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Price Sensitivity and Social Influence as Dual Moderators of the Attitude-Behaviour Gap in Sustainable Fashion: A Systematic Review of Urban Consumer Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT

Despite decades of increasing environmental awareness, sustainable fashion remains responsible for less than 7% of global apparel sales, even as urban consumers' perceptions of sustainable fashion grow more positive. This review investigates the underlying reasons for the persistent gap and, more specifically, explores how Behavior-Context framework and considering price sensitivity and social influence as interacting dual modifiers of the attitude-behavior1966 to 2026 were selected from Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The quality of the studies was assessed using MMAT Version 2018 (with a median score of 4 out of 5), and an integrative framework combining the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Theory of Consumption Values, and Norm Activation Theory was employed through framework synthesis. Four key findings emerge: first, that price sensitivity varies according to individual identity, cultural background, and information access, indicating it is not solely a cost barrier; second, that social influence mechanisms such as peer pressure, identity signaling, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and FOMO actively draw consumers toward fast fashion, functioning in both positive and negative directions; third, that much of the current research is based on intention questionnaires rather than actual behavior, likely leading to an overestimation of what is understood; and fourth, that the disparity is most pronounced in Tier 2 urban areas where actual financial constraints conflict with sustainability aspirations. This constitutes the first comprehensive review explicitly differentiating this model from the Attitude-Behavior-Context framework and considering price sensitivity and social influence as interacting dual modifiers of the attitude-behavior gap within urban sustainable fashion.

Keywords: Attitude-behaviour gap; sustainable fashion; price sensitivity; social influence; TPB; TCV; NAT; urban consumers; systematic review; PRISMA 2020; dual-moderator framework.

INTRODUCTION

Annually, the textile industry generates 92 million tonnes of waste and contributes to 10% of the world's carbon emissions, establishing it as one of the most significant environmental pollutants. Despite a growing positive attitude among urban consumers towards environmentally sustainable practices, sustainable fashion constitutes less than 7% of global apparel sales, with such attitudes rarely reflected in actual purchasing behavior. This study investigates the attitude-behavior gap, emphasizing how price sensitivity and social influence serve as dual moderators that either bridge or widen the divide between consumer intentions and actual purchasing decisions. By synthesizing nearly 60 years of literature, this research presents an integrative framework to comprehensively understand the complex moral, economic, and social trade-offs encountered by modern urban consumers.

The analysis herein is founded upon three frameworks: TPB, TCV, and NAT. Additionally, a fourth framework, "the ABC model," is examined and differentiated from the integrative framework. Collectively, these frameworks address the moral, normative, economic, and cognitive dimensions of decision-making in sustainable fashion.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The predominant theoretical framework in this context is Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which is referenced in approximately 42% of studies concerning sustainable fashion (Busalim et al., 2022). This model employs components such as attitude, perceived behavioral control, and perceived social pressure to predict an individual's intentions. It demonstrates satisfactory predictive capability. However, a significant gap remains in the transition from intention to actual behavior, which constitutes a notable challenge. The sole longitudinal study within this corpus, conducted by Joanes (2019), identified that habit formation impeded the link between social norms and behavior in ways that survey methodologies failed to detect. Furthermore, mechanisms such as peer pressure, identity signaling, and FOMO-driven comparison are distinct processes; thus, representing social influence as a singular construct of subjective standards, as per TPB, may be considered an oversimplification.

Theory of Consumption Values (TCV)

A lexicon for the price sensitivity argument is provided by Sheth et al.'s (1991) TCV. The five value dimensions, namely functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional, help to elucidate why a particular premium may appear to be an unequivocal sacrifice to one customer, while representing a prudent investment to another. According to Dangelico et al. (2022), purchase intention was more accurately predicted by perceived value than by environmental concern among 2,694 Italian consumers. The principal insight of the TCV is value substitution: when social identity benefits are sufficiently compelling, they can compensate for losses in functional value. Value substitution serves as the fundamental mechanism within the dual-moderator system.

Norm Activation Theory (NAT)

According to Schwartz (1977), pro-social behaviour is explained by accepting personal responsibility after being informed of the consequences. When awareness is superficial, as is often the case in sustainable fashion, the pathway fails. According to Bennett and Hill (2022), 58% of the UK sample connected recycling with sustainability nearly exclusively. No systemic awareness, no supply chain ethics, and no comprehension of the true consequences. Personal moral standards never come into play without that initial step. Behaviour has no bearing on attitude. According to Stern (2000), consumers that are most price-sensitive also have the greatest awareness deficiency, hence the two issues exacerbate one another.

Integrative Dual-Moderator Framework

Integrating these three frameworks, price sensitivity impacts the attitude-to-intention stage via TCV's functional value, while social influence affects the intention-to-behavior phase through NAT's activation of moral norms and TPB's subjective norms. Urban income level, habit strength, and cultural orientation each exert influence on both moderating effects (Hofstede, 1980). The framework yields three propositions.

Proposition 1: The attitude-to-intention pathway in sustainable fashion consumption is moderated by price significance, indicating that when price sensitivity is elevated and social value compensation (conspicuous sustainability signaling) is absent, the positive influence of pro-sustainability attitude on purchasing intention is least pronounced. This moderation is further conditioned by cultural long-term orientation and urban income tier, with the most substantial attenuation observed in Tier 2 urban markets (Khan et al., 2024; Pardeshi et al., 2024).

Proposition 2: Social influence moderates the intention-to-behavior pathway through three distinct channels exhibiting varying cultural effects: (a) normative conformity effects are most pronounced in collectivist urban markets such as East Asia and South Asia; (b) identity-based conspicuous sustainability signalling effects are most prominent in individualist markets, including Northern Europe and North America; and (c) electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) effects are most impactful when the experience of sustainable fashion products precedes recommendations. Additionally, FOMO-driven rapid fashion social influence actively opposes normative sustainability conformance in digitally saturated urban environments (Böse et al., 2024; Kong & Ko, 2017).

Proposition 3: According to Bonelli et al. (2024) and Mohammed & Razé (2023), the attitude-behavior gap in sustainable fashion is most pronounced among Tier 2 urban middle-income consumers, who possess the strongest aspirational green identity but have their actual purchasing power significantly constrained by price premiums. Additionally, fast fashion social norms are firmly entrenched as indicators of economic progress within this demographic.

The Reasons this is Not the ABC Model

All contextual effects are represented by a singular facilitating-versus-constraining dimension within the Attitude–Behavior–Context (ABC) model (Guagnano et al., 1995). This is not equivalent to the aforementioned. A consumer may simultaneously experience FOMO, which propels them toward rapid fashion, and social value rewards that encourage

sustainable fashion, with P2 influencing both directions concurrently. Such complexity cannot be encapsulated by a single environmental dimension. Furthermore, the ABC model was developed based on recycling behavior in a pre-social media era and lacks a mechanism for value substitution among TCV dimensions. Its structure entirely neglects factors such as FOMO, electronic word-of-mouth cascades, and algorithmic content exposure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review synthesizes 78 peer-reviewed studies (1966–2026) to examine the mechanisms driving the disconnect between consumer environmental concern and actual purchasing habits within the sustainable fashion sector.

Price Sensitivity and Social Influence as Dual Moderators of the Attitude–Behaviour Gap in Sustainable Fashion

The fashion industry is responsible for approximately 10% of global carbon emissions, 20% of industrial wastewater, and 92 million tonnes of textile waste produced annually, establishing it as one of the most environmentally detrimental sectors globally (Niinimäki et al., 2020; UNEP, 2019). Nonetheless, surveys consistently indicate that the majority of urban consumers prefer to support ethical enterprises, opt for environmentally sustainable products, and are willing to pay a premium when necessary (McKinsey & Company, 2023; PwC, 2024). Despite this, sustainable fashion constitutes less than 7% of worldwide apparel sales (McKinsey & Company, 2023). A notable discrepancy exists between individuals' expressed attitudes and their actual purchasing behaviors. The primary focus of this review is the attitude-behavior gap. The gap itself is not novel. Decades ago, Wicker (1969) demonstrated that attitudes rarely account for more than 10% of the variance in actual behaviour. This issue becomes even more pronounced in the context of sustainable fashion: purchasing sustainably often involves paying a premium of 15–30% compared to traditional options (Dangelico et al., 2022; Harris et al., 2016), while navigating social environments where fast fashion remains prevalent and offers its own social advantages (Böse et al., 2024; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). The tension between the desire to be environmentally responsible and the influence of price and social expectations generates significant decisional conflict, especially among urban consumers whose self-concept is shaped by social comparisons, aspirational lifestyles, and observable peer networks (Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Pardeshi et al., 2024). Numerous reviews have examined the factors that influence consumers' intentions to purchase sustainable clothing. However, none have integrated social influence and price sensitivity as interactive modifiers of the attitude-behavior gap within a unified, theoretically robust framework. Table 1 explicitly delineates the disparity between this review and the six most comparable prior systematic evaluations.

Table 1: Comparative Scope Analysis: Present Review vs. Six Prior Systematic Reviews on Sustainable Fashion Consumer Behaviour.

Prior SLR	N	Period	Theory	Price	Social Inf.	Dual-Mod.	Urban	This Review Adds
Busalim et al. (2022)	88	2009–2019	S-O-R	Partial	Partial	No	Implicit	Dual-moderator theory; 2020–2026 evidence; urban typology
Hogh et al. (2025)	15	2010–2024	None	Yes	Yes	No	No	Theoretical integration; formal propositions; urban segmentation
Faludi (2025)	114	Varies	Social Mktg	No	Partial	No	No	Price × social interaction; TPB+TCV+NAT multi-theory framing
Ray & Nayak (2023)	97	2010–2022	Mktg comms	Partial	Partial	No	No	Joint price–social construct; convergence assessment
Domingos et al. (2022)	25	Varies	Slow values	No	No	No	No	Broader SF scope; income-tier urban segmentation
Bonelli et al. (2024)	117	Varies	GN/GS equity TPB+T	No	Partial	No	Partial	Dual-moderator framework; Global South Tier 2/4 contexts
Present Review	78	1966–2026	CV+N AT	Full	Full	YES	YES	First dual-moderator SLR: price × social in urban SF; ABC differentiation

Note. GN = Global North; GS = Global South; SF = sustainable fashion; S-O-R = Stimulus-Organism-Response; TPB = Theory of Planned Behaviour; TCV = Theory of Consumption Values; NAT = Norm Activation Theory.

Source: Author's Compilation

The preceding research closest in scope comprises those conducted by Busalim et al. (2022) and Hogh et al. (2025), who do not systematically integrate price and social influence; rather, they regard these factors as independent predictors. Faludi (2025) focuses on social marketing without grounding in price theory. This gap is addressed by the present review. Four

contributions are delineated to achieve this: (a) a dual-moderator framework that synthesizes the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Theory of Consumer Value (TCV), and NAT; (b) a distinct differentiation from the ABC model; (c) a comprehensive synthesis of all 78 included studies using PRISMA protocol transparency; and (d) practical implications segmented culturally for four tiers of urban consumers, including those in the Global South. The 25 papers most closely aligned with the analytical focus of this study are presented in Table 2. They encompass six methodological approaches, eleven countries, and span five decades. Notably, these studies do not all convey identical narratives, and their differences constitute part of the meaningful signal rather than extraneous noise that should be disregarded. The remaining 53 studies included are comprehensively detailed in Appendix A and incorporated after the conclusion.

Table 2: Primary Extraction Corpus: Structured Synthesis of 25 Key Studies (Selected from $N = 78$).

<i>Authors (Year)</i>	<i>Journal</i>	<i>Country / Method / N</i>	<i>Key Constructs</i>	<i>Relevant Finding</i>
Ajzen (1991)	Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes	USA / Conceptual / Meta-analytic	Attitude; Subjective norms; PBC; Intention	TPB explains intention–behaviour link; PBC moderates attitude–behaviour gap
Sheth et al. (1991)	Journal of Business Research	USA / Survey + discriminant / 145	Functional; Social; Emotional; Epistemic; Conditional Awareness of consequences;	Consumer choice is additive across five independent values; social value drives brand preference
Schwartz (1977)	Advances in Experimental Social Psychology	USA / Conceptual	Ascription; Personal norms	Personal moral norms activated via responsibility ascription; key mechanism for pro-social behaviour
Juster (1966)	Journal of the American Statistical Association	USA / Experimental survey / ~800	Purchase probability; Buying intentions; Variance	Probability surveys explain ~2× variance vs intentions; non-intender variation is ignored in intention surveys
Vermeir & Verbeke (2006)	Journal of Agricultural & Environmental Ethics	Belgium / Survey + experiment / 456	PCE; Social norms; Availability; Attitude–intention gap	PCE and social norms predict SF purchase intention; low availability amplifies attitude– behaviour gap
Hustvedt & Dickson (2009)	Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management	USA / Survey	Organic cotton; Consumer values; Purchase likelihood Eco-clothing;	Environmental concern and social responsibility values predict organic cotton purchase likelihood
Niinimäki (2010)	Sustainable Development	Finland / Qualitative	Consumer identity; Ideology Slow fashion	SF is tied to self-concept and ideology, not primarily rational cost-benefit calculation
Pookulan gara & Shephard (2013)	Journal of Retailing & Consumer Services	USA / Focus groups / 48	values; Consumer identity; Social norms	Social norms reinforce fast fashion despite awareness; self-expression drives slow fashion adoption
Lundblad & Davies (2016)	Journal of Consumer Behaviour	UK / Soft laddering / 39	Biospheric values; Egoistic values; Motivation	Altruistic and egoistic values mutually reinforce in regular SF consumers; six motivational patterns
Harris et al. (2016)	International Journal of Consumer Studies	UK / Expert interviews / 10	Cost; Stigma; Information gap; Systemic barriers	Systemic interventions needed beyond cost; stigma and availability are underestimated barriers
Paul et al. (2016)	Journal of Retailing & Consumer Services	India / SEM / 410	Attitude; Subjective norm; PBC; PCE; Green purchase Collaborative consumption;	Attitude and PCE strongest predictors; price sensitivity moderates WTP; subjective norms contribute less
Iran et al. (2019)	Journal of Cleaner Production	Iran– Germany / Survey / 412	Cross-cultural norms; Price Personal norms;	Social norms differ sharply by culture; price sensitivity is higher in Tehran; collaborative fashion bridges gap
Joanes (2019)	Journal of Cleaner Production	Germany / Longitudinal (2-wave) / 285	Habit; Social norms; Actual purchase	Habit and social norms attenuate attitude–behaviour correspondence in actual sustainable clothing purchasing
Wiederho ld &	Journal of Cleaner Production	Germany / In-depth	Moral disengagement;	Five rationalisation mechanisms explain the gap; price most cited barrier; social norms constrain ethical purchasing

Martinez (2018)		interviews / 20	Price sensitivity; Social identity	
Park & Lin (2020)	Journal of Business Research	USA / Experiment	Recycled vs. upcycled; Attitude; Behaviour gap	Gap differs by product type: larger for recycled, smaller for upcycled; novelty and status reduce the gap
Dangelico et al. (2022)	Technological Forecasting & Social Change International	Italy / SEM / 2,694	Perceived value; Environmental concern; WTP	Perceived value outperforms environmental concern in predicting PI and WTP; women are more willing to pay a premium
Bennett & Hill (2022)	Journal of Fashion Design, Technology & Education	UK / Mixed methods / 156	Education; Price barrier; Attitude–behaviour gap S-O-R; Stimuli; Organism; Response; Attitude–behaviour gap	58% equate sustainability with recycling only; price salience partly reflects cognitive availability heuristic
Busalim et al. (2022)	International Journal of Consumer Studies	Ireland / SLR–PRISMA / 88 articles	Collectivism; LTO; Power distance; WTP premium	69% of studies lack explicit theory; big data and longitudinal designs are absent; gap is underexplored
Khan et al. (2024)	Journal of Cleaner Production	Italy–Russia / PLS-SEM / 295	Environmental knowledge; Social influence; Price consciousness	Collectivism drives WTP in Italy; LTO drives WTP in Russia; ~14.2% (IT) and ~12.5% (RU) premium
Pardeshi et al. (2024)	NMIMS Management Review	India / SEM / 518	FOMO; Brand credibility; Purchase intention	Social influence is not significant in the Indian context; price consciousness positively moderates the EK–PI relationship
Bläse et al. (2024)	Business Strategy & the Environment	Switzerland/France/USA / SEM / 652	Consumer awareness; GN/GS disparities; Circular production	FOMO negatively moderates credibility → PI in fast fashion; social media amplifies fast fashion over sustainable alternatives
Bonelli et al. (2024)	Discover Sustainability	Italy / SLR–PRISMA / 117 articles	Circular fashion; Social marketing; Digital redistribution	Global North research is twice that of the Global South; used-clothing exports function as waste; the Global South requires a cultural rather than market-driven approach
Faludi (2025)	Social Marketing Quarterly	Hungary / SLR (SPAR-4-SLR) / 114 articles	GABB; Price; Social influence; PBC; Values	Six themes and eleven systemic challenges identified; calls for multi-level social marketing beyond individualistic consumer behaviour research
Hogh et al. (2025)	Sustainability (MDPI) Cleaner & Responsible Consumption	Germany / Critical SLR / 15 studies	SDG alignment; Thematic clusters; SF sub-domains	All studies are cross-sectional; no experiments; price effects remain ambiguous; multidimensional operationalisation is needed
Das et al. (2026)		Global / SLR + BERTopic / 502 articles		SDGs 12, 9, and 13 dominate the literature; SDGs 14 and 15 remain neglected; Global South research output is underrepresented

Note. SF = sustainable fashion; PI = purchase intention; SEM = structural equation modelling; CFA = confirmatory factor analysis; WTP = willingness to pay; eWOM = electronic word-of-mouth; PBC = perceived behavioural control; LTO = long-term orientation; PCE = perceived consumer effectiveness; GABB = green apparel buying behaviour; GN = Global North; GS = Global South. A footnote in the first column indicates year. All 78 included studies appear in the References and are extracted in Appendix A.

Source: Author's Compilation

The review is guided by three questions:

RQ1: How might social influence and price sensitivity, individually and collectively, mitigate the attitude-behaviour gap among consumers of urban sustainable fashion?

RQ2: Which theoretical models provide the most insight into the mechanisms at play?

RQ3: What deficiencies in the methodology of the current literature are biasing our understanding of the existing knowledge?

Research Gaps and Future Research Scope

These are not voids at the periphery of an otherwise comprehensive body of literature. They represent fundamental methodological and empirical omissions that constrain the claims of any synthesis, including this one.

Gap 1: The P1 × P2 Interaction Has Never Been Tested

The interaction between price sensitivity and social influence as concurrent moderators of the attitude–behavior gap has not been examined in any of the 78 studies included in the corpus. While it has yet to be empirically tested directly, the underlying compensatory mechanism proposed in Proposition 1- suggesting that high social value may diminish price sensitivity- is theoretically valid and supported by indirect empirical evidence (Kong & Ko, 2017; Park & Lin, 2020). The most critical unresolved research in this domain involves a factorial experiment that manipulates the level of the price premium and the strength of social identity signals.

Gap 2: Behaviour Is Almost Never Measured

There is data on retailer transactions. Closet audits do occur. Although Juster's (1966) purchase probability scales have been tested for 60 years, they are not found in any research on sustainable fashion. Joanes (2019) demonstrated that implementing a two-wave longitudinal design is entirely feasible. The literature's dependence on cross-sectional intention surveys is predicated solely on inertia and lacks any rational justification.

Gap 3: The Global South Is Absent from an Industry That Affects It Most

Communities in the Global South bear a disproportionate share of the production costs associated with rapid fashion. The majority of the research focuses on consumers in the Global North. These markets are almost nonexistent in Mumbai, Lagos, São Paulo, Nairobi, Dhaka, and Jakarta. It is necessary to conduct research there not because it will validate current frameworks, but because it might not.

Gap 4: Digital Social Influence Is Not the Same as Subjective Norms

The mechanism of FOMO, as delineated by Bläse et al. (2024), does not encompass the construct of subjective norms within the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The visibility of peer purchases, sustainability influencers, and algorithm-driven content all operate via distinct processes and timescales compared to subjective norms. It constitutes a conceptual fallacy with tangible implications for intervention to categorize them as a form of peer pressure. Rather than merely extending existing measurement tools and theoretical frameworks, the development of novel ones is imperative.

Gap 5: Contradictions Should Not Be Explained Away

Numerous inconsistencies exist between the positive social influence finding of Paul et al. (2024) and the null social impact finding of Pardeshi et al. (2024). Qualitative evidence suggests that social influence manifests differently in the Global North and Global South. These differences are often dismissed and dismissed as "cultural variation." Such discrepancies could also suggest potential flaws within the underlying model. Instead of merely addressing these contradictions through theoretical discussion, the academic community may find value in critically engaging with them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The literature search utilized major academic databases to encompass all extant research. These included Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar as of early 2025, covering publications from 1966 to March 2026. The Boolean search string incorporated terms related to social impact, price sensitivity, attitude-behavior gap constructions, and sustainable fashion. Urban consumers were defined operationally following OECD (2012) as settlements with a density of at least 1,500 persons per square kilometer or metropolitan populations of at least 500,000. This definition was specifically selected to circumvent the ambiguity associated with the term 'urban consumer,' which is prevalent throughout much of the literature. Peer-reviewed studies explicitly examining at least one target construct- such as price sensitivity, social influence, social norms, or peer effects- and empirically investigating sustainable or ethical fashion consumption were included. Grey literature, sources without full texts, research focused solely on non-fashion product categories, and studies concerning corporate sustainability or supply chains devoid of consumer-facing structures were likewise excluded. A total of 78 studies were included following the removal of duplicates (n = 201 excluded), screening of titles and abstracts (n = 493), and full-text assessment (n = 84 discarded based on four criteria). The complete process is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: PRISMA 2020 Study Selection Flow.

Phase	Action	Records (n)
Identification	Scopus – initial database search	412
	Web of Science – initial database search	287
	PsycINFO – initial database search	94
	Google Scholar – supplementary search	63
	Total records identified (all sources)	856
Screening	Duplicate records removed	201
	Records remaining after deduplication	655

	Records excluded on title/abstract screening	493
	Records retrieved for full-text assessment	162
Eligibility	Excluded – theme irrelevant to focal constructs	48
	Excluded – not peer-reviewed	12
	Excluded – outside 1966–2026 date range	15
	Excluded – methodology mismatch	9
Inclusion	Studies included in the final synthesis	78

Note. Total identified: n = 856; after deduplication: n = 655; final synthesis: N = 78

Source: Author's Compilation

The quality assessment of MMAT Version 2018 was conducted across all 78 trials, with a median score of 4 out of 5; studies with lower scores were weighted appropriately. The framework synthesis comprised three steps, as outlined by Thomas and Harden (2008): descriptive grouping, analytical reinterpretation, and free coding ($\kappa = 0.79$). Notably, the framing was developed concurrently with the synthesis process, rather than prior to it, and was revised in response to the evidence.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis does not generate a cohesive confirming narrative. Instead, it results in four conclusions, some of which contradict the typical representations found within the literature. Given that the analytical assertion holds greater significance than the categorization, these are designated as findings rather than themes.

Price Sensitivity Is a Symptom, Not a Cause

The typical scenario posits that sustainable fashion generally incurs higher costs; however, some consumers are unwilling to bear this expense due to the barrier being perceived as too effortless. An illustrative example from an urban Indian sample is provided by Pardeshi et al. (2024). Notably, price consciousness augmented the relationship between environmental knowledge and purchase intention among consumers with low-cost sensitivity. Conversely, the same variable exhibited a negative effect among highly price-conscious consumers, wherein concerns related to price entirely overshadowed environmental motivations. These opposing effects of the identical moderator exemplify a conditional mechanism rather than a barrier, aligning precisely with the predictions of Proposition 1. Bennett and Hill (2022) identified a similar qualitative finding: 24% of their UK sample indicated that cost was the primary obstacle; however, interviews revealed that many individuals were simply unaware that reasonably priced, sustainable solutions existed. Both Moser (2016) and Nguyen et al. (2019) found that awareness of affordable alternatives reduced claimed price sensitivity without any change in actual price. This phenomenon should not occur if it were solely driven by economic factors. According to Khan et al. (2024), long-term orientation in Russia and collectivism in Italy influence willingness to pay a premium through distinctly different mechanisms, yet produce identical apparent effects. Van der Werff et al. (2013) noted that because the cost aligns with personal identity, consumers with a strong environmental self-identity are willing to pay higher premiums. In practical terms, this represents value substitution: the loss of functional value is partly compensated by social value. When such a substitute is available, price becomes a considerably less restrictive factor. Price sensitivity is not a fixed structural barrier, but rather a conditional moderator influenced by identity, culture, and information. The extent to which identity and information might influence a decision will be underestimated by interventions that view it solely from an economic perspective. Demonstrates robustness in both quantitative and qualitative data within the specified circumstances. In Tier 2 markets, where Western benchmarks are not effectively applicable, confidence diminishes significantly.

Social Influence Pulls in Both Directions

The majority of the scholarly literature investigates social influence predominantly as a positive factor, encompassing eWOM dissemination of enthusiasm, identity incentives, and peer approval. Although the negative implications are equally significant, they tend to receive comparatively less scholarly attention. Bläse et al. (2024) identified that FOMO, arising from social media exposure to peers' fast fashion consumption, adversely diminishes the impact of brand reputation on purchase intention ($\beta = -.23$). Furthermore, trust in sustainable brands, which is often advantageous, appears to lose its influence among consumers exhibiting high levels of FOMO. This phenomenon indicates that the social environment was behaving in a manner contrary to the presumptions underlying social influence interventions. On the positive side, three pathways are distinct and should be treated as such. Normative conformity functions within collectivist contexts, as evidenced by Paul et al. (2016) in India ($\beta = .18$), Kong and Ko (2017) in East Asia, although Pardeshi et al. (2024) found it to be non-significant in their Indian sample. Additionally, Iran et al. (2019) demonstrated substantial variation between collectivist Tehran and individualist Berlin. In contrast, identity signaling operates differently: Lundblad and Davies (2016) found that egoistic and altruistic motivations mutually reinforce one another among devoted consumers of sustainable fashion, while Park and Lin (2020) experimentally showed that the gap was narrower for upcycled compared to recycled fashion because upcycling signals greater distinctiveness.

The electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) pathway functions as a self-reinforcing loop, primarily aiding in retaining existing sustainable customers rather than attracting new ones (Kong & Ko, 2017: satisfaction $\beta = 1.144$, purchase intention $\beta = .225$). In their study set in Tier 2 urban Iraq, Mohammed and Razé (2023) observed that local norms, which interpret consumption as a marker of economic success, render status-based arguments more effective than those centered on environmental concerns. Strategies successful in Stockholm may, therefore, prove counterproductive in Baghdad. The moderating effect of social influence is not invariably beneficial. Three positive channels coexist with negative channels that are mediated electronically. The platform environment, product identity associations, and culture collectively influence the result. Notable disparities exist between the Global North and the Global South concerning the actual trajectory of social influence. Although FOMO has been observed, its boundary conditions remain undefined.

The Field Is Measuring the Wrong Thing

The majority of research measures purchase intention and characterises it as behaviour; however, this is inaccurate. According to Hogg et al. (2025), all 13 quantitative studies on real sustainable purchasing behaviour were cross-sectional, none of which employed experimental methods, and less than 30% addressed typical method bias. Over sixty years ago, Juster (1966) demonstrated that the variation among non-intenders diminishes when binary intention inquiries consistently overestimate purchase probability. This finding has yet to be applied to studies on sustainable fashion. The only relevant study here, Joanes' (2019) two-wave investigation, revealed that habit obstructed the norm-behaviour connection in ways that survey designs failed to detect. Park and Lin (2020) provided evidence through testing that the magnitude of this gap varies depending on the product type, also remaining undetectable through surveys. This issue is compounded by geographic concentration: as noted by Das et al. (2026), over 60% of publications originate from the UK, the USA, and China, whereas Tier 2 and Tier 4 cities, where the majority of future urban fashion consumers reside, are virtually unrepresented. There may be a measurement issue with the attitude-behavior gap literature. The useful suggestions derived from intention surveys are not as strong as they seem. No existing study currently advocates for the sufficiency of cross-sectional intention measurement in behavior research. The issue is acknowledged but remains unaddressed. Confidence: Very high.

Urban Does Not Mean Homogeneous

Both consumers in Lagos and Stockholm are urban dwellers. Their cultural connections to consumption, price sensitivity, social norms, and access to sustainable fashion markets are all markedly distinct. The majority of existing literature considers both groups as a single analytical category, which results in generalizations that are inapplicable to either group. The empirical findings of the corpus are organized into four layers, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Urban Consumer Profiles by Tier: What the Evidence Actually Shows.

Tier	City Examples	OECD Density	Income Context	SF Market Development	Price Sensitivity	Social Influence Pathway
Tier 1	London, Tokyo, New York, Paris	$\geq 1,500/\text{km}^2$	High disposable income	Mature, diverse SF retail	Moderate; premium accepted	Conspicuous sustainability; eWOM identity signalling
Tier 2	Mumbai, Lagos, São Paulo, Jakarta	$\geq 1,500/\text{km}^2$	Emerging middle class	Growing but limited SF access	High; premium a significant barrier	Status-based signalling; normative conformity
Tier 3	Stockholm, Edinburgh, Amsterdam	$\geq 1,500/\text{km}^2$	Upper-middle income	Well-developed SF markets	Low; strong functional value alignment	Community norms; environmental identity expression
Tier 4	Hanoi, Colombo, Accra	$\geq 1,500/\text{km}^2$	Lower-middle income	Very limited SF availability	Very high; price dominant barrier	Family/community norms; trust-based social proof

Note. SF = sustainable fashion. Tier classification follows OECD (2012) functional urban area definitions: $\geq 1,500$ persons/km² population density threshold for urban classification. Profiles synthesise evidence from the 78 included studies; no single study covers all four tiers. Price sensitivity and social influence profiles represent synthesised conclusions, not measurements from any single study.

Source: Author's Compilation

Mohammed and Razé (2023) discovered that consumers from the lower-middle-class urban Iraqi population who demonstrate a significant concern for sustainable fashion exhibit near-absolute resistance to price variations. Apathy is not the primary issue; rather, it stems from structural inaccessibility and social values that prioritize economic growth over environmental stewardship. According to Pardeshi et al. (2024), price consciousness effectively diminishes the relationship between environmental knowledge and behavioral intention at elevated levels. These findings may suggest that framing is

entirely inapplicable in these contexts, as they are incompatible with Western Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framing. Iran et al. (2019) and Khan et al. (2024) both illustrate how the dominant social influence pathway alternates between individualist and collectivist cultural settings. Throughout the corpus, gender consistently adds a supplementary dimension: women demonstrate a higher willingness to pay (WTP) and greater engagement with sustainable fashion driven by identity (Dangelico et al., 2022; Lundblad & Davies, 2016). Furthermore, price sensitivity is affected by retail availability through cognitive heuristics; in circumstances where sustainable fashion is scarce, the perceived premium exceeds its actual value (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Convergence is robust for Tier 1 and Tier 3 contexts. It is less pronounced for Tier 2 and Tier 4, which precisely earmarks these areas as requiring further research.

CONCLUSION

The knowledge does not fully align with the extensive body of existing literature. It is apparent that the attitude-behaviour gap is influenced by factors such as price sensitivity and social impact. Nevertheless, the precise nature of their interaction remains largely unclear, as does the understanding of which processes dominate specific urban contexts, and which initiatives will genuinely alter consumer purchasing behavior in Tier 2 cities. The two-transition frame is not a theoretical contribution; rather, it serves as an analytical tool. It aids practitioners and researchers in identifying which stage of the decision-making process necessitates specific forms of assistance. While not a novel concept, its utility remains valuable. The field already benefits from factorial trials for P1, P2, and longitudinal purchase data for P3, thereby rendering the three hypotheses empirically testable. It is beneficial if research demonstrates that the propositions are incorrect. Such findings would, in turn, contribute to the advancement of the field by enhancing its knowledge base. Sustainable fashion constitutes less than 7% of global apparel sales, despite the significant environmental impact of the industry. The body of research conducted is extensive and thorough. However, it has not produced sufficient information to bridge the existing gap. This review aims to precisely identify subsequent steps and honestly assess the current position.

The recommendations that follow pertain to specific methods, evidence, and consumer circumstances. Generic advice has been intentionally omitted. Perceived value serves as a more reliable predictor of sustainable fashion purchasing intention and willingness to pay than environmental concern, as evidenced consistently across various studies (Dangelico et al., 2022; Chekima et al., 2016; Ritter et al., 2015). This corroborates a strategic recommendation supported by convergent findings spanning three continents and multiple product categories: sustainable fashion brands should reposition their products by emphasizing functional value narratives, such as durability, cost-per-wear economics, superior quality certifications, and lifetime value, rather than relying on ethical or environmental premium positioning, since framing products with a price premium is counterproductive for urban middle-income consumers in Tier 2 markets. EwOM amplification strategies should be employed to leverage conspicuous sustainability, enabling urban consumers to communicate their sustainable identities within peer networks without necessarily incurring explicit price compromises (Kong & Ko, 2017; Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Noppers et al., 2014). In individualist Tier 1 and Tier 3 markets (Northern Europe, North America, Australia), narratives emphasizing distinctiveness, self-expression, and identity differentiation produce stronger purchase intentions and willingness to pay (WTP) (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). Conversely, in collectivist Tier 1 and Tier 2 markets (East and South Asia), strategies that activate community norms and utilize social proof demonstrate greater effectiveness (Khan et al., 2024; Iran et al., 2019). According to the FOMO mechanism articulated by Bläse et al. (2024), brands should establish sustainable fashion community platforms where consumers' social media environments highlight the social significance of missing out on ethical consumption rather than on fast fashion releases. For economically disadvantaged urban consumers, structural price interventions are more effective in reducing the attitude-behaviour gap than information campaigns alone (Harris et al., 2016; Dangelico et al., 2022). The price premium differential, which constitutes the primary structural barrier in Tier 2 and Tier 4 urban markets, would be directly addressed through extended producer responsibility programs, environmental taxes on fast fashion production, and targeted subsidies or tax incentives for sustainable fashion acquisitions. Bennett and Hill (2022) identified that consumers regarded formal education and documentary media as the most impactful sustainability interventions; integrating sustainable fashion literacy into the national school curricula, emphasizing substantive issues such as labour rights, supply chain ethics, and systemic environmental impacts - rather than mere recycling - would activate NAT's awareness-of-consequences mechanism at a societal level (Schwartz, 1977; Stern, 2000). The lack of awareness is primarily institutional rather than individual. According to research conducted by Bennett and Hill (2022), 58% of consumers consider sustainability solely in relation to recycling; they remain unaware of systemic environmental damages, labor exploitation, and ethical considerations within the supply chain. Effective sustainability education necessitates comprehensive ecological literacy programs that address the following topics: the social justice dimensions of the fast fashion supply chain; the economic aspects of sustainable fashion production; the influence of individual consumption on overall market transformation; and the psychological mechanisms- including FOMO, social comparison, and automatic habitual behavior- that reinforce fast fashion consumption despite pro-sustainability attitudes. This more comprehensive framing enhances the development of stronger personal moral standards that exhibit greater resistance to price sensitivity and social conformity pressures. Such an approach more effectively activates NAT's ascription-of-responsibility mechanism (Schwartz, 1977; Joanes, 2019). Urban markets in

the Global South require fundamentally different strategic frameworks. In these contexts, where sustainable fashion remains inaccessible, is often mistrusted by institutions, and is socially regarded as a symbol of luxury rather than an environmental commitment, Bonelli et al. (2024) provide systematic evidence indicating that market-driven transition strategies from the Global North are inherently unsuitable. Practitioners operating in Tier 2 and Tier 4 cities should employ four evidence-based tactics: (a) Consistent with the findings of Mohammed and Razé (2023), which demonstrate that status-based sustainability appeals are more effective than environmental appeals in urban settings within developing countries, sustainability narratives should focus on community benefits, local cultural values, and collective progress, rather than on individual environmental identity; (b) Offer affordable, entry-level sustainable fashion products that do not require premium payments, thereby reducing the price sensitivity barrier to a tolerable level for the expanding middle class; (c) Engage religious institutions, family networks, and community leaders as channels of social influence, aligning with the high influence of family norms observed among Indian urban adolescents as reported by Khare and Sadachar (2017) and Yadav and Pathak (2017) in their Theory of Planned Behavior extension study; and (d) Promote institutional trust through mechanisms such as fair-trade certification, transparent production provenance, and collaborations with local manufacturers. Mohammed and Razé (2023) identified institutional mistrust as the primary obstacle in urban marketplaces within developing countries.

A coordinated set of methodological advancements should be employed in future research endeavors to address the identified gaps. Given that no prior study has examined how these two moderators interact concurrently, a direct experimental investigation of Price $\times$ Social Influence co-moderation utilizing factorial designs and conditional process analysis is of the utmost importance (Hayes, 2022). Additionally, longitudinal panel studies spanning at least two waves over a period of twelve months or more should incorporate real retailer transaction data and Juster's (1966) purchase probability scales- rather than binary intention measures- to accurately capture actual purchasing behavior across all four urban tiers. Geographically, research initiatives ought to be strategically concentrated on Tier 2 and Tier 4 cities, particularly Mumbai and Lagos.

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