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# Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Fashion: An Integrated Approach towards Ethical Business Models

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## ABSTRACT

The fashion industry has come under scrutiny in recent years for unethical business practices related to labor, environmental sustainability, and socioeconomic impacts. However, many brands are now realizing the importance of incorporating ethical and sustainable practices through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. This research article provides an overview of the main CSR issues in the fashion industry and explains how brands can take an integrated approach to developing ethical business models. A review of academic literature explores the theoretical basis for CSR and its application to the fashion sector. The implementation of CSR practices is examined through case studies of leading sustainable brands. The findings show that integrating CSR across business operations in areas such as supply chain management, environmental impact, transparency, and community engagement can improve profitability while benefiting people and the planet. A conceptual framework is proposed to guide fashion companies in adopting a holistic CSR strategy. The article concludes that industry still faces challenges, but systemic change is achievable through collaboration and innovation.

**Keywords:** *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Globalization, Unethical labor practices, Stakeholder groups, Environmental sustainability, Legislative frameworks*

## Introduction

The explosive growth of the fashion industry, reaching a staggering \$2.5 trillion globally, represents a significant economic force. However, this prosperity has unveiled a dark underbelly, as the fashion sector has inadvertently become the second-largest contributor to environmental degradation, following only the oil industry. The rapid ascent of fast fashion, characterized by the quick production and sale of inexpensive garments to keep pace with ever-changing trends, has led to a myriad of ethical concerns plaguing the industry [1]. From exploitative labor practices and hazardous working conditions to animal mistreatment, toxic chemical usage, and mounting textile waste, the fashion sector stands accused of perpetuating a range of environmental and social injustices. In response to the escalating outcry from consumers, governmental bodies, and advocacy organizations, the fashion industry finds itself at a critical juncture, necessitating a fundamental shift in its modus operandi. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a strategic response to these multifaceted challenges, offering a structured framework for companies to integrate ethical, social, and environmental considerations seamlessly into their core

business strategies [2]. This paradigm shift underscores a growing recognition among fashion brands that mere profitability is no longer sufficient for long-term success. Instead, companies are compelled to adopt a more holistic approach that acknowledges their broader impact on society and the environment.

Figure 1.



CSR in the fashion industry manifests as a commitment to transparency and accountability, aiming to rebuild trust with stakeholders and mitigate the industry's adverse effects. Brands are increasingly expected to address the entire life cycle of their products, from sourcing raw materials to manufacturing, distribution, and eventual disposal. By embracing sustainable and ethical practices, fashion companies seek to minimize their carbon footprint, reduce waste, and foster fair labor practices throughout their supply chains. The integration of CSR principles also involves reevaluating the use of toxic chemicals, promoting cruelty-free alternatives, and investing in innovation to create environmentally friendly materials [3].

Consumers play a pivotal role in propelling the CSR movement within the fashion industry. The rise of conscious consumerism has spurred a demand for transparency and ethical practices, compelling brands to prioritize sustainability in response to changing market dynamics. Governments are also stepping in with regulatory frameworks to enforce ethical standards, imposing penalties for non-compliance and incentivizing responsible business practices. Furthermore, advocacy groups are amplifying their efforts to hold fashion brands accountable, employing various channels to raise awareness about unethical practices and mobilize public opinion [4]. The fashion industry's journey towards comprehensive CSR implementation involves overcoming considerable challenges. Balancing economic viability with ethical considerations requires strategic planning, innovation, and a willingness to challenge entrenched norms. While some leading fashion brands have made notable strides in adopting sustainable practices, the industry as a whole grapples with the inertia of deeply ingrained fast-fashion models. Overcoming this inertia necessitates collaborative efforts across the entire supply chain, from raw material suppliers to manufacturers, retailers, and consumers [5].

**Table 1: Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**

Time Period	Key Developments in CSR
Pre-1950s	Limited acknowledgment of societal impacts
1950s	Emergence of CSR in response to societal pressures
1980s-1990s	Globalization and offshoring, leading to unethical labor practices
2000s onwards	Integration of CSR into business strategies, focus on sustainability

This research article aims to provide an overview of CSR principles and practices in the context of the fashion industry. It examines the main sustainability issues faced by the sector and presents solutions companies can implement through a holistic CSR strategy. The theoretical basis for CSR is reviewed to understand its role in building ethical business models. Case studies of leading sustainable fashion brands provide examples of how CSR can be successfully embedded across business operations. A conceptual framework is proposed to guide companies wishing to take a more integrated approach. The findings indicate that CSR has evolved from an optional add-on to a business imperative for fashion brands aiming to futureproof their operations in a resource-constrained world [6]. However, challenges remain in disrupting an inherently exploitative fast fashion model. The conclusion reflects on progress made while arguing that continued industry-wide collaboration and innovation are required to transform fashion into a truly ethical, closed loop system.

### **Theoretical Background on CSR**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a multifaceted framework that encapsulates the ethical, legal, social, and environmental obligations of enterprises to diverse stakeholder groups. The genesis of CSR can be traced back centuries; however, its solidification occurred in the 1950s when businesses started acknowledging and responding to societal pressures [7]. The dynamism of the corporate landscape in the 1980s and 1990s, propelled by globalization, ushered in a paradigm shift in manufacturing practices. The outsourcing of production to developing countries became a prevailing trend, bringing with it a dark underbelly of unethical labor practices. As corporations sought cost advantages, some turned a blind eye to the exploitation of labor in pursuit of profit. This period marked a pivotal juncture in the evolution of CSR as the ripple effects of such practices reverberated globally, prompting heightened scrutiny. The consequences of unethical labor practices during the era of globalization were not confined to boardrooms; they spilled into the public domain, triggering a groundswell of discontent among consumers and activists alike. The ethical void left by companies pursuing profit at the expense of humane working conditions spurred a backlash that reverberated through various channels of society. The emergence of social media and the interconnectedness it fostered played a pivotal role in amplifying these concerns, turning isolated incidents into global conversations. As consumer awareness grew, so did the demand for accountability from corporations, setting the stage for a reevaluation of business practices through the lens of CSR. This growing tide of societal consciousness pushed CSR to the forefront of the corporate agenda, compelling companies to reexamine their strategies and redefine their role in the broader social context. In response to the mounting pressure, corporations began to recognize that their responsibilities extended beyond mere profit generation [8]. The integration of CSR into business strategies became not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for long-term sustainability [9]. This paradigm shift was not confined to addressing labor practices alone; it encompassed a broader spectrum of issues, including environmental sustainability and community engagement. Recognizing the interconnectedness of business operations with the larger societal fabric, companies started to adopt proactive measures to mitigate their adverse impacts. Environmental conservation initiatives, ethical sourcing policies, and community development programs became integral components of CSR frameworks. Governments and international bodies also played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of CSR. Legislative frameworks were introduced to mandate and regulate corporate behavior, emphasizing the need for transparent reporting on social and environmental performance. The establishment of international standards, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the United Nations Global Compact, provided a common language for companies to articulate their CSR efforts [10]. These frameworks

not only standardized reporting practices but also set benchmarks for ethical conduct, facilitating a more comprehensive and comparable assessment of corporate social performance.

The evolution of CSR was not without its challenges, as companies grappled with the complexities of balancing profit motives with societal obligations. The dichotomy between short-term financial gains and long-term sustainability goals posed a constant dilemma for corporate decision-makers. Striking the right balance necessitated a paradigm shift in corporate culture, requiring a departure from traditional profit-centric models to a more holistic approach that considered the broader implications of business actions. The integration of CSR into corporate governance structures became imperative, prompting companies to establish dedicated departments and roles to oversee CSR initiatives. As CSR continued to evolve, it transcended the confines of individual corporate entities and assumed a systemic dimension. Collaborative efforts between businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and governmental bodies became increasingly prevalent. The recognition that addressing complex societal challenges required collective action led to the formation of partnerships and alliances aimed at driving positive change. Companies began to view themselves not only as economic entities but as integral contributors to the well-being of the communities in which they operated.

CSR is often divided into four areas of responsibility: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. Economic responsibilities relate to financial performance, maximizing profits, and creating shareholder value. Legal responsibilities reflect obeying laws and regulations. Ethical responsibilities involve doing what is right, just and fair even when not legally required. Finally, philanthropic responsibilities focus on contributing resources to the community and improving quality of life.

The business case for CSR proposes that it offers competitive advantage through enhanced reputation and legitimacy. CSR improves risk management, access to capital, customer relationships, HR recruitment and retention, innovation, and operational efficiency [11]. Critics argue CSR distracts from profit maximization while proponents suggest sustainability and ethics are converging with economic success. CSR remains a contested space but has gained increasing influence in global corporate boardrooms.

### **CSR Issues in the Fashion Industry**

The rise of fast fashion since the 1990s has created an industrial model based on selling huge volumes of cheap, disposable clothes. This constitutes a linear take-make-waste system dependent on continuous resource extraction, pollution, and labor exploitation. Some key CSR issues in the fashion industry are outlined below:

#### **Environmental Impacts**

The fashion industry's environmental impact is a pressing global concern, contributing significantly to carbon emissions and exacerbating resource depletion. Accounting for 10% of global carbon emissions, the fashion sector stands as a notable contributor to climate change. The carbon footprint arises from various stages of the supply chain, encompassing the production of raw materials, manufacturing processes, transportation, and disposal. The ubiquity of synthetic fabrics in the industry, coupled with energy-intensive manufacturing processes, further intensifies the sector's carbon emissions. Water scarcity and pollution emerge as pivotal issues in the context of fashion's ecological footprint. Textile dyeing, the second-largest contributor to water pollution globally, releases a myriad of toxic chemicals into water bodies, contaminating water supplies and posing severe threats to aquatic ecosystems [12]. The extensive use of water in various stages of textile production, from growing raw materials to dyeing and finishing, contributes to the sector's significant water footprint. Additionally, the pollution of oceans through the release of microplastic fibers

during the washing of synthetic textiles exacerbates the environmental toll, further highlighting the need for sustainable practices within the industry.

Table 2: Components of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Framework

CSR Components	Description
Ethical Business Practices	Adherence to moral principles, fair business dealings, and avoidance of corruption
Environmental Sustainability	Initiatives to minimize environmental impact, reduce carbon footprint, and conserve resources
Social and Labor Practices	Ensuring fair labor practices, promoting diversity and inclusion, and supporting community development
Legislative Compliance	Adherence to local and international laws and regulations, transparent reporting
Stakeholder Engagement	Collaboration with various stakeholders, including employees, customers, and communities
Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)	Implementation of standardized reporting practices for social and environmental performance

The cultivation of cotton, a primary raw material in the fashion industry, is entangled with environmental issues. Conventional cotton farming relies heavily on pesticides and insecticides, contributing to biodiversity loss and soil degradation. The environmental impact extends beyond agricultural practices, as the sheer demand for cotton perpetuates deforestation in some regions. The need for arable land to cultivate cotton often leads to the destruction of natural habitats, exacerbating the loss of biodiversity. Consequently, the fashion industry's reliance on conventional cotton cultivation is intrinsically linked to broader ecological challenges. The issue of waste within the fashion industry is a compounding factor in its environmental impact [13]. The production of low-cost garments, often associated with fast fashion, results in a rapid turnover of clothing items. The disposability of these garments contributes to the accumulation of textile waste in landfills, where synthetic materials may take centuries to decompose fully. This unsustainable cycle perpetuates resource depletion and environmental degradation, underscoring the urgency for a shift towards circular and sustainable fashion practices [14]. Addressing the environmental challenges posed by the fashion industry necessitates a comprehensive reevaluation of its production processes, sourcing of materials, and consumption patterns. Implementing sustainable practices, such as utilizing eco-friendly materials, adopting circular economy principles, and investing in innovative technologies, is imperative to mitigate the industry's impact on climate change, water resources, and biodiversity. Additionally, raising awareness among consumers about the environmental consequences of their fashion choices can drive demand for sustainable products, fostering a more responsible and eco-conscious industry. In essence, a paradigm shift towards sustainability is indispensable to reconcile the inherent conflict between the fashion industry and environmental preservation [15].

### Labor Exploitation

The dire conditions experienced by approximately 60-75 million garment workers, predominantly young women in the Asian region, underscore a deeply rooted crisis within the global apparel industry. These laborers confront a myriad of challenges, ranging from the pervasive issue of poverty wages to the imposition of forced overtime, working in unsafe environments, and enduring both verbal and physical abuse. Moreover, a distressing reality emerges as instances of modern slavery come to light in supplier factories, where workers find themselves ensnared in debt bondage, rendering them unable to extricate themselves from their predicament [16]. The egregious denial of collective bargaining



rights further compounds the exploitation faced by these workers, leaving them disenfranchised and vulnerable within an industry that demands urgent attention and systemic reform.

### **Animal Welfare**

The conventional production methods of wool, leather, fur, silk, and down have been associated with ethically contentious practices that result in substantial animal suffering. The fashion industry, driven by a demand for these materials, annually subjects an estimated 50-200 million animals to breeding and subsequent slaughter. This process encompasses practices such as live-plucking, mulesing, and confinement in cramped conditions, contributing to the ethical concerns surrounding animal welfare in the fashion supply chain. Beyond the moral implications, there are environmental consequences associated with these traditional production methods, including land degradation, water pollution, and the consumption of significant resources. In response to these issues, there is a growing emphasis on sustainable and cruelty-free alternatives within the fashion industry to mitigate the adverse impacts on both animal welfare and the environment.

### **Health & Safety**

Furthermore, the pervasive use of toxic chemicals in cotton farming and textile production poses a substantial threat to both human health and the environment. Factory workers involved in these processes face significant risks as they come into direct contact with these hazardous substances. The environmental impact is equally concerning, as the release of these chemicals contaminates soil and water, contributing to long-term ecological damage. The persistence of these harmful agents in finished clothing items raises additional safety concerns for consumers, as prolonged skin contact may lead to adverse health effects [17]. Moreover, the presence of toxic chemicals complicates textile recycling efforts, impeding the development of sustainable practices within the industry. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses the entire supply chain, from production to consumption, to mitigate the detrimental effects of toxic substances in the textile industry.

### **Socioeconomic Impacts**

The stark contrast between the precarious economic conditions of millions of garment workers and the lucrative compensation received by CEOs and shareholders underscores the inherent inequalities within the fashion industry. The relentless pursuit of ever-changing styles not only perpetuates materialism and overconsumption but also contributes to environmental degradation. The disposal of used clothes, often in developed countries, poses a significant threat to local textile industries in developing nations, as it inundates their markets with inexpensive second-hand goods, thereby stifling local production. This cycle of exploitation and environmental harm underscores the need for systemic reforms within the fashion industry to address the social and economic imbalances while promoting sustainable practices.

### **Implementing CSR in the Fashion Industry**

Fashion brands have begun responding to these challenges by incorporating CSR practices across business functions from design and sourcing to marketing and recycling.

### **Sustainable Design & Materials**

In addition to the aforementioned eco design strategies, the adoption of sustainable manufacturing processes plays a pivotal role in minimizing the environmental footprint of products. Manufacturers increasingly employ energy-efficient production methods and incorporate closed-loop systems, reducing energy consumption and waste generation [18]. The utilization of innovative technologies, such as 3D knitting and laser cutting, enables precise material usage, contributing to the overall efficiency of the production process.

Moreover, companies are emphasizing the importance of local sourcing and production to decrease transportation-related emissions and support regional economies. Certifications like Cradle to Cradle and Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) further validate the adherence to stringent environmental and social standards in the production of sustainable fashion items. This comprehensive approach underscores the industry's commitment to mitigating environmental impacts across the entire supply chain [19].

### **Ethical Sourcing & Production**

Furthermore, the implementation of robust ethical trade audits is imperative to ensure the adherence of suppliers to established standards, encompassing fair pay, reasonable working hours, safe working conditions, and the unequivocal prohibition of child and forced labor. Emphasizing the importance of freedom of association, these audits serve as a crucial mechanism to safeguard the rights and well-being of workers within the supply chain. In tandem with ethical audits, fostering purchasing practices that afford suppliers reasonable lead times and equitable pricing is essential. This approach not only promotes sustainability but also mitigates undue pressure on suppliers, fostering a more equitable and sustainable business ecosystem [20]. Beyond traditional auditing measures, cultivating strategic partnerships and embracing community-based models can further extend the impact of ethical trade initiatives, contributing to the creation of social value that transcends the confines of factory environments. Such strategic collaborations underscore a commitment to responsible business practices, reinforcing the broader societal impact of the supply chain.

### **Sustainable Consumption & Engagement**

In addition to consumer education, incorporating sustainable materials and production processes is imperative to mitigate the environmental impact of the apparel industry. Adopting eco-friendly fabrics, such as organic cotton or recycled polyester, can significantly reduce the carbon footprint of garments. Moreover, implementing energy-efficient manufacturing techniques and minimizing water usage in production are essential steps toward sustainability. Brands should prioritize investing in research and development to discover innovative, environmentally friendly materials and technologies. By embracing a holistic approach that encompasses responsible consumer behavior and sustainable production practices, the fashion industry can make substantial strides towards minimizing its environmental footprint.

### **Waste Reduction & Recycling**

Efficient clothing utilization encompasses various strategies to enhance sustainability in the fashion industry. Repair services, rental platforms, resale markets, and subscription models are instrumental in prolonging the lifecycle of garments, minimizing the environmental impact associated with production and disposal. Additionally, takeback programs and textile-to-textile recycling initiatives play a crucial role in diverting textiles from landfills, contributing to a more circular and resource-efficient system. By engaging in sector-wide initiatives, companies can collaboratively tackle systemic challenges that transcend individual organizational capacities [5]. This collective approach enables the industry to address complex issues such as supply chain transparency, ethical labor practices, and environmental stewardship, fostering a more responsible and sustainable future for the fashion sector.

### **Case Studies of Leading Sustainable Fashion Brands**

Sustainable trailblazers driving innovation demonstrate that ethics and profitability can successfully align in the fashion industry.

### Stella McCartney

Stella McCartney's commitment to sustainable luxury extends beyond material choices to encompass a comprehensive approach to environmental and social responsibility. The foundation of her luxury fashion house is rooted in a meticulous consideration of the entire lifecycle of her products, as evidenced by the utilization of Life Cycle Assessments (LCAs) to guide fabric and product development. Notably, her aversion to traditional animal-derived materials, such as leather, skins, fur, and feathers, underscores her dedication to cruelty-free and environmentally conscious practices. The integration of lower impact materials like recycled polyester further underscores her commitment to reducing the ecological footprint of her creations.

In addition to environmentally sustainable practices, Stella McCartney's brand is actively engaged in social initiatives. Garment worker empowerment programs operating in regions like India and Kenya exemplify her dedication to improving the lives of those involved in the production process. These initiatives extend beyond the workplace, providing essential services such as access to financial resources, health support, and childcare. Through strategic partnerships with organizations like Canopy, Stella McCartney also contributes to the preservation of endangered forests, aligning her brand with efforts to address broader environmental concerns.

Furthermore, the brand's commitment to circular fashion is evident in its stores, which not only offer luxury goods but also provide services like alterations to extend the lifespan of garments. Additionally, the provision of donation and clothing recycling services reflects a conscientious effort to minimize fashion's impact on the environment. Collectively, Stella McCartney's approach signifies a paradigm shift in the luxury fashion industry, demonstrating that style and sustainability can coexist through deliberate and principled business practices.

### Patagonia

Patagonia's commitment to environmental stewardship is deeply ingrained in its operational ethos, reflecting a comprehensive strategy that spans various facets of sustainability. The company not only prioritizes the utilization of traceable and environmentally preferred materials but also upholds a commitment to fostering safe and supportive workplaces. In a bid to mitigate its carbon footprint, Patagonia diligently addresses emissions across its operations, aligning its practices with a broader goal of environmental responsibility. Beyond mere rhetoric, the brand actively promotes a circular economy by encouraging product repairs and facilitating the resale of used items through its Worn Wear platform. Notably, Patagonia's marketing and advertising campaigns adopt a conscientious stance by framing consumption as a contributor to the climate crisis, signaling a departure from conventional promotional narratives. The brand goes beyond its own sphere, engaging in advocacy for government policies and industry-wide reforms, positioning itself as an influential voice in the collective effort to safeguard the planet.

### People Tree

People Tree, a prominent UK brand, has consistently demonstrated its commitment to ethical practices by establishing direct partnerships with garment worker communities and fair-trade producer groups for more than 25 years. This sustained engagement has allowed the brand to cultivate deep and enduring relationships with its stakeholders, extending beyond mere basic auditing processes. The brand's focus on operating in a select number of countries enables it to provide comprehensive training initiatives that go beyond industry norms. People Tree's dedication to ensuring living wages, safe working conditions, and empowerment programs is exemplified through the integration of flexible and transparent systems into its business practices. This approach not only ensures the well-being of the workers but also fosters a sense of transparency and accountability within the supply chain.



Furthermore, the brand's emphasis on ecological materials and support for marginalized artisans reflects a holistic strategy that considers both environmental sustainability and social responsibility, positioning People Tree as a leader in ethical and responsible business practices within the fashion industry.

### **Indigenous**

Indigenous, the Peruvian eco fashion brand, operates as a transformative force by empowering more than 1,600 artisans through a blend of tradition and innovation. The brand's commitment is evident in the fusion of heritage craft skills with cutting-edge, low-impact materials, resulting in the creation of contemporary designs that not only meet modern standards but also contribute to environmental sustainability. Profits generated by Indigenous are strategically reinvested to revitalize communities, exemplified by initiatives such as Json Wasi, an indigenous-led crafts school that plays a pivotal role in preserving traditional craftsmanship [21]. Furthermore, the brand actively addresses environmental concerns by locally upcycling textile waste into designer products, thus promoting a circular economy. In essence, Indigenous goes beyond being a fashion label; it serves as a conduit connecting customers with the profound stories and cultural traditions embedded in each garment, fostering a meaningful relationship between consumers and the artisanal heritage of Peru [22].

### **Towards an Integrated Model of CSR in Fashion**

While existing initiatives demonstrate progress, most fashion brands have yet to embed comprehensive CSR across operations. A fragmented approach tackling single issues in isolation can undermine effectiveness. Systems thinking is required to address complex, interrelated social and ecological challenges holistically. The proposed model in Figure 1 provides a framework to guide fashion brands in taking an integrated approach to CSR and ethical business, benefiting all stakeholders.

This integrated model comprises four interconnected components which work synergistically:

1. CSR principles and mindset – Placing ethics at the core of business strategy rather than as an add-on. Adopting a triple bottom line philosophy focused on social justice, environmental sustainability and economic success.
2. Stakeholder orientation – Considering and addressing the needs of all stakeholders from shareholders to suppliers, customers, workers and local communities. Engaging via participatory processes not just top-down.
3. Internal alignment – Incorporating sustainability across departments - from design, sourcing, production and marketing to HR, finance and compliance. Dedicated CSR teams can help coordinate efforts.
4. Collaborative innovation – Pooling resources and creative solutions via cross-sector networks, social enterprises and multi-stakeholder initiatives. Policy advocacy brings change that individual businesses cannot alone.

The interplay between these components enables a comprehensive integration of ethics that builds long-term social and environmental value creation opportunities.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

The exploration of both academic research and advancements within the fashion industry highlights a sector at a pivotal crossroads, with sustainability becoming an ever-pressing

concern. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) emerges as a critical framework through which the industry can navigate these challenges, demanding a comprehensive and integrated approach. Despite tangible advancements and an increasing public awareness of sustainability issues, the fashion industry is still struggling to shake off the deep-rooted practices of its traditional business models, which are often at odds with sustainable development goals. The fast fashion paradigm, characterized by rapid production cycles, low-cost outputs, and a market-driven by constant consumption, is particularly problematic [23]. This model is underpinned by a 'profit-first' mentality that has historically prioritized financial gains over environmental and social considerations. The consequences of this approach are evident in a variety of systemic issues that persist across the sector. For instance, the drive for cheaper production costs has led to labor abuses in supply chains that are often kept from public scrutiny [24]. These opaque networks enable brands to distance themselves from the working conditions under which their goods are produced, often in countries with lax labor laws and oversight.

The environmental impact of the industry is equally concerning. The philosophy of planned obsolescence—where products are designed with a limited lifespan to encourage repeated purchases—continues to be a mainstay. This, coupled with the 'take-make-waste' business model, where the extraction of virgin resources and the production of new items are favored over recycling and reuse, results in enormous waste and resource depletion [25]. Textile waste is a glaring example, with millions of tons of clothing ending up in landfills or incinerators every year, often after very short periods of use. Furthermore, as consumer awareness of these issues grows, so does scrutiny over how fashion brands address their environmental and social impacts. Unfortunately, there are numerous instances where brands engage in greenwashing—making misleading claims about their products' eco-friendliness or exaggerating their CSR efforts. This can manifest in symbolic initiatives that, while garnering positive media attention, are decoupled from the core operations of the company and do not lead to substantive change. Such disingenuous practices erode consumer trust and hinder the progress towards genuine sustainability [26].

In light of these challenges, there is a call for the fashion industry to undergo a radical reform. This would entail rethinking the entire lifecycle of fashion products—from design and production to consumption and disposal. It requires a shift away from short-term profitability and towards long-term value creation that encompasses environmental stewardship and social welfare. Sustainable materials and production processes, circular economy models, and fair labor practices need to be integrated into the heart of fashion business strategies [27]. Brands must move beyond compliance and philanthropy, embedding CSR into the core of their business operations where it can guide decision-making and innovation. This includes adopting transparent supply chains, investing in sustainable technologies, and embracing a more slow fashion approach that prioritizes quality and longevity over quantity and speed [28].

Consumer education and engagement are also vital. Brands have the opportunity to lead the way in changing consumer perceptions and behaviors, promoting sustainable consumption patterns, and encouraging a shift away from the disposable culture that has been prevalent for so long. This could involve educating consumers about the true cost of fast fashion, offering more sustainable choices, and providing transparency about product origins and the environmental footprint of their purchases. At the same time, the role of policymakers and industry regulators is crucial. Effective legislation can set higher industry standards, enforce accountability, and incentivize sustainable practices [29]. Regulations such as extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes, which hold producers accountable for the end-of-life impact of their products, can drive change towards more sustainable industry practices [30].

Collaboration is another key piece of the puzzle. No single entity can drive the systemic change needed alone. Partnerships between brands, suppliers, NGOs, governments, and consumers are essential to foster innovation, share best practices, and scale sustainable solutions across the industry. More optimistic voices highlight how sustainability and social innovation are disrupting industry and driving competitive advantage for proactive businesses. Young people especially demand purpose-driven brands [31]. Collaborative networks like the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) enable collective action towards shared goals. Policymakers and investors increasingly expect companies to act on ESG issues and enforce regulations. Technology advances offer solutions - digital design minimizes waste while blockchain enables supply chain traceability and transparency [32]. The fashion industry has made progress on sustainability, but substantial challenges remain. Individual businesses must undergo fundamental change internally while pushing for broader reforms [33]. There are grounds for optimism - an ethical, closed loop fashion system could emerge through continued effort and leadership from frontrunners. But industry-wide transformation requires all players collectively redesigning business priorities and practices, building the foundations for regenerative innovation. The framework proposed here provides guidance for fashion brands to embark on or continue their integrated CSR strategy towards a just, sustainable fashion future.

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