

CONSUMER DECISION DRIVERS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: CHOOSING RECYCLED CLOTHING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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This study evaluates consumer behaviour in the Republic of Moldova regarding the purchase of recycled clothing, aiming to identify key factors influencing these decisions. The textile sector in the EU, a major contributor to environmental impacts, highlights the urgent need for improved recycling practices and sustainable fashion. With only 1% of textiles being recycled into new garments, significant advancements in recycling technology and consumer engagement are necessary. This research utilizes a survey to assess consumer attitudes towards recycled clothing. The study examines factors such as environmental awareness, accessibility, price – quality balance, and the perceived social and ecological benefits of recycled garments. Preliminary findings suggest that while awareness of environmental issues is increasing, challenges remain in terms of affordability and availability of recycled clothing. The study concludes that enhancing consumer education, improving access to recycled garments, and fostering greater participation from both businesses and consumers are essential to scaling recycling practices in Moldova. These insights aim to support the development of effective strategies to boost recycled clothing consumption and to contribute to sustainable waste management in the textile industry.

Keywords: recycled clothing; consumer behaviour; textile recycling; sustainable fashion; climate changes; circular economy.

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INTRODUCTION

In line with the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles (European Commission 2022), which focuses on the production and consumption of textiles, the textile sector in the EU ranks as the fourth-largest contributor to environmental and climate impacts, following food, housing, and mobility. It also ranks third in water and land use, and fifth in primary raw material consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Every year, approximately 5 million tons of clothing are discarded in the EU, equating to about 12 kg per person. This underscores the significant issue of overconsumption and waste within the fashion industry.

Recycling and reusing clothing are crucial strategies for minimizing environmental harm and conserving resources. Statistics show that for every 1,000 tons of textiles collected for reuse, 20 to 35 new jobs are created (European Commission 2022), highlighting not only the ecological benefits but also the economic and social advantages of textile recycling. By reusing clothes, waste is significantly reduced, and new employment opportunities are generated in textile recycling and refurbishing sectors. These efforts not only help manage textile waste but also contribute to local economies by creating jobs and fostering sustainable practices.

Despite these benefits, currently only 1% of materials from clothing are recycled into new garments (European Parliament 2024). This alarmingly low figure underscores the urgent need to enhance recycling technologies, improve collection and sorting systems, and promote sustainable fashion practices. Increased investment in recycling infrastructure and greater consumer awareness can drive up recycling rates. By improving these systems and encouraging consumer participation, the fashion industry could see a dramatic reduction in textile waste and a substantial decrease in its environmental footprint. Furthermore, scaling up these practices aligns with global sustainability goals (United Nations 2015) and supports a transition towards a more circular economy, where resources are reused and waste is minimized.

The Textiles Commission's vision is that by 2030, all textile products placed on the EU market will be sustainable, repairable and recyclable, largely made from recycled fibers, free of hazardous substances and produced with respect for social and environmental rights (European Commission 2022). Achieving this vision involves a comprehensive approach that includes advancing textile recycling technologies, enhancing product design for durability and recyclability, and ensuring transparency in supply chains. By fostering innovation in sustainable materials and processes, the Commission seeks to drive a significant transformation in the textile industry. This vision aligns with broader EU sustainability targets (European Commission 2020) and promotes a circular economy, where products are designed for a longer lifecycle, minimizing waste and reducing environmental impact. The successful realization of this goal will

require collaborative efforts from policymakers, businesses, and consumers to adopt and support sustainable practices throughout the entire lifecycle of textile products.

The aim of this study is to assess the factors influencing consumer behavior in the Republic of Moldova regarding the purchase of recycled clothing. It seeks to explore how consumer attitudes can be shaped to promote acceptance of recycled clothing and to identify the key factors driving sustainable consumer behavior within this context.

Consumer choices in this area can be influenced by multiple factors, including awareness of environmental issues, accessibility to recycled clothing, and the perceived balance between price and quality. Specifically, factors such as consumer education on sustainability, the availability and convenience of purchasing recycled garments, affordability compared to conventional clothing, and the additional benefits, like the social or ecological impact, play a crucial role in shaping purchasing decisions. By understanding these dynamics, the study seeks to offer insights into how recycled clothing consumption can be encouraged and supported.

In the Republic of Moldova, efforts to recycle clothing and manage textile waste are still in the early stages, but notable progress is underway. Several initiatives are focused on adopting circular economy models, particularly through circular business practices aimed at collecting and recycling post-consumer waste to extend the lifecycle of garments. Young designers are also exploring innovative solutions for garment recycling.

Expanding awareness and involvement is key to advancing sustainable waste management and recycling in the sector (Brotosusilo and Nabila 2020). Raising awareness about the benefits of recycling and sustainable fashion is crucial for fostering a culture of sustainability. Businesses need support in integrating circular practices into their operations, including incentives for recycling and investments in sustainable technologies. Consumers also play a key role; their engagement in recycling programs and preference for sustainable products can drive demand and influence industry practices.

Additionally, collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector is vital for developing comprehensive policies and frameworks that support recycling and sustainable garment production. By addressing these challenges and fostering a supportive environment, Moldova can accelerate its transition to a circular economy, reduce textile waste, and contribute to global sustainability goals.

This paper is structured as follows: first, we present a literature review to provide context on sustainability and consumer behavior. The methodology and data section outlines the design of our survey, which evaluates consumer behavior in the Republic of Moldova regarding the purchase of recycled clothing. Next, we analyze the general characteristics of the respondents to our survey, followed by a

discussion of the key results. We then conduct a correlation analysis to explore the relationships between consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviors. Finally, we conclude by summarizing the main findings and offering recommendations for promoting sustainable fashion in Moldova.

UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND DECISION-MAKING FACTORS IN SUSTAINABLE FASHION

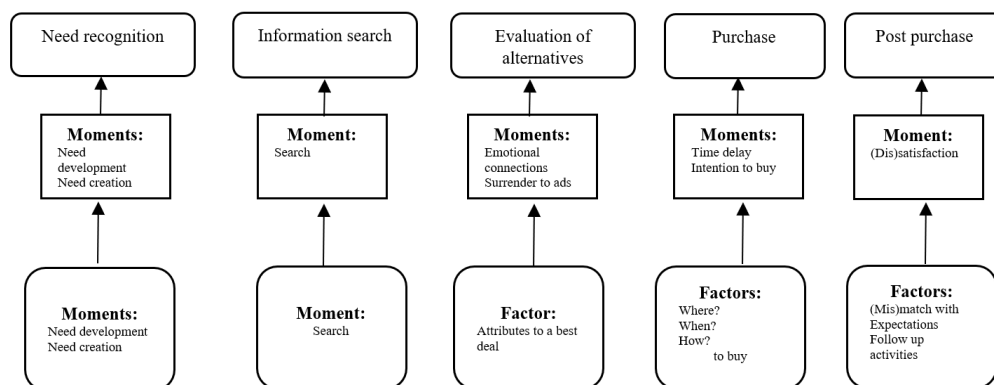
Consumer behaviour has long been a subject of significant interest, as understanding the motivations and decision-making processes of consumers enables decision-makers and stakeholders to refine their marketing strategies and enhance their market success. Gaining insights into why and how consumers make purchasing choices provides a valuable foundation for developing more targeted and effective approaches to meet market demands (Stankevich 2017).

Therefore, understanding buying behaviour sheds light on the psychology behind consumer decisions, including how they think, feel, reason, and choose among available options such as brands, products, and retailers. It also reveals how external factors, such as culture, family, and media, influence their preferences and choices (Stankevich 2017).

Stankevich (2017) critically explained the consumer decision-making process in his research on consumer behaviour; his research has shown how the decision-making process has advanced. In his paper, the author presented an analysis of the evolution of theories regarding purchase decision-making in marketing, the influencing factors in the decision-making process were studied (Stankevich 2017) (see *Figure 1*).

Figure 1

Framework of factors and moments that influence decision-making



Source: Made by authors in base of (Stankevich 2017).

Diksha Panwar, Swati Anand, Farmaan Ali, and Kanika Singal (2019) developed consumer behaviour models that highlight "satisfaction" as a crucial component in the decision-making process. According to their research, satisfaction is not merely a final outcome but rather an integral part of a feedback mechanism that connects past experiences to future behaviours. This concept is exemplified in the Nicosia model, which illustrates how consumer satisfaction influences subsequent purchasing decisions and overall consumer behaviour (Panwar *et al.* 2019). Thus, the authors proposed a five-stage decision-making process model that can be highly effective for guiding purchases. This model provides a robust framework for understanding consumer behaviour and represents a valuable strategy for shaping future market approaches.

Thus, research on consumer behaviour offers a comprehensive understanding of how individuals make purchasing and consumption decisions, revealing the myriad factors that influence these behaviours. For instance, personal characteristics significantly impact decision-making processes (Ballantine and Creery 2010). Additionally, the concept of "fast fashion" drives consumers to purchase more frequently and retain clothing for shorter periods, leading to increased disposal of garments (Bianchi and Birtwistle 2011).

The rise of the circular economy has profoundly impacted consumer behaviour theories, introducing fresh perspectives and approaches. This includes a heightened emphasis on sustainability and responsibility, shifts in values and priorities, and the development of a new role for consumers. These changes reflect a growing awareness of environmental impacts and a shift towards more conscious consumption patterns.

Traditional theories, like the buyer decision-making model, concentrated primarily on the purchasing process. The circular economy, however, introduces new dimensions, by highlighting post-consumption behaviours, such as repairing, donating, and recycling products. Consequently, consumers are now recognized as active participants throughout the entire product lifecycle, extending beyond merely being buyers to include roles in maintaining and repurposing products.

In the context of the circular economy, consumer education and awareness have become essential. Updated theories explore how education and information about environmental impacts influence consumption behaviours and disposal decisions.

According to Jorge Cruz-Cárdenas and other authors an analysis using the Scopus database identified 215 studies, highlighting a significant and rapid increase in the number of publications on this topic (Cruz-Cárdenas, Zabelina, Deyneka, Ramos, and Palacio-Fierro 2022).

In this article, we aim to focus on studies that examine consumer disposal behaviour, which encompasses how individuals decide to part with products they no longer use. This behaviour includes actions such as donating, recycling, selling, refurbishing, or simply disposing of items. Analysing these disposal practices

provides valuable insights into the factors that influence these decisions and helps in developing strategies to reduce waste and encourage sustainable practices. Research on the consumption and disposal of second-hand goods particularly explores how internal factors, such as altruistic motivations and environmental concerns, impact consumer behaviour (Fortuna and Diyamandoglu 2017). Product disposal is of significant interest to companies because it often correlates positively with new purchases (Ha-Brookshire and Hodges 2009; Cruz-Cárdenas *et al.* 2016). Understanding disposal behaviour can help businesses design strategies that encourage consumers to replace old items with new ones, driving sales and fostering a cycle of continuous consumption.

A study conducted by Deloitte revealed that, compared to 2022, there has been a notable increase in the number of consumers considering circularity in their behaviours across 12 out of 15 relevant activities. Significant changes include a rise in circular practices focused on saving money: 76% of consumers are now considering repair services (up from 73% in 2022), 39% are reselling more of their unwanted items (up from 32% in 2022), and 34% are purchasing more second-hand products (up from 29% in 2022). Additionally, in 2023, more consumers are prioritizing durability, repairability, and responsible sourcing when making purchases, as well as supporting products that promote biodiversity. This survey, conducted online with a nationally representative sample of over 2,000 UK adults aged 18+, took place between July 7th and 9th, 2023 (Deloitte 2022).

A recent study by NielsenIQ found that 78 percent of US consumers consider a sustainable lifestyle to be important to them (McKinsey and Nielsen 2024).

Recently, considerable research has explored how the characteristics of sustainable products influence consumer decision-making. A systematic review by Adjengdia Bunga Bangsa and Bodo B. Schlegelmilch (2020) analyzed studies on the relationship between sustainable product characteristics and consumer decision-making from 2008 to 2018. However, this review primarily focuses on studies that assume a linear and rational decision-making process, emphasizing environmental sustainability and predominantly examining food products. Social sustainability and cultural context, particularly differences between emerging and developed countries, remain relatively underexplored in this body of work (Bangsa and Schlegelmilch 2020).

Table no. 1 below systematizes the most relevant factors influencing consumers' purchasing decisions.

Table no. 1

Key drivers of consumer choices for recycled products

Factor	Motivation
Awareness and Education	Awareness of Environmental Issues: Consumers who are informed about the negative impacts of textile waste are more inclined to purchase recycled clothing. Education Campaigns: Public education campaigns highlighting the benefits of recycled clothing and sustainability can positively influence consumer purchasing behaviour.
Accessibility and Availability	Availability of Recycled Clothes: A diverse range of recycled clothing options available in physical stores and online can encourage consumer purchases. Accessibility of Stores: The proximity of stores selling recycled clothing or their accessibility online can simplify the purchasing process for consumers.
Price and Value	Competitive Price: Recycled clothing that is priced affordably tends to attract more consumers. Perception of Quality: Consumers are more likely to purchase recycled clothing if they perceive it to be of high quality and durable.
Socio-Cultural Factors	Fashion Trends: When recycled fashion becomes a popular trend, it attracts more consumers to these products. Social Influence: Recommendations and endorsements from friends, family, and influencers can positively impact purchasing behaviour.
Personal Motivations	Sense of Responsibility: Consumers who feel a personal responsibility for environmental protection are more likely to purchase recycled clothing. Previous Experiences: Positive past experiences with recycled clothing can encourage consumers to make future purchases.
Benefits and Incentives	Rewards Programs: Discounts, loyalty points, or other incentives for purchasing recycled clothing can motivate consumers. Clear Labelling: Transparent information about recycled materials and the manufacturing process can enhance consumer confidence in these products.
Policies and Regulations	Government Regulations: Policies that promote the production and sale of recycled clothing can positively influence consumer behaviour. Tax Incentives: Tax breaks or benefits for manufacturers and retailers of recycled clothing can lower costs, which may result in reduced prices for consumers and encourage purchases.

Source: Elaborated by authors.

Understanding consumer behaviour is both complex and multifaceted. What may appear straightforward at first glance involves analysing and predicting choices through a web of interrelated variables and factors, necessitating a thorough and nuanced approach.

The first aspect contributing to the complexity of understanding consumer behaviour is the diversity of personal and emotional motivations behind purchase decisions. These motivations can differ widely among individuals and are influenced by factors such as basic needs, personal desires, social status, cultural influences, and past experiences. Often, these motivations are not purely rational but are driven by emotions and subjective perceptions, making consumer behaviour challenging to predict in a straightforward manner.

Another complicating factor is the impact of social and cultural contexts on consumer behaviour. Cultural norms, social values, and family influences can profoundly shape purchasing decisions. For instance, a product deemed a luxury in one culture might be viewed as ordinary in another. Additionally, consumption trends and patterns evolve with shifts in social contexts, requiring ongoing monitoring and detailed analysis to stay attuned to these changes.

Every consumer is unique, with distinct preferences, habits, and lifestyles, which complicates the development of one-size-fits-all marketing strategies. To address this, market segmentation and detailed analysis of consumer subgroups – each with its own characteristics and needs – are essential. Segmentation allows for the personalization of messages and offers, but it demands a substantial investment of time and resources to gather and analyse relevant data.

Technology plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behaviour, but also in the complexity of understanding it. Rapid changes in technology, such as the development of the Internet and social media, have changed the way consumers interact with products and brands.

Economic factors, including price fluctuations and global economic conditions, significantly impact consumer behaviour. During periods of economic uncertainty, consumers often become more cautious and adjust their spending habits. Additionally, growing concerns about environmental sustainability add another layer of complexity to purchasing decisions, as many consumers increasingly prioritize eco-friendly and sustainable products.

Thus, understanding consumer behaviour is far from straightforward. It encompasses a complex array of interrelated factors, including personal motivations, social and cultural influences, individual variability, technological impacts, and economic and environmental conditions. To navigate this intricate landscape, the research team has selected a few key factors that, in our view, will provide an initial overview of the behaviour of consumers purchasing recycled clothes in the Republic of Moldova.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The chosen methodology is specifically designed to address the study's main objectives: empirically investigating public concerns related to the circular economy and determining consumer behaviour regarding recycled clothing.

To achieve the proposed objectives, a combination of methods was employed to collect relevant information for this paper. These methods included a survey conducted using a developed questionnaire and telephone interviews to gather the data. Statistical processing was applied for the analysis of empirical data using appropriate statistical tools. Additionally, graphical and indicator methods were utilized for the visualization and measurement of data, while comparison and grouping techniques helped identify patterns and differences. Correlation analysis

was also performed using *Gretl* statistical software to calculate Pearson correlation coefficients, measuring the strength and direction of linear relationships between relevant variables.

The informational support for the research consisted of legislation, international and European policies and strategies in the field of the circular economy, sustainability of textile products, national policies and strategies, official statistical databases from international and national bodies, as well as the developed questionnaire (INCE 2024).

The questionnaire contains 5 sets of questions grouped depending on the selected factors (see *Table no. 2*).

Table no. 2

Questionnaire Structure: Factor-Based Question Sets

Factor 1. Perceived quality of recycled clothing	1.1. In general, consider the quality of recycled products
	1.2. The quality of recycled products meets my expectations.
Factor 2. Purchase intention	2.1. You have purchased clothing with the “product from recyclable materials” logo
	2.2. I am determined to buy recycled clothing in the future
	2.3. I will continue to buy recycled clothing in the future
	2.4. I will only buy recycled clothes when the price is much lower than it is now
	2.5. I want to buy clothing made from recyclable products, but I don't know where to find it
Factor 3. Price perception	3.1. I believe that the price of recycled products corresponds to their quality
	3.2. Clothing made from recycled materials is cheaper
	3.3. I can only afford to buy recycled products (including second-hand clothes)
Factor 4. Environmental concern	4.1. Recycled clothing helps counteract environmental problems
	4.2. I believe that recycled clothing has a low impact on the environment
	4.3. Purchasing recycled clothing is important for conserving natural resources
Factor 5. Perceived social value	5.1. In our society, it is valued when a person chooses to buy recycled products
	5.2. People who buy recycled products demonstrate a high level of civic responsibility

Source: Elaborated by authors in base of the survey “Studiu privind comportamentul consumatorului față de îmbrăcămintea reciclată în R. Moldova” (INCE 2024).

The data presented in this study were collected through telephone interviews based on the aforementioned questionnaire. Responses were recorded using the Google Forms platform, which facilitated efficient data collection by allowing participants to submit their answers online. This platform enabled real-time data aggregation, making it easier to process and systematize the information alongside data collected through telephone interviews. Additionally, the data were exported

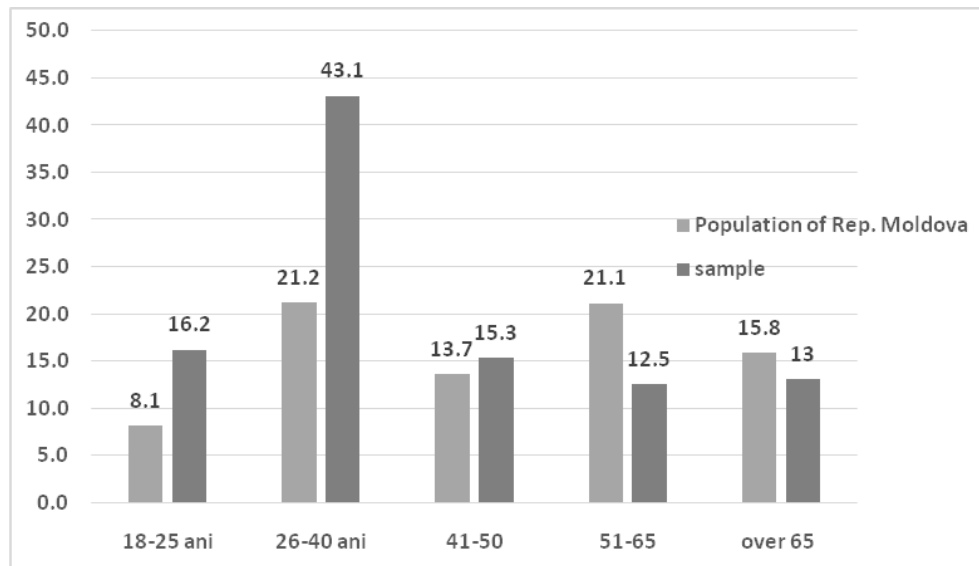
to Excel for further analysis and organization. The data collection period spanned from February 1, 2024, to May 20, 2024.

General characteristics of the sample

The studied sample included 662 participants, selected from different regions of the Republic of Moldova. The age distribution showed that about 16% of the sample are between 18–25 years old, about 43% between 26–40 years old, 15% between 41–50 years old, 12.5% between 51 and 65 years old, and 13% of the respondents are over 65 years old (see *Figure 2*).

Figure 2

Age distribution: survey sample vs population of the Republic of Moldova, %



Source: Authors' calculations in base of statistics offered by the National Bureau of Statistics and results of the survey.

Compared to the situation for the entire country, the sample obtained from the questionnaires shows an over-representation of young people and young adults (18–40 years) and an under-representation of elderly people (51–65 years) (see *Figure 2*).

The sample has a share of 44.0% female respondents, which is lower than the share of 53.0% in the general population. This suggests that women are under-represented in the sample compared to the general population. The proportion of men in the sample is 45.9%, which is comparable to the proportion in the general population of 47.0% (see *Figure 3*).

Figure 3

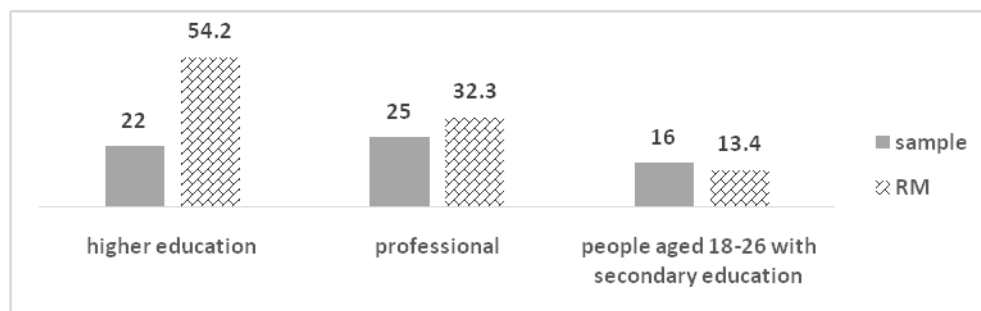
Gender distribution: survey sample vs population of the Republic of Moldova, %

Source: Authors' calculations in base of statistics offered by the National Bureau of Statistics and results of the survey.

Accordingly, a relatively balanced representation of men in the sample is attested. The percentage of 10.1% who did not answer the gender question could indicate a lack of availability or reluctance to answer questions related to gender, and this fact does not allow us to calculate the exact representativeness of the sample.

Regarding the level of education, the share of those with professional studies in the sample (32.3%) is comparable to that of the general population (25.0%) (further see *Figure 4*). This suggests a fairly balanced representation of people with professional education. The sample of people aged 18–26 with secondary education has a weight of 16%, which can be considered relatively balanced. In contrast, the representativeness of people with higher education is attested to be around 54%, which exceeds the weight per country of 22%. This indicates a significant overrepresentation of people with higher education in the sample.

Figure 4

Education level distribution: survey sample vs population of the Republic of Moldova, %

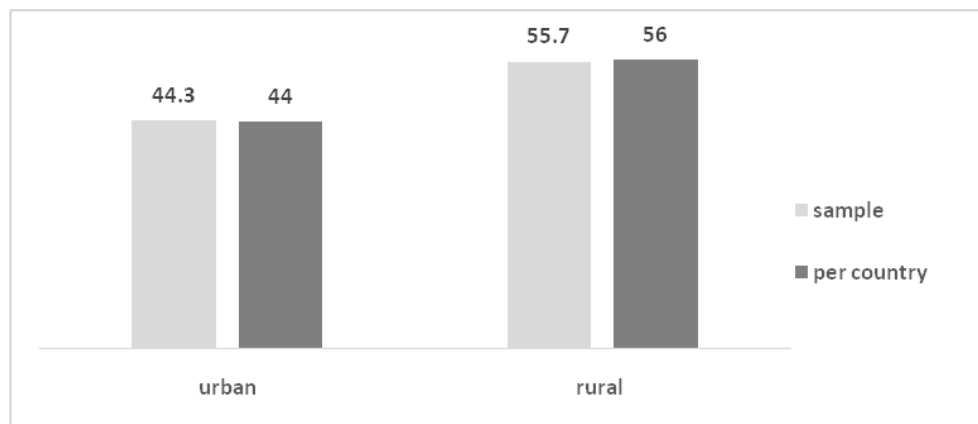
Source: Authors' calculations in base of statistics offered by the National Bureau of Statistics and results of the survey.

The sample has a balanced representation in terms of respondents' background, which is important for the validity of the study results.

The study achieved a roughly equal geographical distribution among the three regions: North, South, and Center. However, about 27% of respondents are from the capital – Chişinău.

Figure 5

Urban–rural distribution: survey sample vs national population, %



Source: Authors' calculations in base of statistics offered by the National Bureau of Statistics and results of the survey.

Monthly income distribution is as follows: up to 5,000 MDL (about 15%), between 5,000 and 10,000 MDL (22.5%), between 10,000 and 15,000 MDL (24.5%), between 15,000 and 20,000 MDL (24.3%), and over 20,000 MDL (around 25%).

Notably, 45.2% of respondents are familiar with the concept of recycling, and 48.5% know what recycling clothing involves.

In conclusion, the attested discrepancies will be taken into account in the interpretation of the study results and will not generalize conclusions to the entire population of the Republic of Moldova.

In the correlation analysis, the following variables were selected as most relevant to the study's objectives:

- PROC_IMBREC: Procurement of recycled clothing – directly measures consumer behavior regarding the purchase of recycled clothing.
- CALIT_GENERAL: Perception of the general quality of recycled clothing – an important factor influencing acceptance and purchase of recycled clothing.

- **PRET_SCAZUT**: Perception of the low price of recycled clothing – a crucial factor in consumer behavior that can influence the decision to buy recycled clothing.
- **CALIT_ASTEPT**: Expectations regarding the quality of recycled clothing – can affect the consumer’s willingness to accept and purchase recycled clothing.
- **PERMIT_CUMP**: Financial ability to buy recycled clothing – an economic factor that can influence sustainable consumer behavior.
- **IMPACT_MED**: Perception of environmental impact – a factor that can motivate sustainable behavior and acceptance of recycled clothing.
- **CONSERV_RES**: Perception of resource conservation – can influence attitudes toward recycled clothing and general sustainable behaviour.
- **APREC_SOC**: Social appreciation of recycled clothing – may play a significant role in the acceptance and adoption of recycled clothing.
- **INTENT_VIIT**: Future purchase intention – directly measures the consumer's willingness to adopt sustainable behaviour in the future.
- **CONT_CUMP**: Continuation of purchasing recycled clothing – indicates the sustainability of long-term sustainable behaviour.

These variables effectively cover key aspects of consumer behaviour and the factors influencing it regarding recycled clothing, thus addressing the study’s specific objectives. They measure both current behaviour and future intentions, as well as factors that may influence this behaviour, including perceptions of quality, price, environmental impact, and social norms.

This comprehensive methodology not only allows for a nuanced understanding of consumer attitudes but also facilitates the identification of trends and potential barriers in the adoption of recycled clothing. By leveraging the quantitative data obtained from the survey, the study provides a comprehensive view of consumer behavior, enabling more targeted strategies for promoting sustainable fashion. Furthermore, the approach provides valuable feedback for policymakers, businesses, and educators seeking to enhance the appeal and accessibility of recycled clothing, ultimately supporting broader sustainability goals.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BEHAVIOUR OF CONSUMERS PURCHASING RECYCLED CLOTHES, BY FIVE SUMMARIZING FACTORS

Factor 1. Perceived quality of recycled clothing – consumers’ opinion on the quality of recycled clothing

In recent years, recycled clothing has become a topic of increased interest as more and more consumers become aware of the negative impact of fast fashion on the environment. Consumer opinion about the quality of recycled clothing varies significantly, influenced by several factors.

Many consumers are sceptical about the quality of materials used in recycled clothing. There is a common perception that recycled clothes are made from inferior materials that may be less durable or less comfortable than new materials. This perception may be influenced by lack of adequate information or negative experiences with poor quality recycled products.

The results of the study showed that about 34% of the 662 respondents consider the quality of recycled products to be satisfactory, about 30% – good quality, while 10 percent considered that recycled clothes are of unsatisfactory quality.

Consumer opinions about recycled clothing are heavily influenced by personal experiences. Those who have encountered high-quality recycled products are generally more favourable towards them and more inclined to purchase recycled items in the future. In contrast, negative experiences, such as problems with the durability or appearance of clothes, can lead to a negative perception and reluctance to try such products again.

The survey further highlights that 49.6% of respondents feel that the quality of recycled clothing meets their expectations, suggesting a near-even split in perception. On the other hand, about 16% of respondents disagree, reflecting the ongoing challenges in improving and consistently meeting consumer expectations.

In conclusion, while a significant portion of the surveyed Moldovan consumers view recycled clothing positively, it is important to note that the sample may not be fully representative of the broader population. Enhancing the quality of recycled clothing and addressing concerns related to durability and appearance are crucial for fostering greater acceptance among consumers.

Consumers' opinions on the quality of recycled clothing are diverse and influenced by numerous factors. From the perception of material quality and personal experiences to environmental awareness and marketing strategies, each aspect plays a role in shaping these views. In our opinion, to improve public perception and increase the adoption of recycled clothing, it is essential for manufacturers to:

Invest in technology and innovation in order to enhance the quality and durability of recycled materials through advanced technology and innovation, addressing common concerns about inferior quality. Companies like Patagonia and Stella McCartney have led the way by integrating cutting-edge technology to improve the quality and durability of recycled materials. Patagonia's use of recycled polyester from plastic bottles not only enhances material quality but also demonstrates the potential for high-performance recycled textiles.

Offer clear and accessible information about the materials and processes used in recycled clothing, helping to build consumer trust and reduce scepticism. Brands such as H&M's Conscious Collection and Levi's have successfully used detailed labels and transparency to build trust. H&M provides information about the percentage of recycled materials used and the environmental benefits, which

helps consumers make informed choices. Thus, manufacturers should ensure that all recycled clothing products include transparent labelling that clearly explains the materials used, the recycling process, and the environmental impact. This can build trust and counter scepticism.

Engage in practices that align with consumers' values of sustainability and responsibility. For example, the brand Toms Shoes has built a reputation not only on quality but also on its commitment to ethical sourcing and social responsibility. Toms integrates a “One for One” model, contributing to social causes with every purchase. Business practices can be aligned with consumer values by adopting ethical sourcing, minimizing environmental impact, and supporting recycling initiatives, engaging in corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs that highlight these efforts.

Develop targeted marketing strategies that emphasize the environmental benefits of recycled clothing and educate consumers about the positive impact of their purchases. Adidas has effectively used campaigns to promote its Parley collection, made from ocean plastic waste. Their marketing focuses on the environmental benefits and the story behind the products, resonating with eco-conscious consumers.

Consider pricing strategies that make recycled clothing more accessible and competitive compared to conventional options. Thus, use of storytelling to connect with consumers on a personal level, showing how their purchases contribute to sustainability is a good practice to consider.

By addressing these key areas, manufacturers can not only improve the perception of recycled clothing but also encourage greater consumer adoption, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable fashion industry.

Factor 2: Purchase Intention

A majority of respondents express an intention to continue purchasing recycled clothing, with 54.4% showing positive purchase intention. Meanwhile, about 25.8% are unlikely to buy recycled clothing in the future, which reflects a barrier that still exists for a portion of the consumer base. The neutral group (19.8%) may be influenced by factors such as quality, availability, or price. The relatively strong intention to continue purchasing recycled clothing highlights a positive trend in consumer commitment, yet it also indicates that there is room for improvement in addressing concerns or hesitations.

While a significant portion of respondents remains sceptical about buying recycled items, there is a notable segment that is committed to prioritizing them. This contrast suggests that future efforts to increase the adoption of recycled clothing should focus on addressing the concerns of those hesitant consumers, such as improving awareness, perceived quality, and affordability. At the same time, strengthening the positive perceptions of committed consumers could help foster long-term sustainable purchasing behaviour.

The majority of respondents (50.8%) strongly agree that they want to buy clothing made from recyclable materials but are unable to find it, while another 13.4% also agree with this statement. This shows that 64.2% of respondents feel that access to recycled clothing is a significant issue. These results indicate a clear gap between consumer demand and the availability of recycled clothing products in the market.

On the other hand, 21.6% (combining responses 1 and 2) disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, suggesting that some consumers do not find availability a problem or may already know where to purchase such items. The neutral group (14.2%) might reflect people who are either indifferent to the availability issue or have mixed experiences regarding access to these products.

These findings suggest that there is considerable interest in buying clothing made from recyclable materials, but a lack of availability is a major barrier for the majority of consumers. Addressing this accessibility issue through better distribution channels, increasing the visibility of recycled clothing options, or enhancing marketing efforts could help bridge this gap between interest and purchase behaviour. If consumers are made more aware of where they can find such products, or if availability is increased, purchase intention could rise significantly.

It is considered that the decision to purchase largely depends on the price of the product. In our case, respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with the following statement: "I will buy recycled clothes only when the price is much lower than it is now." The majority of respondents (49.9%) disagree or strongly disagree with the idea that they will only buy recycled clothing if prices drop significantly. This suggests that nearly half of the participants may already be willing to purchase recycled clothing at current price levels, or they do not view price as the main barrier to purchasing. However, 39% indicate that they would only buy recycled clothing if prices were much lower, which suggests that price sensitivity remains a significant factor for a sizable portion of consumers. This group sees current prices as a deterrent, and reducing the cost of recycled clothing could be key to converting this segment into regular buyers.

The neutral responses (11.2%) indicate that some consumers may be undecided or feel ambivalent about price as the primary influence on their purchasing decisions.

While many consumers may not see price as the only obstacle to buying recycled clothing, a large portion still perceives current prices as a barrier. Strategies such as competitive pricing, promotional offers, or better communication of the value and benefits of recycled clothing could help address this price sensitivity and encourage more widespread adoption.

Factor 3. Price and Perceived Value

Price plays a crucial role in consumers' decision to purchase recycled clothing, directly influencing their perception of the value and quality of these products. Consumers who perceive a good balance between price and quality are

more likely to purchase recycled clothing. They expect these products to be not only financially accessible but also to offer sufficient quality to justify the price.

Survey results show that 39% of respondents have already purchased recycled clothing, indicating a significant openness to these types of products. However, a quarter of respondents (25%) remain hesitant and have not yet decided to buy recycled clothing. Most notably, 35.6% of respondents either do not know or have not considered the type of products they are purchasing, suggesting a lack of awareness or engagement with the issue.

The survey revealed that about 25% of respondents believe that the price of goods made from recycled materials is not lower, while 10% are convinced that recycled clothing is cheaper. Respondents' perceptions of the price-quality ratio are quite varied. However, most respondents (around 39%) have not formed a definitive opinion on the statement "I believe that the price of recycled products matches their quality".

A possible conclusion from these findings is that there is still significant uncertainty and a lack of awareness among consumers regarding the price-quality ratio of recycled clothing. The fact that 39% of respondents have not formed a clear opinion suggests that either they have not had enough exposure to recycled products or that the available information on these products is insufficient. This highlights the need for more transparent communication from manufacturers and retailers about the benefits and quality of recycled clothing. Moreover, educating consumers on the true value of these products could help bridge the perception gap and encourage more informed purchasing decisions.

The significant uncertainty regarding the price-quality ratio of recycled clothing points to a need for enhanced transparency and consumer education. To address these gaps:

- Manufacturers and retailers should provide clear information about the cost structure and benefits of recycled clothing. This can include detailed comparisons and explanations about the sustainability and quality of recycled materials.
- Initiatives to educate consumers about the advantages of recycled clothing, including potential cost savings and environmental benefits, can help bridge the perception gap. Highlighting the long-term value of investing in recycled products could foster a more informed consumer base.
- Effective marketing strategies that showcase the quality and value of recycled clothing can help shift perceptions. Demonstrating the tangible benefits and aligning product pricing with consumer expectations can enhance overall acceptance and encourage more purchases.

By addressing these areas, it is possible to improve consumer perceptions and drive greater acceptance of recycled clothing, ultimately supporting sustainable fashion practices.

Factor 4: Environmental and Ethical Awareness and Factor 5: Perceived Social Value

A significant segment of consumers (40%) value recycled clothing not only for its physical quality but also for its environmental and ethical benefits. Over 60% of respondents believe that recycled clothing has a reduced impact on the environment, and about 50% are convinced that purchasing recycled clothing contributes to the conservation of natural resources.

These consumers are willing to accept potential compromises in quality in exchange for the satisfaction of reducing waste and protecting the environment. For them, the quality of clothing is assessed not only through durability and comfort but also by its positive impact on the planet. In fact, 50% of respondents strongly agreed that people who purchase recycled products demonstrate a high level of civic responsibility.

This highlights a growing awareness among consumers who prioritize sustainability and ethics in their purchasing decisions. The data suggests that a substantial portion of the population is motivated by ecological and social responsibility, which can be leveraged to promote recycled clothing as a symbol of environmental stewardship.

These consumers are willing to accept potential compromises in quality in exchange for the satisfaction of contributing to waste reduction and environmental protection. For them, the quality of clothing is not solely evaluated based on durability and comfort but also through its positive impact on the planet. As a result, 50% of respondents strongly agreed that individuals who purchase recycled products demonstrate a high level of civic responsibility.

UNVEILING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS AND PURCHASING BEHAVIOURS

The correlation analysis revealed several significant relationships between the studied variables, providing a nuanced perspective on the factors influencing consumer behaviours regarding recycled clothing in the Republic of Moldova (see *Figure 6*).

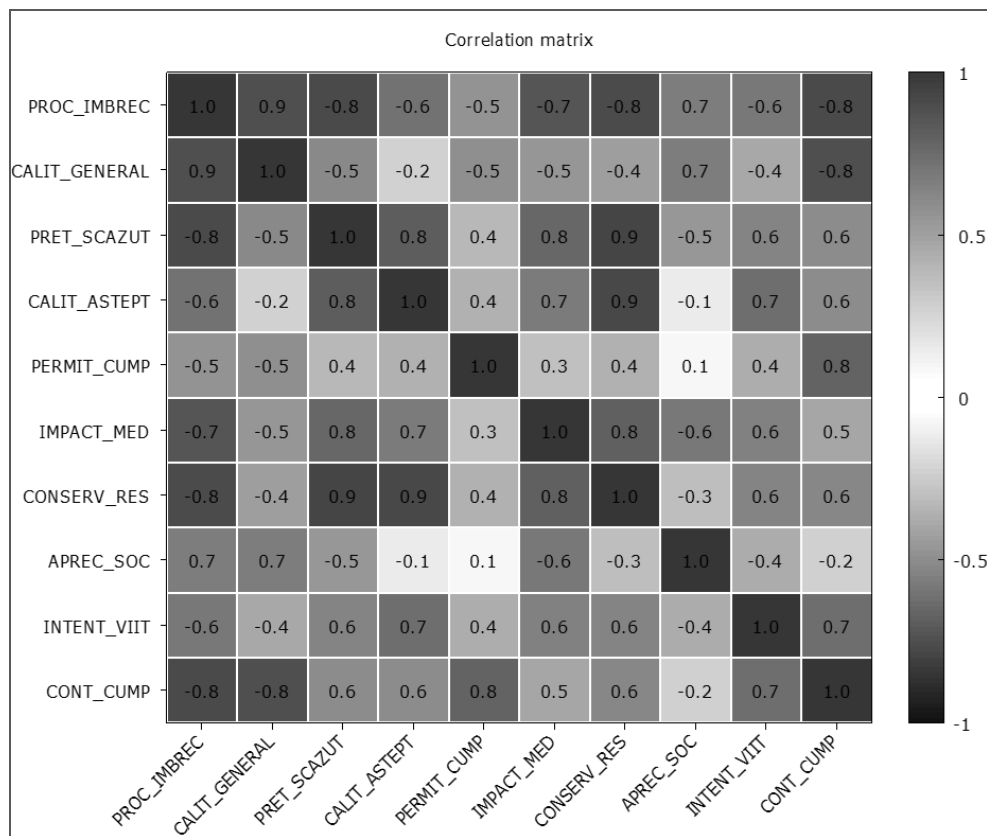
As a result of correlating the selected variables using *Gretl*, the following significant relationships between factors influencing consumer behaviours towards recycled clothing were highlighted:

Recycled Clothing Purchase: This variable shows a strong positive correlation (0.8800) with the perception of general quality, suggesting that consumers with a favourable opinion about the quality of recycled clothing are more likely to purchase it. In contrast, there is a significant negative correlation with the perception of low price (-0.7745), indicating that when consumers perceive recycled clothing as cheap, they are less inclined to buy it. Additionally,

the purchase variable is negatively correlated with environmental impact (-0.7314) and resource conservation (-0.7685), which may initially seem counterintuitive. Many consumers may perceive recycled clothing as having lower environmental impact and resource conservation benefits if they view it primarily as a budget option rather than a sustainable choice. This perception may lead to the assumption that recycled clothing is of inferior quality, thereby discouraging purchases. It suggests that while consumers may recognize the importance of sustainability, their purchasing decisions may be influenced more heavily by perceptions of quality and value, rather than the environmental attributes of the products.

Figure 6

Correlation Matrix of Coefficients for the Studied Variables (Observations 1 – 662)



Source: Developed by the authors based on survey results using Gretl software.

Perceived General Quality: Besides the strong correlation with purchase intention, this variable shows a moderate negative correlation with the perception

of low price (-0.5242), suggesting that recycled clothing perceived as higher quality is not associated with low prices. Additionally, there is a moderate to strong positive correlation with social appreciation (0.6618), indicating that the perception of quality may be influenced by social norms.

Perception of Low Price: This variable exhibits strong positive correlations with expectations regarding quality (0.8141), environmental impact (0.7665), and resource conservation (0.9253). This suggests that consumers who perceive recycled clothing as inexpensive also have lower expectations regarding its quality and are more concerned with environmental aspects.

Quality Expectations: This variable has a strong positive correlation with resource conservation (0.9159) and future purchase intent (0.7303), indicating that quality expectations are closely linked to environmental concerns and future buying behaviour.

Financial Affordability: Exhibits a strong positive correlation with continued purchasing (0.7869), suggesting that financial considerations play a crucial role in sustaining long-term purchasing behaviour.

Environmental Impact and Resource Conservation: These two variables are strongly correlated with each other (0.7988), indicating that consumers tend to view them as closely related.

Social Appreciation: While social factors do play a role in influencing decisions, they show weaker correlations with other factors, indicating that they are not the primary drivers behind the choice to purchase recycled clothing.

Future Purchase Intent and Continued Purchasing: These variables are strongly positively correlated (0.7299), indicating a close link between declared intentions and actual purchasing behaviour.

The correlation analysis reveals a complex picture of the factors influencing consumer behaviour towards recycled clothing. Perception of quality plays a crucial role in the purchase decision, being closely linked to actual purchasing behaviour. At the same time, the perception of a low price seems to discourage purchases, possibly due to the association with lower quality. Environmental concerns and resource conservation are interconnected and significantly influence consumer attitudes.

The findings suggest that while perceived quality is a strong driver of purchasing recycled clothing, a low price perception may inadvertently undermine consumer trust. This indicates a need for better communication regarding the value and quality of recycled products to align consumer expectations. Furthermore, the strong correlations between environmental impact and resource conservation highlight that sustainability factors are key motivators for consumers. Addressing these factors through transparent practices and emphasizing the environmental benefits could enhance consumer acceptance and drive long-term behaviour change towards recycled clothing.

The financial factor is important for sustaining long-term purchasing behaviour. Social appreciation, although relevant, does not appear to be a primary determinant. There is a strong coherence between purchase intentions and actual behaviour, suggesting that consumers' stated intentions are good predictors of their real behaviour.

This finding underscores the importance of addressing financial considerations to encourage sustained purchasing of recycled clothing. Efforts to enhance the economic viability of recycled products could lead to more consistent consumer behaviour over time. While social factors do play a role, their influence is less pronounced compared to financial and environmental concerns. Therefore, focusing on affordability and communicating the environmental benefits effectively can better align consumer intentions with actual purchasing decisions.

The results indicate that promoting recycled clothing should focus on quality and durability rather than solely on low prices. Educating consumers about the positive environmental impact could be beneficial, but it must be carefully balanced to avoid undermining perceptions of quality. Marketing strategies should account for the complexity of these interactions to be effective in encouraging the adoption and maintenance of recycled clothing purchasing behaviour.

Emphasizing quality is essential, as there is a strong correlation between perceived quality and purchasing behaviour. Marketing strategies should focus on showcasing the high standards of recycled clothing by utilizing certifications, testimonials, and detailed product descriptions to boost consumer confidence.

Furthermore, education campaigns should highlight how the environmental benefits of recycled clothing align with high quality. Effective communication could involve demonstrating advancements in recycling technology and sustainable production methods.

In addition, to counteract the negative perception that low prices may imply poor quality, pricing strategies should strike a balance. Offering value-added benefits or implementing tiered pricing can convey that recycled clothing provides both quality and affordability.

Lastly, engaging consumers through interactive campaigns, feedback channels, and transparent practices can foster trust and loyalty. Providing clear information about the environmental impact of recycled clothing can reinforce positive perceptions.

By addressing these aspects, stakeholders can better navigate the multifaceted landscape of consumer behaviour regarding recycled clothing, and foster a more sustainable and engaged consumer base.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study highlight the complexity of the dynamics governing consumer attitudes and behaviours towards recycled clothing. Our findings suggest

that to stimulate widespread adoption of these products, a multidimensional approach is necessary, one that goes beyond simple pricing or marketing strategies.

Future research could delve deeper into the interplay between psychological, social, and economic factors shaping purchasing decisions in this domain. Understanding how these factors interact can provide a more comprehensive view of consumer motivations and barriers.

It would be valuable to investigate how seemingly contradictory perceptions related to quality, price, and environmental impact can be reconciled. This could involve exploring consumer attitudes towards trade-offs and identifying strategies to align these perceptions with positive purchasing behaviour.

Long-term studies could offer valuable insights into the evolution of consumer attitudes over time, enabling adjustments to strategies and interventions based on changing trends and preferences. Tracking shifts in consumer behaviour could help refine approaches to promoting recycled clothing.

Conducting comparative analyses across different demographic segments or geographical markets could reveal important nuances in consumer preferences and motivations. This approach could help tailor marketing and educational efforts to specific target groups.

The findings of the survey underscore the need for close collaboration among producers, market researchers, and sustainability experts to develop innovative solutions that meet both consumer quality expectations and environmental imperatives. A holistic approach is essential to ensure a transition towards a more sustainable and responsible fashion industry, aligned with the evolving values and expectations of contemporary society.

By addressing these aspects, stakeholders can better navigate the complexities of consumer behaviour and foster a more sustainable and engaged consumer base. This collaborative effort will be crucial in advancing the sustainability agenda in the fashion industry and achieving meaningful progress in environmental responsibility.

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Acest studiu evaluează comportamentul consumatorilor din Republica Moldova în ceea ce privește achiziționarea hainelor din materiale reciclate, având ca scop identificarea principalilor factori care influențează aceste decizii. Sectorul textilelor din UE, un contribuitor major la impactul asupra mediului, subliniază necesitatea urgentă de îmbunătățire a practicilor de reciclare și a promovării modei sustenabile. Având în vedere că doar 1% din textile sunt reciclate în noi articole de îmbrăcăminte, sunt necesare progrese semnificative în tehnologia de reciclare și o implicare mai mare din partea consumatorilor.

Această cercetare folosește un sondaj pentru a evalua atitudinile consumatorilor față de hainele reciclate. Studiul analizează factori precum conștientizarea problemelor de mediu, accesibilitatea, echilibrul preț – calitate și beneficiile sociale și ecologice percepute ale reciclării hainelor. Constatările preliminare sugerează că, deși conștientizarea problemelor de mediu este în creștere, există în continuare provocări legate de accesibilitatea și disponibilitatea hainelor din materiale reciclate.

Studiul concluzionează că îmbunătățirea educației consumatorilor, facilitarea accesului la haine din materiale reciclate și încurajarea unei participări mai active atât din partea companiilor, cât și a consumatorilor, sunt esențiale pentru extinderea practicilor de reciclare în Moldova. Aceste perspective urmăresc să sprijine dezvoltarea unor strategii eficiente pentru creșterea consumului de haine reciclate și să contribuie la gestionarea sustenabilă a deșeurilor din industria textilă.

Cuvinte-cheie: haine reciclate; comportament de consum; reciclare textile; modă sustenabilă; schimbări climatice; economie circulară.

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