions with poor labour standards and choosing low-cost materials like polyester blends. Although they expressed a future desire to avoid such practices, current purchasing decisions remain dominated by budget constraints rather than ethical values.

Participant	Consumption Profile Summary
Participant 1 (P1) Fashion Design Student (Gen Z Female)	Wardrobe management is reactive; would like to donate/resell/re-use. Buys cheap regardless of material but avoids polyester where possible. Documentaries concern her but shopping behaviour doesn't change; will attempt to buy fewer sustainable brands. Certification is not influential but would like it to be. Seasonal versatile buying. Leisure: eco/second hand swimwear only. Social events: re-styling/borrowing.
Participant 2 (P2) Fashion Design Student (Gen Z Female)	Leaves issues with clothes/defects unaddressed. Hopes to donate/re-sell/re-purpose. Rarely returns but would like immediate returns. Wants price-driven buys; does not want polyester. Documentaries bother her but does not change a habit; hopes to purchase less sustainable brands. Does not get influenced by certifications but hopes to. Seasonal versatile consumption. Recreational: eco/second-hand swimsuits. Social gatherings: re-style/borrow.
Participant 3 (P3) Fashion Design Student (Gen Z Female)	Leaves closet issues untouched. Hopes to donate/sell/repurpose. Not influenced by certifications but would like to give priority to certified brands. Budget: timeless, good-quality items. Seasonal cross-seasonal shopping. Recreation: eco/second-hand swimwear. Social events: refashion/borrow.
Participant 4 (P4) Industrial Designer Researcher	Alternative ethical stance: no moral issue with sweatshop countries. Chooses cheapest T-shirts without regard to fabric. Does not believe certifications (considers greenwash). Shaken by documentaries but lifestyle unaffected. Seasonal adaptive buying. Price point: timeless, durable items. Recreation: green/hand-me-down swim wear. Social events: upcycle/borrow.
Participant 5 (P5) PhD Student in Design (Millennial Female)	Would not buy from poverty labour countries. Chooses cheapest regardless of material. Upset by documentaries; habits haven't changed but wants to sustainable alternatives. Not influenced by certifications but wants to. Seasonal versatile shopping. Budget: classic, good-quality pieces. Leisure: eco/second hand swimwear. Social: restyle/borrow.
Participant 6 (P6) PhD Student in Design (Millennial Male)	Wardrobe abandonment. Hopes to donate/re-sell/re-purpose. Buys cheap T-shirts; does not want polyester. Disturbed by documentaries; looks for sustainable brands. Not influenced by certifications but wishes to be. Seasonal versatile buying. Budget: classic, quality. Recreation: eco/second hand swimwear. Social events: restyle/borrow.
Participant 7 (P7) Musician (Millennial Female)	Forgets about wardrobe. Aims to donate/re-sell/re-use. Bases shopping on price, would not like to purchase polyester. Alarmed by documentaries but no habit change. Not influenced by labels but wishes to be. Seasonal all-around buys. Budget: quality, classic items. Leisure: second-hand/eco swimwear. Social events: restyle/borrow
Participant 8 (P8) Fashion Design Student (Gen Z Female)	Forgets about wardrobe. Aspires to donate/resell/re-purpose. Buys low-price regardless of material; polyester is avoided. Documentaries annoy her but routine continues as is. Not influenced by credentials but aspires to give preference to credentialed brands. Seasonal versatile buying. Budget: timeless, quality. Leisure: eco/second-hand swimsuits. Social events: re-make/borrow.
Participant 9 (P9) Fashion Design Student/Photographer (Gen Z Female)	Wardrobe indifference. Aspires to donate/re-sell/re-use. Buys inexpensive T-shirts but dislikes polyester. Documentaries annoy her but no change in behaviour. Not influenced by certifications but aspires to be. Seasonal flexible buying. Budget: timeless, quality. Recreation: specifically, would just prefer to keep using current swimwear. Social events: re-style/borrow.

Tab. 01

Awareness and Action: While participants noted that documentaries on the fashion industry's environmental and social costs caused them discomfort, this increased awareness rarely led to behavioural shifts. The goal to *"buy less and choose sustainable brands"* remains a conceptual ideal rather than a practical habit, failing to trigger meaningful changes in consumption patterns. *Scepticism of Certifications:* At present, sustainability certifications do not influence purchasing habits. This is attributed to either a lack of awareness or a general distrust of the authenticity of such labels. However, participants indicated a future preference for certified brands, suggesting a latent desire for visible and trustworthy indicators of sustainability.

PART 2 - SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPE EXPLORATION FINDINGS

During this phase, other than the actions already described in section 4, participants were asked to self-identify into four preliminary archetype categories: Zero Wasters, Renters, Researchers, or Resellers [Tab. 02]. This exercise served for identifying broader patterns of behaviour. An analysis of the workshop data showed that most participants aligned with these archetypes, though two did not fit neatly into any of the initial categories, a significant finding:

- Zero Wasters: The members of this group were highly aware and very critical of

Participant	Archetype	Awareness	Consumer Consulting	Affiliated Brands
P1	Reseller	Moderate	Interested in resale/repair services	Vinted, Depop
P2	Reseller	Moderate	Would use second-hand platforms	Vinted, eBay
P3	Reseller	Moderate	Sees resale as sustainable option	Depop, Vestiaire Collective
P4	Zero Waster	High	Skeptical of certifications, but open to zero-waste	Patagonia
P5	Zero Waster	High	Would engage with recycling/upcycling services	Eileen Fisher Renew
P6	Zero Waster	High	Open to sustainable services but cautious	Patagonia, Veja
P7	Researcher	Very high	Curious about ethical research-oriented brands	Good On You
P8	Not aligned	Varied	Struggles to connect with services	Fast fashion + mix
P9	Not aligned	Varied	No clear archetype alignment	Mixed brands

Tab. 02

certifications and appreciated brands with a zero-waste ideology.

- Resellers: These members were moderately aware of the sustainable environment and participated in reselling and repairing clothes platforms and services.

- Researchers: This character was characterized by extremely heightened consciousness and strong research-driven, ethical brand interest, seeking open information on production and sourcing.

- Unaligned Participants: The identification of two "Unaligned" participants (those disconnected from provided brands and services) highlights consumer behaviour complexities exceeding initial categorizations. This finding necessitates broader future studies to further chart and validate these understandings.

PHASE 2: QUANTITATIVE VALIDATION AND ARCHETYPE REFINEMENT

The preliminary participatory workshop established a baseline understanding of consumer behaviours. To build upon this and develop future-oriented consumer archetypes, a quantitative survey was developed. This survey adapted the 12 hypothetical scenarios from the workshop's first board to validate qualitative insights with a broader demographic and secure structured data.
Titled "The Future of Fashion Consumption", the survey was administered via Microsoft Teams using a convenience sampling approach throughout June and July of 2025, resulting in 100 responses with an average completion time of 10 minutes and 34 seconds. Data collection was finalized once the 100-response target was reached. The questionnaire was intended to quantitatively verify and expand on the workshop's findings, using an iterative design process. By applying the same 12 scenarios to a larger group, the survey helped refine the final consumer archetypes. The questionnaire consisted of 19 questions targeting purchasing habits, consumer values, and situational behavioural responses presented as multiple-choice options where respondents selected the specific action or value that best aligned with their personal habits. Mirroring the workshop logic, respondents were asked to categorize their responses to the

12 scenarios without a mandatory requirement for balanced distribution among categories. Full survey questions and data results are available upon request.

FINDINGS

The examination of 100 anonymised survey data from respondents reveals an often-contradictory picture of contemporary fashion consumption. The findings create a consumer market which is pragmatically minded in overall spending tendencies but also is highly ethical and with a strong desire for more circular and conscious practices.

The sample is composed primarily young European women. The demographic is younger generation skewed with 68 reporting themselves as Generation Z and 31 as Millennials. The geography is 93 participants located in Europe. The gender divide is also present, with 74 responding as women, 23 as men, two as non-binary, one as preferring not to say. This specific demographic segment also showed moderate consumption levels; the most common frequency of purchases is "every few months" (56 respondents), while the majority of the segment (54 respondents) spends less than €500 annually on clothing.

Analysis of the primary shopping decision drivers shows high pragmatic pull. Upon being asked to rank various factors on a five-to-one scale, tangible attributes like quality and price are the obvious victors. The new two respondents added to this iteration only tend to reinforce this trend further, both giving quality a 5 out of 5 and price 4 and 3, respectively. Across the entire sample, these practical considerations overshadow more abstract values. Ethical and environmental factors, while recorded, were rated as far less important, with "Ethical Production" and "Environmental Impact" rated lower on average. "Style/Trends" was also rated lower as an importance. This rating implies consumers in normal shopping conditions prioritize individual benefit, for instance, price and durability, above broader social or environmental aims.

However, a more nuanced image is painted by the scenario-based questions in the survey that distinguish between wanted and enacted behaviour ("That's what I do" versus "That's what I would like to do"). The comparison illustrates a wide gap between aspiration and behaviour. The strongest ethical stance was witnessed in response to the child labour situation; 86 stated that they already "refuse to buy that garment", and introducing the new data adds one more person who "would like to do" that too, totalling 14. This near universal response suggests that when an ethical issue is stringent and unequivocal, it will have the ability to override other considerations while shopping. Similarly, the respondents strongly preferred circular fashion practices. Of the entire dataset, 79 already donate or sell off unwanted clothes, and 20 others are willing to. To repair defects, 63 already do so, while 35 others want to, reflecting an extremely low willingness to discard faulty clothing. The preference is towards reuse, as 59 of the sample expressed that they would buy a timeless design for a special event on which they can wear it again, while only 15 would buy a fashionable dress for once-off usage.

Aspirational gap is greatest when eco-friendly options require greater efforts or expenses. Though just 30 of the respondents currently consider buying from sustainable certification brands a priority, 59 indicated they "would like to do" so. The most common group of respondents (64) fall into a middle category, reporting labels will trigger a purchase but that price and fashion continue to be more important. When prices rise, the optimal reaction is not trade down but trade up in terms of quality and longevity. 62 of the interviewees intend to "purchase fewer things and focus only on traditional, high-quality items" an increase of 34 from those who do so at present.

Across the board, the full sample of 100 responses supports the preliminary findings. It portrays a consumer dominated by a salient contradiction. Their overall purchasing pattern is governed by the self-interested and utilitarian concerns with price and quality. But when faced with real-life ethical or environmental scenarios, they profess a strong feeling of obligation to act as responsible consumers and an earnest desire to get out of their habits. The repeated gap between intended and actual behaviour shows an unrealized desire for easy and appealing sustainable clothing, proclaiming once more that consumers are actually seeking means of aligning their consumption with their ethical aspirations.

By merging the qualitative knowledge gained from the workshop with the quantitative controlled data from the survey, six final future-oriented consumer archetypes were constructed.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE ARCHETYPES

The concept of archetypes originates in Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology, where archetypes are understood as universal and innate patterns embedded in the collective unconscious, shaping shared myths, symbols, and narratives across cultures (Jung, 1968). These ideas were later adapted to branding and marketing by Carol S. Pearson and Margaret Mark, who, in *The Hero and the Outlaw* (2001), codified twelve archetypes into a practical framework for defining brand personality and fostering emotional connections with consumers. While informed by these theoretical and strategic foundations, this study develops its own archetypes through an empirically grounded analytical framework rather than adopting existing models. The six consumer archetypes were developed through a structured mixed-methods process combining qualitative exploration with quantitative validation. This approach aimed to produce empirically grounded and practically

applicable archetypes capable of capturing contemporary fashion consumption behaviours. The first phase consisted of an exploratory participatory workshop using a Personal Consumption Mapping exercise based on twelve hypothetical fashion consumption scenarios. Participants visually mapped their current and aspirational practices, revealing a persistent *intention-action gap*. Sustainable behaviours, such as repairing, reselling, or passing on garments, were frequently positioned as desired rather than enacted practices. Preliminary analysis identified initial consumer categories (e.g., Reseller, Zero Waste, Researcher); however, a part of participants did not align clearly with these profiles, indicating the need for a more nuanced classification system. In the second phase, a quantitative survey (The Future of Fashion Consumption) was administered to 100 participants adapting the dynamic applied in the workshop. The results confirmed the qualitative findings, particularly the dominance of utilitarian drivers such as price and quality over

ARCHETYPE	VALUES	TYPICAL BEHAVIOURS
The Conscious Minimalist	Sustainability Long-term Thinking Quality over Quantity	▪ Buys fewer items, chooses timeless and versatile pieces ▪ Waits for sales or chooses mid-range ethical brands ▪ Repairs, repurposes, or donates old clothing ▪ Avoids polyester, prioritizes cotton or sustainable fibres ▪ Responds to climate concerns by reducing new purchases
The Aspiring Circularist	Responsibility Practicality Low-waste Lifestyle	▪ Wants to do the right thing but doesn't always follow through ▪ Leaves clothes unused but aspires to donate or upcycle them ▪ Influenced by sustainable certifications, but price and style still matter ▪ Interested in services like repair, resale, and recycling
The Cost-Conscious Pragmatist	Affordability Utility Accessibility	▪ Chooses cheaper garments regardless of sustainability credentials ▪ Buys seasonal or trendy items for short-term use ▪ Returns or discards items easily if they don't meet expectations ▪ Feels bad about unsustainable choices but prioritizes financial constraints
The Style-Driven Shopper	Appearance Self-expression Social relevance	▪ Buys trendy items for events or social expectations ▪ May recognize sustainability but prioritizes look and fashion value ▪ Returns unwanted items quickly and moves on ▪ Occasionally buys high-quality or timeless pieces when style aligns
The Diy Upcycler	Creativity Self-sufficiency Sustainability	▪ Repairs or alters clothes independently Repurposes old clothes into cleaning rags, bags, etc. ▪ Buys 100% cotton or avoids polyester intentionally Generally skeptical of greenwashing or vague certifications
The Ethical Researcher	Transparency Ethics Awareness	▪ Refuses to buy from brands linked to poor labor conditions ▪ Prioritizes certified sustainable brands Investigates the credibility of certifications ▪ Openly questions marketing claims and corporate responsibility

Tab. 03

broader environmental aspirations. While ethical concerns were generally secondary, specific issues, most notably child labour, emerged as consistently prioritised. Cluster analysis further demonstrated high engagement with reuse behaviours, such as repairing garments and reselling or passing on clothing, reinforcing the complexity and hybridity of consumer practices.

The final phase synthesised qualitative and quantitative insights to refine the preliminary categories into six comprehensive consumer archetypes [Tab. 03]. Each archetype integrates values, motivations, and behavioural tendencies, capturing the tension between sustainability aspirations and actual consumption practices.

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS FOR SMES

The study identifies clear behavioural patterns that define each archetype and provide SMEs with direct strategic implications, as outlined below.

As far as Purchasing Behaviours: Consumer profiles reveal differentiated consumption habits, ranging from reduced usage and consumption of substitute channels (second-hand websites or edited boutiques) to more conventional acquisition modes. For SMEs, the strategic reaction is to align their offer with these behaviours by emphasizing product longevity, developing repair and renovation services, and investigating partnerships with edited resale marketplaces. These tactics provide a competitive edge over seasonally operated, high-speed cycle production paradigms and allow SMEs access to customers who place a premium on durability and selectivity in their decisions.

On Values and Priorities: Archetypes also vary widely in terms of the values behind their decisions. Some are price-sensitive primarily, others by newness of look, and others again by environmental and ethical considerations. For SMEs, this variety implies that trying to reach all consumer archetypes at once is not possible or strategically strong. Rather, companies need to find segments that are most suited to their competencies and positioning. More specifically, sustainability-minded archetypes offer opportunities for SMEs that have the capability to truly tell a strong story about ethical manufacturing and ecological stewardship, so values become a tool of marketplace differentiation.

In Coping with Garment Defects: There are different behaviour reactions to defects in garments. There are archetypes (those to durability and thrift) to

actively seek to fix or creatively reuse defective products as a good opportunity to increase the life of a product. Others (frugal consumers) would simply discard a product that is defective because it is cheap to replace. For SMEs, this is a strategic opportunity to build strong brand loyalty among the frugal segments. Offering affordable maintenance packages or adaptable repair workshops not only shows a company's commitment to product longevity but also generates a service-based, worthy revenue stream

In case of Ethical Challenges: Consumer archetypes show their real motive when facing ethical challenges. Certain archetypes (those very strongly committed to ethics and sustainability) categorically shun brands associated with undesirable labour practices or unsustainable processes, requiring radical openness as an absolute requirement for purchase. Others (whose loyalties lie between ethics and pragmatism) will tend to be ambivalent, eventually prioritizing price and short-term necessity over ethics. SMEs intending to pursue these segments need to be aware of this continuum. For the very ethical segment, honesty and transparent disclosure are essential. For the less altruistic segment, SMEs can close the *intention-action gap* by making the sustainable option easier, more convenient, or cheaper.

On Social Events: Consumer conduct on social events shows a stark dichotomy. While some archetypes (novelty and social utility-driven) have a tendency to buy a new piece of clothing for one occasion, others (resource-aware) re-style older clothes or borrow, reflecting resourcefulness and a direct opposition to wastefulness. Such opposition holds a special appeal for business. Services like styling consultation or renting premises can directly serve both markets: providing the style-conscious market with access to novelty without purchase, and access for the resource-conscious market to a pleasing, environmentally friendly option to new acquisition.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated that while policy instruments like EPR and DPP provide the structural framework for sustainability (European Commission, 2022; Garcia-Torres et al., 2022), their success is fundamentally tie up to the resolution of the *intention-action gap*. By translating complex consumer behaviours into a diagnostic archetype framework, this study provides a mechanism to

navigate the cognitive biases that currently stall the adoption of Collaborative Fashion Consumption (CFC) models (Singh & Giacosa, 2019; Won & Kim, 2020).

In addition, the findings highlight that the circular transition is currently uneven, posing significant risks of marginalization for SMEs who lack the capital to compete with the sustainability strategies of major corporations (Eric, 2014; Standaert, 2022). However, the six archetypes, ranging from the *Ethical Researcher* to the *Style-Driven Shopper*, reveal that consumer motivations are not monolithic. This diversity offers SMEs a unique strategic opening. By moving away from transactional B2C models toward community-driven, social-collaborative loops, smaller actors can foster the radical transparency and emotional durability that larger, more rigid platforms struggle to replicate (Akbar & Hoffmann, 2023; Chowdhury et al., 2023).

Additionally, the participatory workshop provides a scalable methodological framework for researchers and practitioners. By employing scenario-based cards and visual mapping, SMEs can replicate this diagnostic process locally to identify S.PSS adoption barriers. Despite the small initial sample, the methodology's value lies in its operational flexibility; it can be adapted into digital applications or expanded for larger co-creation sessions and cross-cultural comparative studies.

Closing the *intention-action gap* requires the design of models that prioritize convenience and economic viability as much as ecological stewardship. For SMEs, the path forward lies in leveraging their agility to provide personalized, service-based solutions, such as repair workshops and curated rental offerings, that align with the specific values and coping mechanisms of diverse consumer segments. Future research should build upon this framework by utilizing Digital Product Passport (DPP) data to longitudinally track how these archetypal interventions impact actual garment longevity, thereby providing the empirical evidence needed to move from a culture of disposal to one of enduring collaborative value.

This study is subject to specific limitations. First, the small qualitative sample of design professionals provides technical depth but may not represent general population habits. Second, the EU geographic focus means findings regarding regulations and cultural values may not translate to regions with different environmental legislation.

Finally, self-reported data remains susceptible to social desirability bias, potentially overstating sustainability commitments despite the focus on the *intention-action gap*.

CAPTIONS

[Fig. 01] Elaborated by the author; Overall Methodology applied - Workshop

[Fig. 02] Elaborated by the author; Scheme explaining the dynamic of the first board of the workshop

[Tab. 01] Elaborated by the author; Personal Consumption Mapping Findings 1/2.

[Tab. 02] Elaborated by the author; Personal Consumption Mapping Findings 2/2.

[Tab. 03] Elaborated by the author; Final Archetypes.

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