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A Study on Relationship between Sustainable Fashion Brands and Consumer Value through Application of Importance-Performance Analysis, Impact Range-Performance Analysis, and Impact Assessment Act

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Abstract: Based upon the Consumer Value Theory, we delved into consumers' perceptions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as represented by fashion brands. By employing the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) approach, functionality, emotional value, and social value serve as the primary dimensions through which consumers evaluate the SDG. From a functionality perspective, consumers anticipate that fashion brands extend beyond meeting basic apparel needs, emphasizing the significance of brands delivering augmented value through pioneering designs and superior material quality. This insinuates the imperative for brands to meticulously consider the sustainability of materials and the environmental impact inherent in their manufacturing processes. The emotional dimension underscores the avenues through which brands foster emotional affiliations with consumers. A genuine commitment to, and enactment of, sustainability by brands enhances the depth of emotional bonds they share with consumers. This is manifested solely in the brand's imagery and designs and the alignment of the brand's mission and ethos with consumers' convictions and principles. From a social value standpoint, there is a consumer expectation for brands to undertake broader societal roles, such as buttressing local communities, ensuring the integrity and transparency of their supply chains, and amplifying charitable endeavors. The findings of this research posit that in their pursuit of sustainability, fashion brands need to holistically address product functionality and emotional resonance, while concurrently comprehending consumers' social value aspirations and acknowledging the nuances introduced by cultural and contextual variables, thereby crafting more bespoke and efficacious marketing strategies.

Keywords: Consumer value theory, Fashion brands, Sustainable development goals (SDGs), Importance-performance analysis (IPA)

1. Introduction

The global challenges faced in the 21st century encompass climate change, resource depletion, and social disparities, highlighting the imperative for sustainable development. The fashion industry, a pivotal sector in the global economy, has significant environmental and societal ramifications. Spanning from raw material procurement to manufacturing, sales, and consumption, it is characterized by extensive resource consumption and pollution generation. The pronounced utilization of water, production of textile waste, associated carbon emissions, and labor-related issues have cast doubts on its sustainability. Thus, the adaptation of fashion brands to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their capacity to steer consumers toward eco-friendly options becomes a vital research avenue.

In this context, the values and perceptions of consumers concerning fashion brands become central to the industry's trajectory. Diverse cultural, value, and educational backgrounds lead to varied emphases on SDGs among consumers, presenting novel challenges for fashion brand marketing. Using tools such as Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA), Impact range-performance analysis (IRPA), and Impact Assessment Act (IAA), we investigated consumer evaluations of fashion brands in alignment with SDGs to understand how these perceptions influence purchasing behaviors.

Employing qualitative and quantitative methodologies, we assessed the impact of SDGs' portrayal on consumers across functional, emotional, and social value dimensions. Leveraging IPA, IRPA, and IAA analytical frameworks, it was ascertained how

these dimensions influence the rapport between fashion brands and consumers. The ultimate aim of this study was to provide fashion brands with in-depth insights into consumer expectations concerning SDGs and to offer strategic guidelines, thus directing the wider fashion sector toward a more sustainable path. The findings of this research augment the application of Consumer Value Theory within the sustainable fashion domain and serve as a foundational reference for subsequent investigations in related sectors. This fosters a more harmonious relationship between the fashion sector and its consumers, jointly ushering in a sustainable future.

2. Materials and Methods

In the context of rapid globalization and economic growth, the fashion industry has seen remarkable expansion, offering trendy apparel at low prices (O'Connell, 2010; Passariello, 2008; Rohwedder & Johnson, 2008). Fast fashion, characterized by quick market response, frequent product updates, and affordability, has become a key industry trend. However, this model promotes a disposable approach to clothing and significant environmental impact. With climate change concerns, sustainable development is now a global priority (Huang, 2021). Joy et al. (2012) highlight ethical and sustainability tensions in fast fashion versus luxury brands. Fast fashion, though market-responsive, faces serious ethical and sustainability issues, unlike luxury brands, which emphasize sustainability and ethical values. Brands adopting eco-friendly materials and reducing production emissions suggest that sustainable fashion encompasses more than environmental measures, as Henninger et al. (2016) point out. It requires considering the full product lifecycle and addressing economic, environmental, and social aspects.

The rise of third-party certifications underscores industry commitment to environmental standards. The United Nations' SDGs guide global efforts in sustainability (Stevenson & Skillern, 2006), but applying these in the fashion industry, especially balancing green design with economic and ethical considerations, remains challenging (Chen, Wu & Xie, 2019). Overall, the fashion industry's response to environmental and social responsibilities varies. True sustainability goes beyond brand image or marketing, requiring integration into every supply chain aspect. It calls for changes from both brands and consumers. Achieving sustainability in fashion involves aligning economic, environmental, and social factors, posing a significant challenge for future research to provide practical strategies for a sustainable industry evolution.

In light of these industry challenges and the need for sustainable practices, our study focused on understanding consumer behavior towards sustainable fashion brands. We employed the Consumer Value Theory to gauge consumer perceptions of the SDGs and their impact on purchasing decisions. Drawing on the foundational framework by Sheth et al. (1991), which outlines five key dimensions of consumer value — functionality, sociability, emotionality, novelty, and situationality, we refined its relevance and performance scales through consultations with five experts. Using the Likert scale (Likert, 1932), from '1: Strongly Disagree' to '5: Strongly Agree', participants evaluated items based on their awareness of the samples. Our survey targeted individuals connected to the fashion industry and those deeply interested in SDG topics, resulting in 100 valid questionnaire responses.

3. Results

Reliability refers to the consistency or stability of scores derived from a measurement instrument. The greater the reliability of a scale, the more stable its results. The term “reliability” denotes the trustworthiness and stability of outcomes from an assessment. Numerous methods exist for assessing reliability, but Cronbach's α is the most prevalent method employed in academic research. Accordingly, we used Cronbach's α to evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire. Based on the criteria established by Wu (1990) with correlation coefficients and variance analysis, the reliability thresholds were defined as follows: an α coefficient below 0.3 suggested an unreliable scale; between 0.3 and 0.4, it was marginally reliable; between 0.4 and 0.5, it was moderately reliable; between 0.5 and 0.7, it was reliable and the most common range; between 0.7 and 0.9, it was highly reliable, constituting the second most frequent range; an α coefficient exceeding 0.9 indicated exceptional reliability.

In May 2023, the IPA questionnaire was distributed and collected online via Google Forms. The primary respondents were postgraduate students with backgrounds in the arts, design, and creative cultural domains. A total of 100 valid questionnaires were retrieved. The Cronbach's α values and associated reliability levels for the IPA questionnaire are presented in Table 1. The importance and satisfaction coefficients of the IPA questionnaire showed an α value exceeding 0.70, indicating inter-item consistency and stability. The comprehensive reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's α of 0.975. The “ α value post item deletion” for each query is presented in Table 1. With an α range of $0.7 < \alpha \leq 0.9$, the questionnaire exhibits high reliability. Hence, all items were retained. Table 1 lists Cronbach's α values with individual item deletions.

Table 1. Reliability test result of IPA Questionnaire.

Survey Items	Importance	Satisfaction
1. Good elasticity and flexibility	0.895	0.898
2. Increase aesthetic value in clothing	0.905	0.892
3. Express personal style	0.906	0.892
4. Align with societal values of sustainability	0.906	0.893
5. Environmentally and health-friendly	0.909	0.893
6. Reduce waste and resource consumption	0.910	0.889
7. Make a positive contribution to the environment	0.905	0.892
8. Establish resonance with people around me	0.905	0.894
9. Evoke happiness and positive emotions	0.906	0.891
10. Increase awareness of fashion brands and related fields	0.910	0.898
11. Open to using innovative products	0.908	0.892
12. Desire to try new things and innovative products	0.906	0.895
13. Align with current social trends	0.901	0.894
14. Enhance personal image and confidence in social situations	0.907	0.892
15. Show concern for environmental protection and sustainable living	0.905	0.894
Average value (M)	0.911	0.900

Based upon the Consumer Value Theory and IPA, we delineated four quadrants, encompassing 15 data points related to importance and satisfaction to elucidate the influence of SDGs on consumers’ perceptions of fashion brands. The detailed distribution of these data points across the quadrants is presented in Table 2(IPA results.) and Figure 1. IPA matrix distribution. Within the “Dominant Maintain” quadrant, three salient quality attributes were identified: “Superior Elasticity and Flexibility,” “Augmented Aesthetic Value in Wear,” and “Manifestation of a Commitment to Environmental Stewardship and Sustainable Living.” All these attributes were categorized in the “Dominant Maintain” sector, suggesting that the needs of Taiwanese consumers for sustainable fashion brands in these dimensions have been comprehensively addressed, positioning these elements as core competencies of the brand.

- (1) Superior Elasticity and Flexibility (Dominant Maintain): Consumers underscored the paramount importance of sustainable fashion brands maintaining superior elasticity and flexibility in their products. Nonetheless, a potential knowledge gap existed amongst Taiwanese consumers regarding manufacturers’ methodologies to ensure these sustainable attributes. Brands can fortify consumers’ comprehension of the product through heightened transparency and educational initiatives that elucidate the sustainable characteristics of their offerings.
- (2) Augmented Aesthetic Value in Wear (Dominant Maintain): Taiwanese consumers perceived that sustainable fashion brands efficaciously enhanced the aesthetic value of their assortments. However, it is imperative for brands to continually ensure that their products, while aesthetically appealing, also underscore the principles of sustainability, thereby bolstering consumer trust.
- (3) Manifestation of a Commitment to Environmental Stewardship and Sustainable Living (Dominant Maintain): Taiwanese consumers consistently acknowledged and commended the brand’s unwavering commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable living, considering it a foundational strength. Nonetheless, there is an opportunity for brands to further amplify consumer cognizance regarding their endeavors in these domains, solidifying their market presence.

Subsequently, within the “Priority Improve” quadrant, various quality attributes were discerned, including “Exhibition of Personal Style,” “Conformity with Societal Sustainable Development Values,” “Enhanced Eco-Friendliness and Propensity for Human Health,” and “Enriched Understanding in the Realm of Fashion Brands.” These findings highlighted the elevated anticipations of Taiwanese consumers for sustainability, personal style, and brand cognizance, signaling an avenue for further refinement in these domains to adeptly cater to consumer exigencies. Within the “Priority Improve” quadrant, several quality attributes were identified, including “Exhibition of Personal Style,” “Conformity with Societal Values Towards Sustainable Development,” “Enhanced Eco-Friendliness and Consideration for Human Health,” and “Augmented Understanding of Fashion Brands.” These attributes underscored the elevated expectations of Taiwanese consumers for sustainability, personal style, and brand knowledge. However, they also indicated opportunities for further enhancement in these areas to more effectively meet their requirements.


- (1) Exhibition of Personal Style (Priority Improve): Taiwanese consumers desired sustainable fashion brands to better represent individual style as evidenced in the Priority Improve quadrant. Brands need to address this by offering a diverse range of sustainable choices, reflecting varied style preferences, and emphasizing the importance of personal style.
- (2) Conformity with Societal Values Towards Sustainable Development (Priority Improve): There is a growing expectation among Taiwanese consumers for fashion brands to resonate more actively with societal values surrounding sustainable development. Brands must articulate their concerted efforts in societal and environmental stewardship to meet this expectation.
- (3) Enhanced Eco-Friendliness and Consideration for Human Health (Priority Improve): Consumers aspired for sustainable fashion brands to consider the environmental and health aspects of their products more. Brands can bolster consumer awareness by emphasizing the sustainable attributes of their products, thus addressing this aspiration.
- (4) Augmented Understanding of Fashion Brands (Priority Improve): Consumers believed that there was a need for more comprehensive information to understand the sustainable commitments of fashion brands fully. Brands need to amplify this understanding through educational campaigns and outreach that spotlight their sustainable endeavor.

In the “Minor Improve” quadrant, attributes such as “Reduction of Waste and Resource Consumption,” “Preference for Innovative Products,” “Induction of Positive and Joyful Emotions,” and “Conformity with Current Societal Trends” were included. Although these factors exerted influence on consumers, their relative significance and performance indices were subdued. Consequently, brands need to thoughtfully evaluate their prioritization within strategic formulations.

Conversely, in the “Overemphasized” quadrant, attributes encompass “Positive Contributions to the Environment,” “Cultivating Resonance with Associates,” and “Augmenting Personal Image and Confidence in Social Contexts.” These elements were disproportionately emphasized by consumers, despite their relatively lower performance indices. This intimated that brands accentuated these attributes in their outreach excessively, overshadowing more salient quality attributes.

Such results delineated the anticipations of Taiwanese consumers regarding sustainable fashion brands, furnishing pivotal directives for the enhancement of brand strategies and product conceptualization. Yet, it concurrently underscored the imperative for brands to judiciously calibrate the weightage of disparate quality attributes in their messaging, ensuring an authentic alignment with consumer demands and preserving their competitive stance within the sustainable fashion landscape. Such insights are paramount for Taiwanese fashion brands, particularly for the prevailing inclination that premium brands must ardently burden their corporate social responsibilities.

Table 2. IPA results.

Item		Importance (M = 4.23)	Satisfaction (M = 3.29)	Quadrants
1	Good elasticity and flexibility	3.48	3.53	I: Dominant Maintain
2	Increase aesthetic value in clothing	3.42	3.5	I: Dominant Maintain
3	Express personal style	3.42	3.34	IV: Priority Improve
4	Align with societal values of sustainability	3.47	3.41	IV: Priority Improve
5	Environmentally and health-friendly	3.38	3.41	IV: Priority Improve
6	Reduce waste and resource consumption	3.33	3.38	III: Minor Improve
7	Make a positive contribution to the environment	3.33	3.48	II: Overemphasized
8	Establish resonance with people around me	3.24	3.47	II: Overemphasized
9	Evoke happiness and positive emotions	3.21	3.42	III: Minor Improve
10	Increase awareness of fashion brands and related fields	3.44	3.36	IV: Priority Improve
11	Open to using innovative products	3.23	3.39	III: Minor Improve
12	Desire to try new things and innovative products	3.51	3.34	IV: Priority Improve
13	Align with current social trends	3.36	3.37	III: Minor Improve
14	Enhance personal image and confidence in social situations	3.37	3.56	II: Overemphasized
15	Show concern for environmental protection and sustainable living	3.47	3.65	I: Dominant Maintain

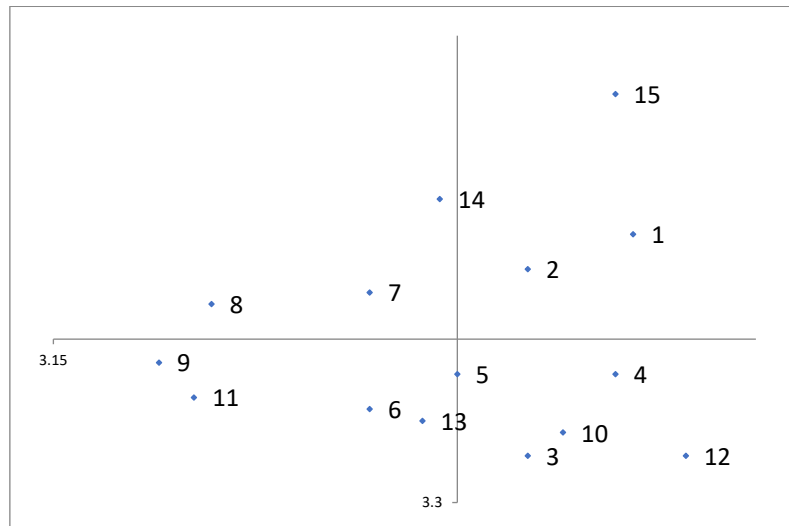


Fig. 1. IPA matrix distribution.

According to the results of the IRPA result presented in Table 3, the following key insights were elucidated.

(1) Reward Index (RI)

The highest RI was attributed to “Augmenting Aesthetic Value of Apparel” with a value of 0.711. This indicated that exemplary performance in this attribute substantially enhanced consumer satisfaction and underscored the importance of consumers’ assignment to the aesthetic value of attire. In the domain of fashion and clothing, aesthetics remained a pivotal value. This data suggested that a brand’s investments and endeavors in this area correlated with consumer satisfaction levels. The RI for “Reduction of Waste and Resource Consumption” stood at 0.511. Although it was ranked the lowest among the attributes, it still exceeded 0.5, denoting that positive brand performance in this sphere garnered beneficial outcomes. However, in comparison to “Augmenting Aesthetic Value of Apparel”, its influence is relatively mitigated, implying that while consumers valued environmental and resource consumption concerns and emphasized aesthetic value prevails.

(2) Penalty Index (PI)

The PI was associated with “Reduction of Waste and Resource Consumption,” with a value of -0.599. This indicated that suboptimal performance in this attribute had the most deleterious effect on consumer satisfaction. This observation further underscored that while the positive ramifications of this attribute were less pronounced than others, its potential adverse impact was significant. Brands must exercise caution in this domain to avert pronounced consumer dissatisfaction.

(3) Range of Influence on Customer Satisfaction (RIOCS)

The attribute with the highest RIOCS was “Superior Elasticity and Flexibility,” registering at 1.141. This signified the comprehensive influence of this attribute on overall satisfaction from its minimal to optimal performance. Irrespective of the brand’s performance in this area—be it positive or negative—it invariably exerts a substantial impact on consumer satisfaction.

(4) Probability of Generating Satisfaction (SGP)

The attribute “Augmenting the Aesthetic Value of Apparel” showed the highest SGP at 0.668. This observation substantiated the notion that when a brand excels in this domain, the ensuing positive impact is pronounced. Notably, this attribute dominated the SGP and the IA metric. Such results emphasized its pivotal role in enhancing consumer satisfaction and suggested that the positive implications of proficient brand performance in this domain surpass any potential negatives. Consequently, brands must prioritize this strategy, allocating resources and attention to enhance the aesthetic quality of their offerings. In an epoch marked by a heightened emphasis on personalization and self-expression, consumers tended to favor products that mirror their unique taste and style.

(5) Probability of Generating Dissatisfaction (DGP)

The elevated DGP value associated with “Willingness to Use Innovative Products” underscored the profound expectation consumers hold regarding brand innovation. A failure on the part of the brand to offer novel and distinct products caused significant consumer dissatisfaction. In today’s dynamic market, innovation extends beyond mere technological advancements and involves a nuanced understanding of consumer needs and the ability to forecast future demands. Brands must persistently innovate, ensuring their offerings align with consumer expectations and contemporary market trends.

(6) Influence Asymmetry (IA)

The prominent score associated with “Augmenting the Aesthetic Value of Apparel” reaffirmed its importance in amplifying consumer satisfaction. A brand’s proficient performance in this dimension attracts a loyal consumer base and minimizes potential negative feedback.

Given these empirical findings, it was evident that contemporary consumer choices extended beyond product functionality or direct benefits. Instead, they were influenced by a constellation of attributes and values, each bearing distinct importance to different consumers. Data from the RI metric indicates that a brand’s performance in “Augmenting the Aesthetic Value of Apparel” was crucial. This importance arises not just because of the direct positive influence on consumer satisfaction but also due to the contemporary emphasis on personal aesthetic expression. Individuals increasingly seek attire that reflects their discerning tastes and values. Furthermore, “Superior Elasticity and Flexibility” was identified as another critical attribute. This reflected the consumer’s heightened emphasis on product usability and comfort. Specifically, in the fashion and apparel sector, elasticity and flexibility determined the comfort of wear and implied individuals’ daily activities and overall physical health.

Conversely, the modest RI value for “Reducing Waste and Resource Consumption” did not imply that this attribute could be overlooked by brands. Although its positive contribution might be limited, a lackluster performance in this area could significantly diminish consumer satisfaction. This trend might be attributed to the rising environmental awareness and the increasing scarcity of resources, leading consumers to scrutinize the environmental responsibility of products and their associated brands more closely. Neglecting this aspect might adversely affect a brand’s reputation, potentially alienating a segment of its loyal clientele.

In formulating strategies and product development processes, brands must holistically consider consumers’ diverse needs and values. Particularly for these three key attributes, brands must strive for exemplary performance while avoiding potential negative impacts. By adhering to these standards, brands can carve out a unique position in a highly competitive market, garnering consumer trust and loyalty.

Table 3. IRPA results.

Item	Content	RI	PI	RIOCS	SGP	DGP	IA
1	Good elasticity and flexibility	0.596	-0.545	1.141	0.522	0.478	0.045
2	Increase aesthetic value in clothing	0.711	-0.353	1.064	0.668	0.332	0.336
3	Express personal style	0.591	-0.515	1.106	0.534	0.466	0.069
4	Align with societal values of sustainability	0.625	-0.442	1.067	0.586	0.414	0.172
5	Environmentally and health-friendly	0.667	-0.416	1.083	0.616	0.384	0.232
6	Reduce waste and resource consumption	0.511	-0.599	1.110	0.460	0.540	-0.079
7	Make a positive contribution to the environment	0.561	-0.555	1.116	0.503	0.497	0.005
8	Establish resonance with people around me	0.587	-0.550	1.137	0.516	0.484	0.033
9	Evoke happiness and positive emotions	0.551	-0.583	1.134	0.486	0.514	-0.028
10	Increase awareness of fashion brands and related fields	0.621	-0.493	1.114	0.557	0.443	0.115
11	Open to using innovative products	0.540	-0.589	1.129	0.478	0.522	-0.043
12	Desire to try new things and innovative products	0.622	-0.476	1.098	0.566	0.434	0.133
13	Align with current social trends	0.611	-0.468	1.079	0.566	0.434	0.133
14	Enhance personal image and confidence in social situations	0.587	-0.499	1.086	0.541	0.459	0.081
15	Show concern for environmental protection and sustainable living	0.663	-0.432	1.095	0.605	0.395	0.211
Average value (M)		0.603	-0.501	1.104	0.547	0.453	0.094

4. Conclusion

We employed methodologies such as IPA, IRPA, and IAA to investigate the intricate nexus between sustainable fashion brands and consumer values from a multidimensional perspective. Through a comprehensive analysis of the data procured from these methodologies, the study results provided an in-depth understanding of the needs and expectations of Taiwanese consumers for sustainable fashion brands. Data from RIOCS elucidated the relative importance of diverse quality attributes in the consumer’s perception. Consumers attributed importance to the “Enhancement of Aesthetic Value in Wear” and “Demonstration of Commitment to Environmental Conservation and Sustainable Living.” This emphasized the pivotal role fashion brands play in delivering both aesthetic and sustainable value. Concurrently, the insights from SGP (Satisfaction Gap) and DGP (Desired Gap) indicated potential

brand improvement in “Reduction of Waste and Resource Consumption” and consumers’ “Propensity to Engage with Innovative Products.” The IRPA approach further delineated the performance of brands in addressing diverse quality attributes, guiding brands in identifying areas that require refinement to enhance consumer satisfaction. Moreover, the IAA data presented a comparative analysis between the importance and actual performance of quality attributes, emphasizing consumer concerns encompassing aesthetic appeal, sustainability, and innovation.

The findings of this research facilitate brands in deepening their understanding of consumer needs and provide a roadmap for strategic enhancements, product design evolution, and articulating brand value propositions. In a highly competitive marketplace, such insights are instrumental for the thriving success of sustainable fashion brands, bolstering their competitive advantage and promoting a more expansive sustainable consumption ethos. Consequently, this has the potential to engender tangible impacts for Taiwan’s sustainable fashion sector, fostering a market environment resonating with sustainability and aligning with consumer anticipations. Based on the aforementioned research findings, the following three strategic recommendations are proposed to guide the future trajectory of sustainable fashion brands:

- (1) **Balancing Aesthetic Value with Sustainability:** The study result showed that consumers highly valued the aesthetic offerings of fashion brands while also placing significant emphasis on the brands’ sustainability measures. Moving forward, sustainable fashion brands need to strive to harmonize aesthetic appeal with sustainability initiatives, catering to this dual consumer expectation. Such equilibrium can be achieved through innovative design paradigms and judicious material selection, ensuring that products are both appealing and environmentally responsible.
- (2) **Emphasizing Environmental Stewardship and Social Responsibility:** The study result emphasized an increasing consumer concern regarding brands’ commitments to environmental conservation and their adherence to social responsibilities. Sustainable fashion brands must highlight their eco-friendly initiatives, including waste reduction and judicious resource utilization, and advocate for sustainable lifestyle practices. These endeavors not only align with consumer aspirations but also bolster brand credibility and enhance brand equity.
- (3) **Prioritizing Innovation and Sustainable Resource Management:** The study result revealed that consumer expectations for innovative products and sustainable resource utilization remained high, yet there was an evident disparity in brand deliverables. Consequently, sustainable fashion brands must focus on the development of pioneering products that incorporate sustainable materials and manufacturing techniques while enhancing resource efficiency. Such initiatives not only meet consumer desires but also establish a brand’s distinctive position in the competitive landscape.

Sustainable fashion brands ought to continually elevate their performance in areas such as aesthetic value, sustainability, environmental commitment, and innovation. By adapting to the dynamic market demands and consistently emphasizing their societal and environmental duties, brands can secure long-term commercial success, concurrently fostering a more sustainable trajectory for the fashion industry.

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