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Research Article

Circular Fashion Communication Strategies: A Secondary Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

The transition toward circular fashion represents a critical response to the environmental and social challenges associated with the traditional linear fashion system. This study examines circular fashion communication strategies through a qualitative analysis of secondary data, including academic literature, industry reports, and brand communications. Drawing on Signalling Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the research explores how communication influences consumer perceptions, trust, and engagement with circular practices. The findings reveal that effective communication strategies integrate transparency, storytelling, educational messaging, and participatory engagement to bridge the gap between sustainability intentions and consumer behaviour. Digital platforms further enhance these strategies by enabling interactive and personalised communication, although they also intensify scrutiny and scepticism. The study identifies key challenges, including the complexity of circular concepts, consumer distrust due to greenwashing, and the lack of standardised communication frameworks. The research contributes to the literature by offering an integrated conceptual framework that links communication strategies with behavioural outcomes in a circular fashion. Practical implications highlight the need for authentic, consistent, and stakeholder-oriented communication to support the transition toward a sustainable fashion ecosystem.

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1. Introduction

The global fashion industry is widely recognised as one of the most resource-intensive and environmentally impactful sectors, contributing significantly to carbon emissions, water consumption, and textile waste. Traditionally structured around a linear economic model—often described as “take, make, dispose”—the industry has encouraged rapid production cycles and high consumption rates, particularly under the influence of fast fashion (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). This model has led to profound ecological consequences, including landfill overflow, microplastic pollution, and unsustainable resource extraction. In response to these challenges, the concept of circular fashion has emerged as a transformative paradigm aimed at redesigning the lifecycle of garments and textiles.

Circular fashion is rooted in the broader framework of the circular economy, which seeks to decouple economic growth from resource consumption by promoting regenerative systems and closed-loop material flows (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). Within the fashion context, circularity involves practices such as recycling, upcycling, repair, resale, and rental models, all of which aim to extend product lifecycles and reduce waste (Niinimäki et al., 2020). However, while technological innovation and supply chain restructuring are critical to achieving circularity, these efforts alone are insufficient without effective communication strategies that engage consumers and stakeholders.

Communication plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer awareness, attitudes, and behaviours toward sustainable practices. In the context of circular fashion, communication extends beyond traditional marketing functions to encompass education, transparency, and engagement. It involves conveying complex information about sustainability practices, product lifecycles, and environmental impacts in ways that are accessible and persuasive to diverse audiences (Henninger et al., 2016). As such, circular fashion communication is both an informational and a strategic process that influences how consumers perceive and interact with sustainable products and services.

One of the central challenges in circular fashion communication lies in the inherent complexity of the concept itself. Circular systems involve multiple stages, stakeholders, and processes, making it difficult to communicate their value in a clear and concise manner. Consumers may struggle to understand the environmental benefits of circular practices, leading to confusion or disengagement. Moreover, the proliferation of sustainability claims in the fashion industry has heightened concerns about greenwashing, where companies exaggerate or misrepresent their environmental efforts (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). This has resulted in increasing scepticism among consumers, further complicating communication efforts.

In addition to these challenges, there exists a well-documented gap between consumer attitudes and behaviours in sustainable fashion. While many consumers express

concern for environmental issues, this concern does not always translate into purchasing decisions or long-term behavioural change (Joy et al., 2012). Communication strategies must therefore address not only informational deficits but also psychological and social barriers to sustainable consumption. This includes leveraging emotional engagement, social norms, and perceived behavioural control to influence decision-making processes (Ajzen, 1991).

The rise of digital media has introduced new opportunities and complexities in circular fashion communication. Social media platforms, brand websites, and mobile applications enable real-time interaction, personalised messaging, and user-generated content, thereby enhancing engagement and transparency (McKinsey & Company, 2021). However, the digital landscape also amplifies scrutiny, as consumers and advocacy groups increasingly hold brands accountable for their sustainability claims. This dynamic necessitates a more authentic, transparent, and consistent approach to communication.

Despite the growing importance of communication in facilitating circular fashion, academic research on this topic remains relatively fragmented. Existing studies have primarily focused on technological innovations, supply chain management, and consumer behaviour, with less attention given to the strategic role of communication. There is a need for a comprehensive analysis that integrates theoretical perspectives with empirical insights to better understand how circular fashion is communicated and perceived.

This study addresses this gap by examining circular fashion communication strategies through a qualitative analysis of secondary data. By synthesising academic literature, industry reports, and real-world examples, the research aims to identify key communication practices, theoretical underpinnings, and challenges associated with circular fashion. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the dominant communication strategies employed circularly?
- How do these strategies influence consumer perceptions and behaviours?
- What theoretical frameworks can explain the effectiveness of circular fashion communication?
- What challenges and limitations exist in communicating circularity?

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both academic and practical domains. From a theoretical perspective, it integrates insights from sustainability communication, consumer behaviour, and organisational theory to develop a conceptual framework for circular fashion communication. From a practical standpoint, it provides actionable recommendations for fashion brands, policymakers, and other stakeholders seeking to promote sustainable consumption.

In conclusion, as the fashion industry continues to transition toward circularity, communication will play an increasingly critical role in shaping its success. Understanding how to effectively

communicate circular practices is essential for fostering consumer engagement, building trust, and ultimately achieving sustainable transformation.

2. Literature Review

Circular fashion is a systemic approach that seeks to redesign the lifecycle of clothing by minimising waste and maximising resource efficiency. It is grounded in the principles of the circular economy, which emphasise regeneration, reuse, and closed-loop systems (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). Unlike the linear model, circular fashion aims to maintain the value of products, materials, and resources for as long as possible.

The transition toward circular fashion has been driven by increasing awareness of the environmental impacts of the industry. According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017), the fashion sector generates millions of tons of textile waste annually, much of which ends up in landfills or is incinerated. Circular strategies such as recycling, upcycling, and product life extension offer potential solutions to these challenges.

However, the adoption of circular practices remains uneven across the industry. While some brands have embraced circularity as a core business model, others have implemented it in a more limited or symbolic manner. This variation highlights the importance of communication in conveying the authenticity and effectiveness of circular initiatives.

2.1 Sustainability Communication: Theoretical Perspectives

Sustainability communication encompasses the strategies and practices used by organisations to convey information about their environmental and social impacts (Peattie & Crane, 2005). It is a multidisciplinary field that draws from marketing, communication studies, and environmental science.

One of the key challenges in sustainability communication is balancing transparency with clarity. While consumers demand detailed information about sustainability practices, excessive complexity can lead to confusion and disengagement (Henninger et al., 2016). Effective communication must therefore simplify complex concepts without compromising accuracy.

Signalling theory provides a useful framework for understanding sustainability communication. According to Spence (1973), organisations use signals to convey information and reduce information asymmetry. In the context of circular fashion, signals may include certifications, eco-labels, and storytelling. These signals help consumers assess the credibility of sustainability claims.

2.2 Consumer Behaviour and Sustainable Fashion

Consumer behaviour plays a central role in the success of circular fashion. Research indicates that while consumers are increasingly aware of environmental issues, their purchasing decisions are influenced by a range of factors, including price,

convenience, and social norms (Joy et al., 2012).

The attitude-behaviour gap is a well-documented phenomenon in sustainable consumption. Many consumers express positive attitudes toward sustainability, but fail to translate these attitudes into action. This gap can be attributed to factors such as lack of information, perceived inconvenience, and scepticism about the effectiveness of individual actions.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) provides a framework for understanding this gap. According to the theory, behaviour is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Communication strategies can influence these factors by shaping perceptions, reinforcing social norms, and enhancing consumers' sense of agency.

2.3 Greenwashing and Consumer Trust

Greenwashing is a significant challenge in sustainability communication. It refers to the practice of making misleading or exaggerated claims about environmental performance (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). In the fashion industry, greenwashing can undermine consumer trust and hinder the adoption of genuine circular practices.

Research suggests that transparency and third-party verification are critical for building trust. Certifications and standardised labelling systems can help consumers distinguish between credible and misleading claims. However, the proliferation of labels and certifications can also create confusion,

highlighting the need for standardised communication practices.

2.4 Digital Media and the Evolution of Communication Strategies

The rise of digital media has transformed sustainability communication in the fashion industry. Social media platforms, websites, and mobile applications enable brands to engage with consumers in real time and provide detailed information about their sustainability practices (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Digital platforms also facilitate participatory communication, allowing consumers to share their experiences and contribute to brand narratives. This creates opportunities for co-creation and community building, which are essential for promoting circular practices.

However, digital communication also presents challenges, including information overload and increased scrutiny. Consumers are more likely to question and verify sustainability claims, making authenticity and consistency more important than ever.

2.5 Circular Fashion Communication Strategies

Circular fashion communication strategies can be broadly categorised into four types:

- **Informational Communication:** Providing factual information about sustainability practices and product lifecycles.
- **Emotional Communication:** Using storytelling to create emotional connections with consumers.

- **Behavioural Communication:** Encouraging specific actions such as recycling or repairing garments.
- **Participatory Communication:** Involving consumers in circular practices through interactive platforms.

These strategies are often used in combination to achieve multiple objectives, including awareness, engagement, and behavioural change.

2.6 Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of literature on sustainable fashion, several gaps remain. First, there is limited research on the integration of communication strategies with circular business models. Second, existing studies often focus on consumer behaviour without considering the broader stakeholder context. Third, there is a need for more qualitative research that explores the nuances of communication practices.

This study addresses these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of circular fashion communication strategies using a qualitative secondary research approach.

3. Theoretical Framework

The transition toward circular fashion requires not only structural and technological changes but also a robust theoretical understanding of how communication influences stakeholder perceptions and behaviours. This study integrates three complementary theoretical perspectives—Signalling Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)—to

develop a comprehensive framework for analysing circular fashion communication strategies. These theories collectively explain how information is transmitted, interpreted, and translated into behavioural outcomes within the context of sustainability.

3.1 Signalling Theory

Signalling Theory, originally proposed by Spence (1973), provides a foundational lens for understanding how organisations communicate information under conditions of uncertainty and information asymmetry. In markets where consumers lack complete knowledge about product attributes, such as the environmental impact of clothing, firms rely on signals to convey credibility and quality. In the context of circular fashion, these signals include eco-labels, certifications, sustainability reports, and narrative storytelling.

The effectiveness of signalling depends on its perceived credibility and cost. High-quality signals are typically costly to produce and difficult to imitate, thereby enhancing their trustworthiness (Connelly et al., 2011). For example, third-party certifications and transparent supply chain disclosures serve as credible indicators of a brand's commitment to circular practices. Conversely, low-cost signals, such as vague sustainability claims, may be perceived as greenwashing and thus undermine trust.

In circular fashion communication, signalling theory highlights the importance of clarity, consistency, and verification. Brands must carefully design their communication strategies to ensure that signals are not only visible but also interpretable by consumers.

This is particularly relevant given the complexity of circular systems, which may involve multiple stages and stakeholders. Effective signalling reduces uncertainty, enhances consumer confidence, and facilitates informed decision-making.

Furthermore, signalling extends beyond consumers to include investors, regulators, and other stakeholders. Sustainability disclosures and integrated reporting frameworks are increasingly used to signal corporate responsibility and long-term value creation. Thus, signalling theory underscores the strategic role of communication in aligning organisational practices with stakeholder expectations.

3.2 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, as articulated by Freeman (1984), posits that organisations must consider the interests and expectations of all stakeholders, rather than focusing solely on shareholders. In the context of circular fashion, stakeholders include consumers, suppliers, employees, policymakers, non-governmental organisations, and local communities. Each of these groups plays a critical role in the adoption and success of circular practices.

Circular fashion communication is inherently multi-directional, requiring engagement with diverse stakeholder groups. For instance, consumers need information about product usage and disposal, while suppliers require guidance on sustainable production practices. Policymakers and advocacy groups, on the other hand, demand transparency and accountability.

Stakeholder theory emphasises the importance of dialogue and collaboration in communication strategies. Rather than adopting a top-down approach, organisations are encouraged to engage stakeholders in meaningful interactions, fostering trust and mutual understanding. This aligns with the principles of participatory communication, where stakeholders are actively involved in the co-creation of value (Freeman et al., 2010).

Circularly, stakeholder engagement can take various forms, including collaborative platforms, community initiatives, and feedback mechanisms. For example, take-back programs and repair workshops not only promote circular practices but also create opportunities for direct interaction between brands and consumers. These initiatives enhance transparency, build relationships, and reinforce brand credibility.

Moreover, stakeholder theory highlights the ethical dimension of communication. Organisations have a responsibility to provide accurate and accessible information about their environmental and social impacts. Misleading or incomplete communication not only damages trust but also undermines the broader goals of sustainability.

3.3 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) offers a psychological perspective on how communication influences individual behaviour. According to TPB, behaviour is determined by three key factors: attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. These factors

collectively shape behavioural intentions, which in turn influence actual behaviour.

In the context of circular fashion, communication strategies can directly impact each of these components. First, informational and persuasive messages can shape attitudes by highlighting the environmental and social benefits of circular practices. For example, campaigns that emphasise the reduction of waste and carbon emissions can foster positive attitudes toward sustainable consumption.

Second, communication can influence subjective norms by creating a sense of social expectation. Social media campaigns, influencer endorsements, and community initiatives can reinforce the idea that sustainable behaviour is desirable and widely accepted. This is particularly important in the fashion industry, where social influence plays a significant role in shaping consumer choices (Joy et al., 2012).

Third, communication can enhance perceived behavioural control by providing practical guidance and resources. For instance, tutorials on garment repair or information about recycling programs can empower consumers to engage in circular practices. By reducing perceived barriers, communication increases the likelihood of behavioural change.

TPB also highlights the importance of consistency between attitudes, intentions, and behaviours. While many consumers express positive attitudes toward sustainability, this does not always translate into action, a phenomenon known as the attitude-behaviour gap. Effective

communication strategies must therefore address not only cognitive factors but also emotional and contextual influences.

3.4 Integration of Theoretical Perspectives

The integration of Signalling Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and TPB provides a holistic framework for analysing circular fashion communication. While signalling theory focuses on information transmission and credibility, stakeholder theory emphasises relational dynamics and ethical considerations. TPB, in turn, explains how communication influences individual behaviour.

Together, these theories suggest that effective circular fashion communication must be credible, inclusive, and behaviorally oriented. It should provide clear and trustworthy information, engage diverse stakeholders, and motivate consumers to adopt sustainable practices. This integrated framework serves as the foundation for the analysis conducted in this study.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary data analysis. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for exploring complex and context-dependent phenomena, such as communication strategies and consumer perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Unlike quantitative approaches, which focus on numerical measurement, qualitative research emphasises interpretation, meaning, and depth of understanding.

Secondary data analysis involves the use of existing data sources to address new research questions (Johnston, 2017). In the context of this study, secondary data provide a rich and diverse set of materials, including academic literature, industry reports, brand communications, and policy documents. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of circular fashion communication without the constraints of primary data collection.

4.1 Data Sources

The study draws on multiple types of secondary data to ensure breadth and depth of analysis. These include:

- **Academic Literature:** Peer-reviewed journal articles and books on circular economy, sustainable fashion, and communication strategies.
- **Industry Reports:** Publications from organisations such as consulting firms, non-profit institutions, and industry associations.
- **Brand Communications:** Sustainability reports, marketing campaigns, and digital content from fashion brands.
- **Policy Documents:** Government and international organisation reports on sustainability and circular economy initiatives.

The use of diverse data sources enables triangulation, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings (Denzin, 1978).

4.2 Data Collection and Selection Criteria

Data were collected through systematic searches of academic databases, organisational websites, and digital platforms. Keywords included “circular fashion,” “sustainability communication,” “green marketing,” and “consumer behaviour.”

The selection of data followed specific inclusion criteria:

- Relevance to circular fashion or sustainability communication
- Publication in reputable academic journals or recognised industry sources
- Availability of detailed information on communication strategies
- Recency, with a preference for sources published within the last decade

Exclusion criteria included:

- Sources lacking academic or practical credibility
- Irrelevant or outdated materials
- Duplicate or redundant information

This systematic approach ensured that the data set was both relevant and comprehensive.

4.3 Data Analysis: Thematic Approach

The study employs thematic analysis as the primary method of data analysis. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

It is particularly suitable for synthesising diverse data sources and generating insights into complex phenomena.

The analysis followed a six-step process:

- **Familiarisation:** Reviewing and understanding the data corpus.
- **Initial Coding:** Identifying relevant segments of text and assigning codes.
- **Theme Development:** Grouping codes into broader themes.
- **Reviewing Themes:** Refining and validating the themes.
- **Defining and Naming Themes:** स्पष्ट articulation of each theme.
- **Interpretation:** Linking themes to theoretical frameworks and research questions.

The themes identified in this study include transparency, storytelling, education, participation, and digital engagement.

4.4 Reliability and Validity

Ensuring the rigour of qualitative research is essential for producing credible findings. This study employs several strategies to enhance reliability and validity:

- **Triangulation:** Using multiple data sources to cross-verify findings (Denzin, 1978).
- **Transparency:** documentation of data collection and analysis.
- **Consistency:** Systematic application of coding and thematic analysis.
- **Theoretical Integration:** Linking findings to established theories to enhance interpretive validity.

These measures contribute to the robustness and trustworthiness of the research.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

As a secondary data study, this research does not involve direct interaction with human participants. However, ethical considerations remain important, particularly in relation to data usage and representation. All sources are properly cited, and care is taken to accurately represent the original context and meaning of the data (Mannan & Farhana, 2026).

4.6 Limitations of the Methodology

While secondary qualitative research offers several advantages, it also has limitations. First, the study relies on existing data, which may not fully address the specific research questions. Second, the interpretation of data is inherently subjective, although this is mitigated through systematic analysis and theoretical grounding.

Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a comprehensive and flexible approach to exploring circular fashion communication.

5. Findings and Analysis

The thematic analysis of secondary data reveals that circular fashion communication is characterised by a complex interplay of informational, emotional, behavioural, and participatory strategies. These strategies are not implemented in isolation but are often integrated to address multiple dimensions of consumer engagement, trust-building, and behavioural change. The findings are organised into six major themes: transparency and traceability, storytelling and

emotional engagement, educational communication, participatory communication, digital and social media strategies, and challenges in circular communication.

5.1 Transparency and Traceability

Transparency emerges as one of the most critical elements in circular fashion communication. It refers to the extent to which brands disclose information about their supply chains, sourcing practices, production processes, and environmental impacts. Traceability, a related concept, involves the ability to track the lifecycle of a product from raw materials to end-of-life stages.

The increasing demand for transparency is largely driven by consumer scepticism and the prevalence of greenwashing. Consumers are no longer satisfied with vague sustainability claims; instead, they seek verifiable and detailed information (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). As a result, many fashion brands have adopted transparency as a core communication strategy, using tools such as sustainability reports, product labelling, and digital traceability platforms.

From a signalling theory perspective, transparency functions as a high-quality signal that reduces information asymmetry between brands and consumers (Spence, 1973). Detailed disclosures about materials, labour conditions, and environmental impacts enhance credibility and foster trust. However, the effectiveness of transparency depends on its clarity and accessibility. Overly technical or complex information may overwhelm consumers, leading to

disengagement rather than empowerment (Henninger et al., 2016).

Furthermore, transparency is not merely a communication tool but also a strategic imperative. Brands that fail to provide adequate information risk reputational damage and loss of consumer trust. Conversely, those that demonstrate openness and accountability are more likely to build long-term relationships with stakeholders.

5.2 Storytelling and Emotional Engagement

Storytelling is a powerful mechanism for translating abstract sustainability concepts into relatable and meaningful narratives. In circular fashion communication, storytelling often focuses on the lifecycle of garments, the artisans involved in production, and the environmental impact of materials and processes.

Emotional engagement plays a crucial role in influencing consumer behaviour. While informational communication addresses cognitive aspects, storytelling appeals to emotions, values, and identity. For example, narratives that highlight the transformation of waste materials into new products can evoke a sense of innovation and responsibility, encouraging consumers to support circular initiatives.

The effectiveness of storytelling can be understood through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). By shaping attitudes toward sustainability, storytelling increases the likelihood of positive behavioural intentions. Additionally, stories that emphasise social norms—such as the growing popularity of sustainable

fashion-can influence subjective norms and reinforce desirable behaviours.

However, the use of storytelling also presents challenges. If narratives are perceived as exaggerated or inauthentic, they may be interpreted as greenwashing. Authenticity is therefore essential in storytelling, requiring alignment between communication and actual practices. Brands must ensure that their narratives are supported by tangible actions and evidence.

5.3 Educational Communication

Educational communication is a key strategy for addressing the knowledge gap associated with circular fashion. Many consumers are unfamiliar with concepts such as recycling, upcycling, and product lifecycle extension, which can hinder their ability to participate in circular systems.

Educational initiatives include providing information on garment care, repair techniques, and recycling programs. These efforts aim to empower consumers by enhancing their understanding of sustainability and enabling them to make informed decisions. For instance, care instructions that promote longer garment use can significantly reduce environmental impact.

From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, educational communication enhances perceived behavioural control by providing consumers with the knowledge and resources needed to engage in sustainable practices (Ajzen, 1991). This, in turn, increases the likelihood of behavioural change.

Moreover, education contributes to the normalisation of circular practices. As consumers become more informed, sustainable behaviours are more likely to be perceived as standard rather than exceptional. This shift in perception is critical for the widespread adoption of circular fashion.

Despite its importance, educational communication must be carefully designed to avoid information overload. Simplifying complex concepts without compromising accuracy is a key challenge. Visual aids, infographics, and interactive tools can enhance comprehension and engagement.

5.4 Participatory Communication

Participatory communication represents a shift from passive consumption to active engagement. Circularly, consumers are not merely recipients of information but active participants in the lifecycle of products. This includes activities such as returning used garments, participating in repair workshops, and contributing to user-generated content.

Participatory strategies align closely with stakeholder theory, which emphasises the importance of engaging multiple stakeholders in value creation (Freeman et al., 2010). By involving consumers in circular practices, brands foster a sense of ownership and responsibility, strengthening the relationship between the brand and its audience.

Participation also enhances the effectiveness of communication by making it experiential. Rather than simply informing consumers about sustainability, participatory initiatives allow them to experience it firsthand. This experiential learning can lead to deeper

understanding and more sustained behavioural change.

However, participatory communication requires careful implementation. Barriers such as inconvenience, lack of infrastructure, and limited accessibility can hinder participation. Brands must therefore ensure that participatory initiatives are user-friendly and widely accessible.

5.5 Digital and Social Media Strategies

Digital and social media platforms play a central role in circular fashion communication. These platforms enable brands to reach large audiences, provide real-time updates, and engage in interactive communication. Social media campaigns, in particular, have become a key tool for promoting sustainability.

Digital communication offers several advantages, including scalability, personalisation, and interactivity. Brands can tailor messages to specific audiences, track engagement metrics, and adjust strategies accordingly. Additionally, user-generated content and influencer collaborations can amplify the reach and impact of sustainability messages.

However, the digital environment also presents challenges. The abundance of information can lead to cognitive overload, reducing the effectiveness of communication. Moreover, the transparency of digital platforms increases scrutiny, making it easier for consumers and advocacy groups to identify inconsistencies or misleading claims (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

To navigate these challenges, brands must adopt a strategic approach to digital communication, focusing on authenticity, consistency, and engagement. Integrating multiple channels and formats can enhance the effectiveness of communication.

5.6 Challenges in Circular Fashion Communication

Despite the adoption of various communication strategies, several challenges persist. These include:

- **Complexity of Circular Concepts:** The multifaceted nature of circular fashion makes it difficult to communicate effectively.
- **Consumer Scepticism:** Widespread greenwashing has led to distrust and scepticism.
- **Lack of Standardisation:** The absence of standardised communication frameworks creates inconsistency and confusion.

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort among brands, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Standardised labelling systems, regulatory frameworks, and collaborative initiatives can enhance the clarity and credibility of communication.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of circular fashion communication strategies and their implications for consumer behaviour and industry transformation. This section integrates the findings with the theoretical

framework and existing literature, offering deeper interpretation and critical insights.

6.1 Communication as a Strategic Enabler of Circular Fashion

The analysis highlights that communication is not merely a supportive function but a strategic enabler of circular fashion. It bridges the gap between complex sustainability practices and consumer understanding, facilitating the adoption of circular behaviours. This aligns with the broader literature on sustainability communication, which emphasises the role of communication in driving behavioural change (Peattie & Crane, 2005).

From a signalling theory perspective, communication serves as a mechanism for reducing information asymmetry and building trust. High-quality signals, such as transparency and third-party certifications, enhance credibility and differentiate genuine sustainability efforts from greenwashing (Connelly et al., 2011). This underscores the importance of investing in credible and verifiable communication practices.

6.2 Integration of Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioural Dimensions

One of the key insights from the findings is the integration of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions in circular fashion communication. Informational strategies address cognitive aspects by providing knowledge and awareness, while storytelling engages emotions and values. Participatory initiatives, in turn, translate these cognitive and emotional responses into action.

This multidimensional approach is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which emphasises the interplay between attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Effective communication strategies must therefore address all three components to influence behaviour.

The integration of these dimensions also highlights the limitations of purely informational approaches. While knowledge is necessary, it is not sufficient to drive behavioural change. Emotional engagement and experiential learning are equally important in shaping consumer behaviour.

6.3 The Role of Trust and Credibility

Trust emerges as a central theme in circular fashion communication. In an environment characterised by information overload and widespread scepticism, credibility is a critical determinant of communication effectiveness. Transparency, traceability, and third-party verification are key mechanisms for building trust.

Stakeholder theory provides a useful framework for understanding the relational aspects of trust. By engaging stakeholders in meaningful dialogue and collaboration, brands can foster trust and mutual understanding (Freeman, 1984). This relational approach contrasts with traditional one-way communication, emphasising the importance of interaction and engagement.

However, building trust is a long-term process that requires consistency and authenticity. Any discrepancy between communication and actual practices can

undermine credibility and damage brand reputation. This highlights the need for alignment between communication strategies and organisational practices.

6.4 Digital Transformation and Communication Dynamics

The findings underscore the transformative impact of digital media on circular fashion communication. Digital platforms enable greater transparency, interactivity, and personalisation, enhancing the effectiveness of communication. At the same time, they increase scrutiny and accountability, requiring brands to adopt more authentic and consistent communication practices.

The digital environment also facilitates the emergence of new forms of communication, such as influencer marketing and user-generated content. These forms of communication leverage social influence and peer networks, which are particularly important in the fashion industry (Joy et al., 2012).

However, the digital landscape also presents challenges, including information overload and the rapid spread of misinformation. Brands must therefore carefully manage their digital communication strategies to ensure clarity and credibility.

6.5 Implications for Practice

The findings have several implications for practitioners in the fashion industry:

- **Adopt Integrated Communication Strategies:** Combining informational, emotional, and participatory approaches enhances effectiveness.

- **Prioritise Transparency and Authenticity:** Clear and verifiable communication builds trust and credibility.
- **Leverage Digital Platforms Strategically:** Use digital tools to enhance engagement while maintaining consistency.
- **Engage Stakeholders Actively:** Foster collaboration and dialogue to support circular practices.

6.6 Implications for Policy and Future Research

From a policy perspective, the lack of standardised communication frameworks highlights the need for regulatory intervention. Standardised labelling systems and guidelines can enhance clarity and reduce confusion.

Future research should explore empirical validation of communication strategies and examine the role of emerging technologies, such as blockchain, in enhancing transparency and traceability.

In conclusion, circular fashion communication is a complex and multifaceted process that requires the integration of multiple strategies and theoretical perspectives. By addressing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions, effective communication can facilitate the transition toward a more sustainable and circular fashion industry.

7. Conclusion

This study has explored circular fashion communication strategies through a

qualitative analysis of secondary data, providing both theoretical and practical insights into how communication facilitates the transition from linear to circular systems in the fashion industry. The findings demonstrate that communication is not merely an auxiliary function but a central mechanism that shapes consumer understanding, trust, and behavioural engagement with sustainability initiatives.

A key conclusion of this research is that effective circular fashion communication requires the integration of multiple strategic dimensions. Transparency and traceability are essential for building credibility and addressing consumer scepticism, particularly in an environment where greenwashing has eroded trust. At the same time, storytelling and emotional engagement play a critical role in making complex sustainability concepts relatable and meaningful, thereby influencing attitudes and values. Educational communication further enhances consumer knowledge and perceived behavioural control, while participatory initiatives foster active engagement and long-term behavioural change.

The study also highlights the transformative role of digital media in shaping contemporary communication practices. Digital platforms enable real-time interaction, personalised messaging, and broader dissemination of sustainability information. However, they also increase scrutiny and demand higher levels of authenticity and consistency from brands. As such, organisations must carefully balance visibility with credibility in their communication strategies.

From a theoretical perspective, the integration of Signalling Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how communication operates circularly. This integrated approach underscores the importance of credibility, stakeholder engagement, and behavioural motivation in driving sustainable consumption.

Despite these contributions, several challenges remain. The complexity of circular systems, the persistence of the attitude-behaviour gap, and the lack of standardised communication frameworks continue to hinder the effectiveness of sustainability messaging. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts among industry stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers.

In conclusion, circular fashion communication is a dynamic and evolving field that plays a pivotal role in advancing sustainability in the fashion industry. Future research should focus on empirical validation of communication strategies and explore the potential of emerging technologies to enhance transparency and engagement. By adopting integrated, authentic, and stakeholder-oriented communication approaches, the fashion industry can more effectively support the transition toward a circular and sustainable future.

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