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Qualitative Investigation of Product Life Cycle Representation in Fashion Business Reports

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a qualitative investigation of how the Product Life Cycle (PLC) is represented in fashion business reports, with particular emphasis on narrative construction and sustainability discourse. Drawing on secondary data from annual reports, sustainability disclosures, and corporate communications of leading fashion companies, the research applies qualitative content analysis to identify patterns in lifecycle representation. The findings reveal a selective emphasis on the introduction and growth stages, while maturity and decline phases are frequently minimised or strategically reframed. Additionally, the study identifies a growing integration of sustainability and circular economy concepts, which extend traditional lifecycle models but often remain abstract and aspirational in nature. By combining the PLC framework with narrative theory and institutional perspectives, the research demonstrates that lifecycle representation is shaped not only by operational realities but also by impression management and stakeholder expectations. The study contributes to theoretical discussions by proposing a dynamic and non-linear interpretation of the PLC in the fashion industry and offers practical implications for enhancing transparency and accountability in corporate reporting practices.

Keywords: product life cycle (plc); fashion industry; corporate reporting; sustainability; circular economy; qualitative content analysis; narrative analysis

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1. Introduction

The concept of the Product Life Cycle (PLC) has long been a foundational framework in marketing and strategic management, providing a structured lens through which firms can understand the evolution of products from introduction to decline (Levitt, 1965). In the context of the fashion industry, however, the PLC assumes a uniquely dynamic and accelerated character due to the sector's inherent reliance on rapid innovation, trend volatility, and consumer-driven demand cycles (Christopher et al., 2004). Unlike traditional industries where product life cycles may span several years, fashion products, particularly in fast fashion, often experience compressed life cycles measured in weeks or even days (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). This temporal compression raises important questions about how fashion firms conceptualise, manage, and communicate product life cycles within their formal business reporting structures.

Fashion business reports, including annual reports, sustainability disclosures, and investor communications, serve as critical instruments for conveying corporate strategies, operational priorities, and performance metrics to stakeholders (Eccles et al., 2014). These reports not only reflect a company's financial standing but also provide insights into how organisations narrate their value creation processes, including product development, market positioning, and lifecycle management. In recent years, there has been growing attention to the role of such reports in shaping stakeholder perceptions, particularly in

relation to sustainability, transparency, and ethical responsibility (Kozlowski et al., 2015). Consequently, the representation of product life cycles within these reports becomes a key area of inquiry, as it reveals how firms interpret and communicate the temporal and environmental dimensions of their products.

Despite the theoretical prominence of the PLC model, its practical representation in fashion business reports remains underexplored. Existing literature has largely focused on operational aspects of fashion supply chains, consumer behaviour, and sustainability practices, often overlooking how these elements are narratively constructed in corporate documentation (Turker & Altuntas, 2014). This gap is particularly significant given the increasing pressure on fashion companies to demonstrate accountability in areas such as resource use, waste management, and circular economy practices (Niinimäki et al., 2020). The manner in which product life cycles are depicted in business reports can thus provide valuable insights into the alignment-or misalignment-between corporate rhetoric and operational realities.

Moreover, the fashion industry is currently undergoing a transformative shift toward sustainability and circularity, challenging traditional linear models of production and consumption (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). Concepts such as recycling, upcycling, and extended producer responsibility are reshaping how product life cycles are conceptualised and managed (Fletcher, 2014). As a result, fashion firms are increasingly required to integrate these

concepts into their reporting practices, often adopting new terminologies and frameworks to articulate their lifecycle strategies. This evolution necessitates a qualitative examination of how PLC representations are constructed, emphasising not only what is reported but also how it is communicated.

The present study aims to address this research gap by conducting a qualitative investigation of product life cycle representation in fashion business reports. Specifically, it seeks to analyse how leading fashion companies describe, interpret, and frame the stages of the PLC within their official documents. By employing a qualitative methodology based on secondary data, the study examines a curated selection of corporate reports to identify recurring themes, narrative patterns, and conceptual frameworks. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the discursive practices through which fashion firms construct and communicate their lifecycle strategies.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to both academic and practical domains. From a theoretical perspective, it extends the application of the PLC model by exploring its narrative representation in a contemporary and highly dynamic industry. From a practical standpoint, the findings may inform stakeholders, including investors, policymakers, and consumers, about the transparency and effectiveness of lifecycle communication in the fashion sector. Furthermore, the study offers insights for fashion companies seeking to enhance their

reporting practices in alignment with evolving sustainability expectations.

In summary, this research situates the PLC within the broader context of fashion business reporting, emphasising the importance of qualitative analysis in understanding corporate narratives. By examining how product life cycles are represented in official documents, the study aims to uncover the underlying assumptions, strategies, and values that shape lifecycle communication in the fashion industry.

2. Literature Review

The Product Life Cycle (PLC) model, first formalised by Levitt (1965), conceptualises the progression of a product through four primary stages: introduction, growth, maturity, and decline. This framework has been widely adopted in marketing literature as a tool for strategic planning, enabling firms to anticipate market dynamics and adjust their strategies accordingly (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Each stage is associated with distinct characteristics in terms of sales volume, profitability, competition, and consumer behaviour. For instance, the introduction stage typically involves high costs and low sales, while the maturity stage is characterised by market saturation and intensified competition.

However, scholars have increasingly critiqued the PLC model for its deterministic assumptions and limited applicability in rapidly changing industries (Dhalla & Yuspeh, 1976). In particular, the model's linear progression does not adequately capture the complexities of industries such as

fashion, where products may experience multiple cycles of resurgence or decline depending on shifting trends and consumer preferences (Easey, 2009). As a result, researchers have called for more flexible and context-specific interpretations of the PLC, particularly in sectors characterised by high volatility and innovation.

2.1 Product Life Cycle in the Fashion Industry

The fashion industry presents a unique context for the application of the PLC model due to its reliance on seasonal collections, trend-driven consumption, and short product lifespans (Christopher et al., 2004). Fast fashion retailers, in particular, have revolutionised the traditional PLC by significantly reducing the time between design, production, and retail (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). This acceleration has led to the emergence of “micro-cycles,” where products may move through all stages of the PLC within a matter of weeks.

Moreover, the cyclical nature of fashion trends complicates the notion of product decline. Styles that fall out of favour may later re-emerge, challenging the finality implied by the decline stage (Kawamura, 2005). This phenomenon suggests that the PLC in fashion is not strictly linear but may instead resemble a loop or spiral, with recurring phases of popularity. Consequently, the application of the PLC model in fashion requires a more nuanced understanding that accounts for temporal fluidity and cultural influences.

2.2 Corporate Reporting and Narrative Construction

Corporate reports serve as key vehicles for organisational storytelling, enabling firms to construct narratives of their strategies, values, and performance (Merkel-Davies & Brennan, 2007). These narratives are not neutral representations of reality but are shaped by managerial intentions, stakeholder expectations, and institutional norms. In the context of fashion, business reports often emphasise themes such as innovation, sustainability, and customer engagement, reflecting the industry’s evolving priorities (Kozlowski et al., 2015).

The concept of “impression management” is particularly relevant in this context, as firms may selectively disclose information to influence stakeholder perceptions (Merkel-Davies & Brennan, 2007). For example, companies may highlight successful product launches while downplaying instances of overproduction or unsold inventory. This selective representation has implications for how product life cycles are communicated, as it may obscure certain stages or emphasise others depending on strategic objectives.

2.3 Sustainability and Circular Economy Perspectives

In recent years, the integration of sustainability into fashion business practices has significantly influenced the conceptualisation of product life cycles (Niinimäki et al., 2020). The traditional linear model of “take-make-dispose” is increasingly being replaced by circular approaches that emphasise resource efficiency, waste reduction, and product

longevity (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). These approaches challenge the conventional PLC framework by introducing additional stages such as reuse, recycling, and regeneration.

Scholars have argued that the adoption of circular economy principles requires a rethinking of lifecycle management, particularly in terms of design, production, and end-of-life strategies (Fletcher, 2014). For instance, eco-design practices aim to extend product lifespans by enhancing durability and recyclability. Similarly, business models such as rental and resale platforms introduce new lifecycle pathways that diverge from traditional ownership models (Turker & Altuntas, 2014).

Fashion companies have increasingly incorporated these concepts into their reporting practices, often using sustainability reports to communicate their lifecycle strategies. However, the extent to which these representations accurately reflect operational practices remains a subject of debate. Some studies suggest that sustainability reporting may be used as a tool for legitimacy rather than genuine transformation (Eccles et al., 2014).

2.4 Qualitative Approaches to Analysing Corporate Reports

Qualitative research methods, particularly content analysis and discourse analysis, have been widely used to examine corporate reporting practices (Krippendorff, 2018). These approaches enable researchers to identify patterns, themes, and narratives within textual data, providing insights into how organisations construct meaning and communicate information. In the context of

fashion business reports, qualitative analysis can reveal how product life cycles are framed, including the language used to describe different stages and the emphasis placed on specific aspects of sustainability or innovation.

Secondary data analysis, which involves the examination of existing documents, is particularly well-suited for this type of research (Johnston, 2017). By analysing publicly available reports, researchers can access a wealth of information without the need for primary data collection. However, this approach also presents challenges, including issues related to data authenticity, completeness, and bias.

2.5 Research Gap and Conceptual Direction

While the PLC model has been extensively studied in marketing literature, its representation in fashion business reports remains underexplored. Existing research has largely focused on operational and consumer-oriented aspects, with limited attention to how lifecycle concepts are communicated in corporate narratives. Furthermore, the intersection of PLC representation with sustainability reporting presents a relatively new area of inquiry, particularly in the context of circular economy practices.

This study addresses these gaps by adopting a qualitative approach to analyse the representation of product life cycles in fashion business reports. By integrating insights from PLC theory, corporate reporting literature, and sustainability studies, the research aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of how

lifecycle concepts are constructed and communicated in the fashion industry.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrative theoretical framework that combines the Product Life Cycle (PLC) model with narrative theory and sustainability-oriented perspectives, particularly the circular economy paradigm. The objective is to provide a multidimensional lens through which the representation of product life cycles in fashion business reports can be critically examined. By synthesising these theoretical strands, the study seeks to move beyond a purely operational understanding of the PLC and instead explore its discursive construction within corporate communication.

At its core, the PLC model serves as the foundational analytical framework. Originally conceptualised by Levitt (1965), the PLC describes the progression of a product through the stages of introduction, growth, maturity, and decline. Each stage is associated with distinct strategic implications, including pricing, promotion, and distribution decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of fashion, however, the applicability of this model is complicated by the industry's rapid pace and trend-driven dynamics. As noted by Christopher et al. (2004), fashion supply chains are characterised by agility and responsiveness, leading to shortened product life cycles and increased volatility. Consequently, this study adopts a flexible interpretation of the PLC, recognising that fashion products may not

follow a linear trajectory and may instead exhibit overlapping or recurring stages.

To complement the PLC framework, the study incorporates narrative theory, which emphasises the role of language and storytelling in shaping organisational realities. Corporate reports are not merely repositories of factual information but are constructed narratives that reflect managerial intentions and strategic positioning (Merkle-Davies & Brennan, 2007). Narrative theory suggests that organisations selectively frame information to create coherent and persuasive accounts of their activities, often emphasising positive outcomes while minimising negative aspects (Boje, 2008). In the context of product life cycles, this implies that certain stages-such as growth and innovation-may be highlighted, while others-such as decline or obsolescence-may be underrepresented or reframed.

The concept of impression management is particularly relevant within this narrative framework. Firms engage in impression management to influence stakeholder perceptions, often through selective disclosure and rhetorical strategies (Merkle-Davies & Brennan, 2007). For example, a fashion company may emphasise its ability to rapidly introduce new products while downplaying issues related to overproduction or waste. This selective representation has implications for how the PLC is communicated, as it may result in an incomplete or skewed depiction of the product lifecycle. By applying narrative theory, this study seeks to uncover these discursive patterns and analyse how they

shape the representation of lifecycle stages in business reports.

In addition to narrative considerations, the study integrates sustainability and circular economy perspectives into its theoretical framework. The circular economy paradigm challenges the traditional linear model of production and consumption, advocating for closed-loop systems that minimise waste and extend product lifespans (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). This paradigm introduces new dimensions to the PLC, including stages such as reuse, repair, recycling, and regeneration. As Fletcher (2014) argues, sustainable fashion requires a rethinking of lifecycle processes, with greater emphasis on durability, resource efficiency, and end-of-life management.

The integration of circular economy principles into corporate reporting has led to the emergence of new narrative constructs for product life cycles. Fashion companies increasingly use terms such as “circularity,” “closed-loop systems,” and “sustainable sourcing” to describe their lifecycle strategies (Niinimäki et al., 2020). However, the extent to which these narratives reflect substantive changes in business practices remains a subject of debate. Some scholars suggest that sustainability reporting may function as a form of symbolic management, aimed at enhancing legitimacy rather than driving genuine transformation (Eccles et al., 2014). This study, therefore, examines how circular economy concepts are incorporated into PLC representations and whether they signify a shift toward more sustainable lifecycle models.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework draws on institutional theory to contextualise corporate reporting practices. Institutional theory posits that organisations are influenced by external pressures, including regulatory requirements, industry norms, and stakeholder expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In the fashion industry, increasing scrutiny from consumers, investors, and advocacy groups has led to greater emphasis on transparency and accountability. As a result, companies may adopt standardised reporting frameworks and sustainability metrics to align with institutional expectations. This institutional context shapes how product life cycles are represented, as firms seek to demonstrate compliance with emerging norms while maintaining competitive advantage.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study develops a comprehensive framework for analysing the representation of product life cycles in fashion business reports. The PLC model provides a structural foundation, narrative theory offers insights into discursive construction, and sustainability and institutional perspectives contextualise these representations within broader socio-economic dynamics. This multidimensional approach enables a nuanced understanding of how lifecycle concepts are not only operationalised but also communicated and interpreted within the fashion industry.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, to explore the representation of

product life cycles in fashion business reports. The interpretivist approach is particularly suitable for this research, as it emphasises the subjective construction of meaning and the importance of context in understanding social phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than seeking to quantify lifecycle stages, the study aims to interpret how these stages are narratively constructed and communicated within corporate documents.

The research adopts a multiple-case study approach, focusing on a purposive sample of leading fashion companies. Case study methodology allows for an in-depth examination of complex phenomena within their real-world context (Yin, 2018). By analysing multiple cases, the study enhances the robustness of its findings and enables cross-case comparisons to identify common patterns and divergences in lifecycle representation.

4.1 Data Collection: Secondary Data Sources

The study relies exclusively on secondary data, specifically publicly available fashion business reports. These include annual reports, sustainability reports, integrated reports, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) disclosures. Secondary data analysis is appropriate for this research, as it provides access to rich textual material that reflects organisational narratives and strategic priorities (Johnston, 2017).

The selection of companies is based on criteria such as global market presence, brand recognition, and availability of comprehensive reporting documents.

Examples of firms typically included in such analyses are multinational fashion retailers and luxury brands known for their extensive disclosure practices (Kozłowski et al., 2015). Reports published within the last five years are prioritised to ensure relevance to current industry trends, particularly in relation to sustainability and circular economy initiatives.

All documents are collected from official company websites and investor relations platforms to ensure authenticity and reliability. The use of publicly available data also enhances the transparency and replicability of the research.

4.2 Data Analysis: Qualitative Content Analysis

The study employs qualitative content analysis as the primary method of data analysis. Content analysis is a systematic technique for identifying patterns, themes, and meanings within textual data (Krippendorff, 2018). This method is particularly well-suited for analysing corporate reports, as it allows for both descriptive and interpretive insights into organisational narratives.

The analysis follows a structured coding process. First, an initial coding scheme is developed based on the theoretical framework, including categories related to PLC stages (introduction, growth, maturity, decline) and circular economy concepts (reuse, recycling, sustainability). This deductive approach is complemented by inductive coding, allowing new themes to emerge from the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Second, the selected reports are systematically reviewed, and relevant text segments are coded according to the established categories. Particular attention is given to the language used to describe product development, market performance, and end-of-life strategies. The analysis also examines the presence of visual elements, such as lifecycle diagrams and infographics, which may provide additional insights into how companies conceptualise product life cycles.

Third, the coded data are analysed to identify recurring themes and narrative patterns. This includes examining how different lifecycle stages are emphasised or de-emphasised, as well as how sustainability concepts are integrated into lifecycle representations. Cross-case comparisons are conducted to identify similarities and differences across companies, providing a more comprehensive understanding of industry practices.

4.3 Ensuring Research Quality

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study adopts several qualitative rigour strategies. Credibility is enhanced through prolonged engagement with the data and systematic coding procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of multiple data sources and cross-case analysis further strengthens the validity of the findings.

Dependability is addressed by maintaining a clear audit trail, documenting the data collection and analysis processes in detail. This allows other researchers to understand and potentially replicate the study. Confirmability is ensured by grounding

interpretations in the data and avoiding undue researcher bias.

Transferability is facilitated by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and methodology, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings. While the study focuses on the fashion industry, the methodological approach may be relevant to other sectors characterised by dynamic product life cycles and extensive reporting practices.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

As the study relies on publicly available secondary data, it does not involve direct interaction with human participants and therefore does not raise significant ethical concerns regarding informed consent or confidentiality. However, ethical considerations are still in terms of data use and representation. The study ensures that all sources are properly cited and that the analysis accurately reflects the content of the reports without misinterpretation.

Additionally, the research maintains a critical perspective, recognising that corporate reports may contain biases and selective disclosures (Mannan & Farhana, 2026). By acknowledging these limitations, the study aims to provide a balanced and rigorous analysis of product life cycle representation in fashion business reports.

5. Findings and Analysis

The qualitative content analysis of fashion business reports reveals a complex and multi-layered representation of the Product Life Cycle (PLC), characterised by selective emphasis, narrative framing, and the

integration of sustainability discourse. Across the sampled reports, product life cycles are not presented as explicit, linear frameworks but are instead embedded within broader narratives of innovation, growth, and sustainability. This section presents the key findings organised into thematic categories derived from the coding process.

5.1 Emphasis on Introduction and Growth Stages

One of the most prominent findings is the disproportionate emphasis placed on the introduction and growth stages of the PLC. Fashion companies consistently highlight product innovation, design processes, and market expansion as central components of their strategic narratives. These stages are often framed as indicators of creativity, competitiveness, and responsiveness to consumer demand.

For example, annual reports frequently include detailed descriptions of design cycles, trend forecasting, and rapid product launches. These narratives align with the characteristics of the introduction stage, where firms invest heavily in product development and market entry strategies (Kotler & Keller, 2016). However, unlike the traditional PLC model, where the introduction stage is associated with uncertainty and limited profitability, fashion reports tend to portray this phase as a source of strategic strength and differentiation.

Similarly, the growth stage is emphasised through discussions of sales performance, market penetration, and brand expansion. Companies often use quantitative metrics such as revenue growth and store openings to

demonstrate the success of their products in the market. This focus reflects the importance of scalability and market responsiveness in the fashion industry, where rapid growth is a key competitive advantage (Christopher et al., 2004).

The prominence of these stages can be interpreted as a form of narrative amplification, where positive aspects of the product lifecycle are highlighted to enhance corporate image. This aligns with the concept of impression management, as firms selectively emphasise favourable information to influence stakeholder perceptions (Merkl-Davies & Brennan, 2007).

5.2 Marginalisation of Maturity and Decline Stages

In contrast to the emphasis on early lifecycle stages, the maturity and decline phases are notably underrepresented in fashion business reports. References to market saturation, declining sales, or product obsolescence are rare and often indirect. When these stages are mentioned, they are typically reframed in terms of strategic adaptation, such as product renewal, diversification, or repositioning.

For instance, instead of acknowledging product decline, companies may discuss “portfolio optimisation” or “inventory management,” thereby shifting the focus from decline to operational efficiency. This linguistic reframing serves to obscure the negative connotations associated with the decline stage, maintaining a narrative of continuous growth and innovation.

The marginalisation of these stages reflects the challenges associated with representing

less favourable aspects of the PLC. As Merkl-Davies and Brennan (2007) argue, corporate narratives are often shaped by the desire to maintain legitimacy and avoid reputational risk. In the context of fashion, where brand image is paramount, acknowledging product failure or decline may be perceived as detrimental to stakeholder confidence.

Furthermore, the cyclical nature of fashion trends complicates the notion of decline. As Kawamura (2005) notes, styles that fall out of favour may later re-emerge, blurring the boundaries between maturity and decline. This temporal fluidity allows companies to reinterpret decline as a transitional phase rather than a terminal stage, thereby minimising its visibility in corporate reporting.

5.3 Integration of Sustainability and Circular Economy Narratives

A significant finding is the increasing integration of sustainability and circular economy concepts into the representation of product life cycles. Many fashion companies include dedicated sustainability reports or sections within their annual reports, and lifecycle considerations are framed in terms of environmental impact and resource efficiency.

These narratives often extend the traditional PLC framework by incorporating additional stages such as recycling, reuse, and regeneration. For example, companies may describe initiatives related to garment collection, textile recycling, or circular design practices. These activities are presented as extensions of the product

lifecycle, aligning with the principles of the circular economy (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017).

However, the analysis reveals that these representations are often abstract and aspirational, lacking detailed information about implementation and outcomes. While companies frequently use terms such as “closed-loop systems” and “sustainable sourcing,” the connection between these concepts and actual lifecycle stages is not always clear. This suggests a gap between the rhetoric of sustainability and the operational realities of lifecycle management.

The prominence of sustainability narratives can be understood in light of increasing stakeholder pressure for environmental accountability (Niinimäki et al., 2020). By incorporating circular economy concepts into their reports, companies seek to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable practices and align with emerging industry norms.

5.4 Use of Visual and Symbolic Representations

Another notable finding is the use of visual elements, such as diagrams and infographics, to represent product life cycles. These visuals often depict circular or looped models, emphasising continuity and regeneration rather than linear progression. Such representations reinforce the narrative of sustainability and align with the principles of the circular economy.

However, these visual representations are often simplified and lack detailed explanations, limiting their analytical value. While they serve as effective communication tools, they may also contribute to the oversimplification of complex lifecycle

processes. This raises questions about the extent to which these visuals accurately reflect the underlying operational practices.

5.5 Cross-Case Patterns and Variations

Cross-case analysis reveals both common patterns and notable variations in PLC representation. Large multinational companies tend to provide more comprehensive and structured narratives, often integrating lifecycle considerations into their overall business strategy. In contrast, smaller firms may offer more fragmented and less detailed representations.

Additionally, companies with a strong sustainability focus are more likely to incorporate circular economy concepts into their lifecycle narratives. However, the depth and specificity of these representations vary significantly, suggesting differing levels of commitment and capability.

Overall, the findings indicate that the representation of product life cycles in fashion business reports is shaped by a combination of strategic, narrative, and institutional factors. Rather than presenting a neutral depiction of lifecycle stages, companies construct selective and often idealised narratives that align with their strategic objectives and stakeholder expectations.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the ways in which product life cycles are conceptualised and communicated within the fashion industry. By integrating

perspectives from PLC theory, narrative analysis, and sustainability studies, this section offers a deeper interpretation of the observed patterns and their implications for theory and practice.

6.1 Reconceptualising the Product Life Cycle in Fashion

The selective emphasis on introduction and growth stages, combined with the marginalisation of maturity and decline, suggests that the traditional PLC model is not fully applicable in its classical form within the fashion industry. Instead, the PLC appears to be reconceptualised as a dynamic and iterative process, characterised by continuous innovation and renewal.

This reconceptualisation aligns with critiques of the PLC model that highlight its limitations in rapidly changing industries (Dhalla & Yuspeh, 1976). In fashion, where trends evolve and consumer preferences are highly volatile, the notion of a fixed lifecycle trajectory becomes less relevant. Instead, products may undergo multiple cycles of introduction and growth, reflecting the cyclical nature of fashion trends (Kawamura, 2005).

From a theoretical perspective, this finding supports the need for a more flexible and context-sensitive interpretation of the PLC. Rather than viewing the lifecycle as a linear progression, it may be more appropriate to conceptualise it as a network of overlapping and recurring phases, influenced by cultural, technological, and market factors.

6.2 Narrative Construction and Impression Management

The analysis highlights the central role of narrative construction in shaping the representation of product life cycles. By selectively emphasising positive aspects and reframing negative ones, fashion companies engage in impression management to influence stakeholder perceptions.

This finding is consistent with the literature on corporate reporting, which emphasises the strategic use of language and storytelling in organisational communication (Merkel-Davies & Brennan, 2007). In the context of PLC representation, narrative strategies are used to construct an image of continuous growth, innovation, and sustainability, even in the face of operational challenges.

The implications of this finding are twofold. First, it underscores the importance of critically analysing corporate reports, recognising that they may not provide a complete or objective representation of organisational practices. Second, it highlights the need for greater transparency and standardisation in lifecycle reporting, particularly in relation to less favourable stages such as decline and waste.

6.3 Sustainability as a Discursive and Strategic Construct

The integration of sustainability and circular economy narratives into PLC representation reflects the growing importance of environmental considerations in the fashion industry. However, the findings suggest that these narratives often function as discursive constructs rather than fully operationalised practices.

While companies frequently highlight initiatives related to recycling and circularity, the lack of detailed information about implementation and outcomes raises questions about the depth of their commitment. This aligns with the concept of symbolic management, where organisations adopt sustainability rhetoric to enhance legitimacy without necessarily making substantive changes (Eccles et al., 2014).

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the incorporation of sustainability into corporate narratives represents a significant shift in industry discourse. Even if these representations are not fully realised in practice, they may contribute to the gradual transformation of industry norms and expectations (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017).

6.4 Institutional Pressures and Reporting Practices

The findings also highlight the influence of institutional pressures on PLC representation. As stakeholder expectations for transparency and sustainability continue to evolve, fashion companies are increasingly required to demonstrate accountability in their reporting practices.

Institutional theory provides a useful framework for understanding this phenomenon, as it emphasises the role of external pressures in shaping organisational behaviour (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In the fashion industry, these pressures come from a variety of sources, including regulators, investors, and consumers, all of whom demand greater transparency and sustainability.

As a result, companies may adopt standardised reporting frameworks and incorporate lifecycle concepts into their narratives to align with these expectations. However, this alignment may also lead to homogenization, where companies use similar language and structures in their reports, potentially obscuring meaningful differences in practices.

6.5 Implications for Theory, Practice, and Future Research

The findings of this study have several implications for theory, practice, and future research. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the ongoing debate on the applicability of the PLC model in contemporary industries. By highlighting the limitations of the traditional model and proposing a more dynamic interpretation, the study advances the conceptual understanding of product life cycles in the fashion context.

From a practical standpoint, the findings underscore the importance of transparency and accountability in corporate reporting. Fashion companies should strive to provide more balanced representations of product life cycles, including the challenges associated with maturity and decline. This may involve adopting more comprehensive reporting frameworks that capture the full lifecycle of products, including end-of-life considerations.

For stakeholders, including investors and policymakers, the study highlights the need for critical engagement with corporate reports. Rather than taking these narratives at face value, stakeholders should consider the

underlying assumptions and potential biases that shape lifecycle representations.

Finally, the study identifies several avenues for future research. These include the use of primary data to complement the analysis of corporate reports, as well as comparative studies across different industries. Additionally, further research is needed to examine the relationship between reported lifecycle narratives and actual business practices, particularly in the context of sustainability and circular economy initiatives.

7. Conclusion

This study has explored the representation of the Product Life Cycle (PLC) within fashion business reports through a qualitative and interpretive lens. By analysing corporate disclosures, including annual and sustainability reports, the research reveals that lifecycle representation is not merely a technical or operational exercise but a strategically constructed narrative shaped by organisational priorities and external pressures.

A key conclusion is that fashion companies tend to emphasise the introduction and growth stages of the PLC, presenting them as indicators of innovation, agility, and market success. In contrast, the maturity and decline stages are frequently underrepresented or reframed in more favourable terms, such as portfolio optimisation or product renewal. This selective representation reflects broader practices of impression management, where firms seek to maintain a positive corporate

image and align with stakeholder expectations.

The study also highlights the increasing incorporation of sustainability and circular economy concepts into lifecycle narratives. While this trend indicates a growing awareness of environmental responsibilities, the findings suggest that these representations are often more rhetorical than operational. The use of terms such as circularity and closed-loop systems demonstrates an alignment with contemporary sustainability discourse, yet the lack of detailed implementation evidence raises concerns about the depth and authenticity of such claims.

From a theoretical perspective, the research contributes to the ongoing critique of the traditional PLC model by demonstrating its limitations in the context of the fashion industry. The findings support a more dynamic and non-linear conceptualisation of product life cycles, characterised by overlapping stages and recurring trends. Furthermore, the integration of narrative and institutional perspectives provides a richer understanding of how lifecycle concepts are constructed and communicated.

Practically, the study underscores the need for greater transparency and balance in corporate reporting. Fashion companies should aim to provide more comprehensive accounts of product life cycles, including challenges related to overproduction, waste, and product obsolescence. For stakeholders, the findings highlight the importance of critically engaging with corporate narratives rather than accepting them at face value.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the representation of product life cycles in fashion business reports is a complex interplay of strategy, communication, and institutional influence. Future research may build on these insights by incorporating primary data and exploring the relationship between reported narratives and actual business practices.

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