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From threats to growth: How recommence shapes the new economy and reduces the fashion industry's carbon footprint

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Abstract. As one of the most significant sources of environmental pollution, the fashion industry requires a transition from the linear production model to sustainable business approaches, among which recommencement is a key strategy for reducing climate impact. The aim of the article was a comprehensive analysis of recommerce as a key factor in the transformation of the fashion industry. The study theoretically substantiated and empirically examined how this business model contributed to the transition from a linear to a circular economy. Particular attention was paid to studying the economic benefits for brands, reducing the climate footprint, and changing consumer behaviour in the context of sustainable development. The main mechanisms by which recommerce helped achieve this goal were described, including extending the life cycle of clothing, reducing the need to produce new goods, decreasing the volume of waste, and saving resources (water, energy, raw materials). Various formats of recommerce were considered – from second-hand shops to online resale platforms, clothing rental, and brand buyback programs. Special attention was paid to the challenges and opportunities facing the development of recommerce, such as logistical difficulties, issues of quality and hygiene of used goods, and the need to change consumer habits. The advantages of recommerce were substantiated not only for the environment, but also for consumers (affordability, uniqueness, cost savings) and business (new sources of income, strengthening reputation, attracting eco-conscious customers). It was emphasised that to achieve maximum effect, a comprehensive strategy is needed, combining recommerce innovations with a rethinking of clothing design (emphasising durability and the possibility of resale). It was demonstrated that introducing recommerce as a priority model in the fashion industry was not just a trend but an urgent necessity for forming a more sustainable future and significantly reducing the climate footprint

Keywords: economic security; climate footprint; sustainable development; circular economy; green economy; reuse; textile waste; consumer habits

Introduction

The necessity for fundamental changes in the global economy is driven by the urgent need to minimise negative environmental impact. Excessive consumption of natural resources and significant volumes of greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the processing and use of materials create considerable ecological risks. In this context, the fashion industry is one of the most prominent sectors that requires transitioning to more sustainable models. Historically, the fashion industry has operated on a linear model of "production-consumption-disposal", which has led to a massive climate footprint, intensive use of natural resources, and the generation of enormous amounts of waste. The phenomenon of "fast fashion" has only exacerbated these problems by encouraging excessive consumption and reducing the life cycle of clothing to a minimum. According to the Circularity Gap Report, the average consumer buys 60% more items than 20 years ago (World Economic Forum, 2023). At the same time, less than 1% of used clothing is recycled into new fibres (ThredUp, 2024). This prompts the fashion industry to rethink its operational and

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business models. The transition to a circular economy requires environmentally friendly production and systemic changes covering the entire value chain – from initial design and raw material selection to logistics, marketing, sales, consumer use and subsequent disposal. Recognising the complexity and depth of such transformations requires a comprehensive study of global experience and existing scientific developments.

In particular, P. Centobelli *et al.* (2022) emphasised that clothing production is highly resource-intensive and resource-dependent, which is why the fashion industry is recognised as unsustainable and is forced, in the context of a transformation to a "green" economy, to seek a more rational model of functioning. They underlined that the current linear model, built on fast fashion, is economically and environmentally unsustainable in the long run. The paradigm shift requires a systemic approach that includes innovations in production processes and business models. According to S. Mishra *et al.* (2021), such a model is the circular business model, in which the driving forces of a closed fashion value chain are innovations, a waste management system, collaboration with partners, connection with clients, and a change in models of using fashion products. The authors specified that successfully implementing a circular economy requires the integration of technologies and ethical principles at all stages of the product's life cycle. They viewed collaboration between brands, consumers, and suppliers as a key element for closing the loop. A. Kozlowski *et al.* (2019) examined traditional tools to minimise the fashion industry's negative impact on the environment in detail. Their research analysed approaches such as using organic materials, recycling, and implementing ecological labelling systems. Although important, the authors stated that these measures cannot fully solve the problem, since they do not change the fundamental principles of linear production.

However, I. Gardabkhadze (2023) emphasised that traditional tools are not enough and suggests expanding their list by developing digital tools for fashion design. The author proved that using 3D modelling and virtual prototypes allows for a significant reduction in the volume of physical waste during the design and production stages of clothing. This enables optimising processes, reducing the need for materials, and increasing production efficiency. O. Vodzinska & V. Paukova (2023) advocated the appropriateness of using upcycling as a way of reusing things to solve this issue. The authors emphasised that upcycling (transforming old things into new ones) extends the product's life cycle and creates additional value, contributing to the formation of unique products. They noted that this practice is important for reducing pressure on natural resources and forming a creative ecological consciousness.

Researchers A. Gakhova & I. Yeremenko (2021) saw the reduction of the fashion industry's environmental impact by introducing innovative technologies for processing textile waste. The authors focused on the importance of chemical and mechanical processing, which allows for obtaining new fibres from used clothing. They stated that introducing such technologies is critical for closing the material cycle and reducing dependence on primary raw materials. I.I. Bilyk *et al.* (2021) emphasised that the processing of textile waste is not only a guarantee of resource efficiency but also an indication of the ecological responsibility of fashion industry companies. They noted that companies that invest in recycling technologies reduce their ecological footprint and improve their reputation and attractiveness to conscious consumers. This contributes to the formation of a new brand image that corresponds to the principles of sustainable development.

Despite the considerable attention given to sustainable fashion and circular economy practices, previous research has primarily focused on technological innovations, material recycling, and production process optimisation. However, the economic and managerial dimensions of recommerce – as a new business model transforming the fashion industry – have received significantly less scholarly attention. Most studies analysed recycling and upcycling as environmental strategies but overlooked recommerce as a comprehensive economic mechanism that simultaneously addresses sustainability, consumer behaviour, and business profitability. The article sought to deliver an in-depth examination of recommerce as a key force shaping the evolution of the fashion industry.

Materials and Methods

A complex set of scientific methods was employed to conduct this research, ensuring a systematic and comprehensive approach to the analysis. The study relied on general scientific and special methods that made it possible to identify the economic and environmental effects of recommerce in the fashion industry. The methods of systematisation and generalisation were used to structure various recommerce formats – from traditional second-hand stores to modern online resale platforms and brand take-back programs implemented by Ralph Lauren, Vans, and Nike**.** This methodological approach enabled the identification of key trends in transforming consumption patterns and business strategies within the sustainable development framework.

The comparative analysis method constituted the core of the research, allowing a systematic comparison between the traditional linear production model ("take-make-use-dispose") and the circular model, which emphasises resource efficiency and waste minimisation. The comparison was carried out according to four key criteria: 1) main goal – defining the strategic objective of production; 2) environmental impact – assessing the level of resource consumption, emissions, and waste; 3) product lifecycle – evaluating product durability and reuse potential; and 4) economic strategy – identifying how business models ensure profitability through recommerce practices. This structured comparison enabled a clear differentiation between the short-term, profit-oriented focus of the linear model and the long-term, sustainability-oriented goals of the circular model.

In addition, the method of content analysis was applied to evaluate academic literature and analytical reports from

leading consulting companies and sustainability organisations (including World Economic Forum (2023), McKinsey & Company (2020), and ThredUp (2024)). This allowed for identifying dominant research directions, conceptual gaps, and practical case studies of successful recommerce integration into corporate strategies. Three criteria guided the selection of sources: 1) relevance – priority was given to publications from the last five years (2019-2025) to reflect current global trends; 2) authority – works by recognised scholars in sustainable fashion and circular economy were included; 3) practical significance – emphasis was placed on empirical data and case studies of internationally known fashion brands that have implemented recommerce. The synthesis of theoretical, empirical, and comparative data allowed the formation of a transparent, evidence-based understanding of how recommerce operates as a transformative mechanism that bridges environmental responsibility with economic efficiency in the fashion industry.

Results and Discussion

Ecological imperative:
From a linear model to a circular economy

The fashion industry is widely recognised as one of the global economy's most resource-intensive and polluting sectors. Its production, distribution, and consumption processes generate substantial environmental impacts throughout the value chain. According to estimates by the World Economic Forum (2023), the fashion industry is responsible for 2-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, which exceeds the combined emissions from all international flights and maritime transport. This figure reaches about 2.1 billion tons of greenhouse gases annually. Its carbon footprint is more than 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions. In this context, it can be said that the fashion industry annually emits approximately as many greenhouse gases as the entire economies of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom combined. Most of these emissions fall into the third category (Scope 3 emissions), covering the entire value chain – from growing raw materials and producing fabrics to using and disposing of products. This makes decarbonising the industry difficult, as it requires influencing countless disparate suppliers and processes worldwide. Therefore, "fast fashion" companies must be responsible for their own production and the product's entire life cycle.

Researchers O. Vodzinska & V. Paukova (2023) explored upcycling as a design-oriented approach that extends the lifecycle of garments through creative reuse. Their research showed how incorporating upcycling into brand strategies supports environmental sustainability, enhances the uniqueness of products, and strengthens brand identity among environmentally conscious consumers. This perspective was particularly relevant to recommerce, which builds upon the revaluation and resale of pre-owned items as a new and dynamic business direction. In contrast, T. Brydges (2024) critically examined the phenomenon of ultra-fast fashion, noting that the accelerated production and consumption cycles promoted by brands such as Shein and Boohoo undermine efforts to achieve global sustainability. The author argued that such models exacerbate environmental pressures, destabilise market equilibrium, and contradict the principles of circularity. From a managerial point of view, this highlights the necessity for companies to adopt recommerce practices as tools for risk reduction and as drivers of strategic innovation. V. Lisitsa (2025) analysed the contemporary fashion industry's operational and competitive challenges during its transition towards sustainable development. The author demonstrated that digital resale platforms and take-back programmes are not merely ecological measures but also profitable entrepreneurial innovations that restructure traditional value chains. These findings correspond closely with the purpose of the present study, which investigates recommerce as both an environmental and an economic catalyst for transformation. Finally, A.A. Ivashura (2022) examined the relationship between the green economy and the minimalist consumption movement, observing that overproduction and shortened product lifecycles have effectively turned the fashion sector into a "disposable industry". This observation supports the conceptual foundation of recommerce, which seeks to prolong product use, optimise resource efficiency, and promote responsible consumption as an integral part of sustainable business management.

In addition to greenhouse gas emissions, the fashion industry is one of the largest consumers of the world's water resources, absorbing approximately 93 billion m^3 of water annually, equivalent to five million people's annual needs. The production of one cotton T-shirt can require up to 2,700 litres of water, and a pair of jeans up to 10,000 litres, creating a significant burden on water resources, especially in deficit regions. The fashion industry is also a colossal generator of waste: about 92 million tons of textile waste are produced worldwide annually, the volume of which has almost doubled over the last decade and a half due to the further evolution of "fast fashion" into "ultra-fast" – Ultra Fast Fashion, where trends for fashionable goods change even faster, as does their production, promotion, and sale (for example, brands Shein, Boohoo, and Cider). For instance, Gap and H&M introduce 12,000 and 25,000 new products yearly, while Shein introduces 1.3 million items over the same period. Most "fast fashion" clothing ends up in landfills, thus turning the fashion industry into a "terrible disposable industry" that produces countless useless items of clothing (McKinsey & Company, 2020; Brydges, 2024).

This ecological imperative dictates the urgent need for the transformation of business models of fashion industry companies from business models based on the "extract-produce-use-dispose" principle to circular business models, based on three key principles (Gakhova & Yeremenko, 2021):

- Circular design, which means not just "eco-design", but a profound rethinking of the product creation process, taking into account its impact on the environment throughout its entire life cycle, which is reflected in the "Cradle to Cradle" concept. This involves transitioning

from traditional resource-intensive and polluting materials (such as conventional cotton with intensive water, pesticides, or primary polyester based on fossil fuels) to environmentally friendly alternatives. These include organic cotton (GOTS certified), linen, hemp, which require less water and chemicals, recycled polyester (from plastic bottles or textile waste), Tencel (lyocell) from environmentally responsible forests (produced in a closed loop where solvents are recovered), as well as innovative biomaterials (for example, leather from mushrooms, fibres from algae, plant waste such as pineapple leaves or banana stalks, or even bacterial cellulose). That is, it is about creating clothing that is not only easy to repair, update, and reuse, but also, after the end of its long-life cycle, can be effectively recycled into new materials or safely returned to the biological cycle (composted). In addition to the choice of materials, designers should focus on design for durability and versatility, creating high-quality, long-lasting clothing that does not go out of fashion in one season and can withstand repeated use and washing.

- Design for recycling involves developing clothing made of mono-materials or easily separable components, which significantly simplifies further processing into new fibres. This avoids complex fabric blends, such as cotton-polyester, which are virtually impossible to economically and effectively recycle into quality secondary fibres.
- Zero-waste design, which minimises fabric scraps during cutting and sewing (up to 15% of fabric traditionally goes to waste (Galushka & Kondratenko, 2020)), and the use of innovative technologies (for example, 3D printing that creates clothing layer by layer, or knitting a "whole" item without seams) helps to reduce waste directly in production.

Companies have viewed circularity as improving traditional processes (Ishchuk & Ivanishena, 2025). However, circular practices like resource recovery create more productive, sustainable, resource-saving, closed supply chains, strengthening resilience and stimulating economic growth. For clarity, a comparison of the linear and circular models is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of key characteristics of the linear and circular models in the fashion industry

Characteristic	Linear model	Circular model
Main goal	Maximising production volume and profit from the first sale.	Minimising environmental impact, extending product lifecycles, and diversifying revenue streams.
Environmental impact	High resource consumption, significant climate footprint, and generation of a considerable amount of waste.	Reducing resource consumption and emissions, minimising waste, and creating closed-loop systems.
Product lifecycle	Short, single-use, rapid disposal.	Extended, with multiple uses, repair, resale, and recycling.
Economic strategy	Low prices, fast assortment updates, and stimulating excessive consumption.	Creating new revenue sources (resale, rental), increasing customer loyalty, and attracting investment.

Source: developed by the author based on O. Vodzinska & V. Paukova (2023)

Therefore, the data in Table 1 clearly demonstrates the fundamental differences between the linear and circular models in the fashion industry. While the traditional model focuses on maximising production volume and profit from the first sale, which leads to significant resource consumption and waste, the circular model aims to extend a product's life cycle, reduce the environmental footprint, and diversify revenue streams. This comparative analysis emphasises that the transition to a circular economy is an ecological choice and a radical change in business strategy that ensures long-term sustainability. In particular, resource recovery and material regeneration create more productive, resilient, resource-saving, and closed supply chains, enhancing sustainability and stimulating economic growth (Fig. 1).

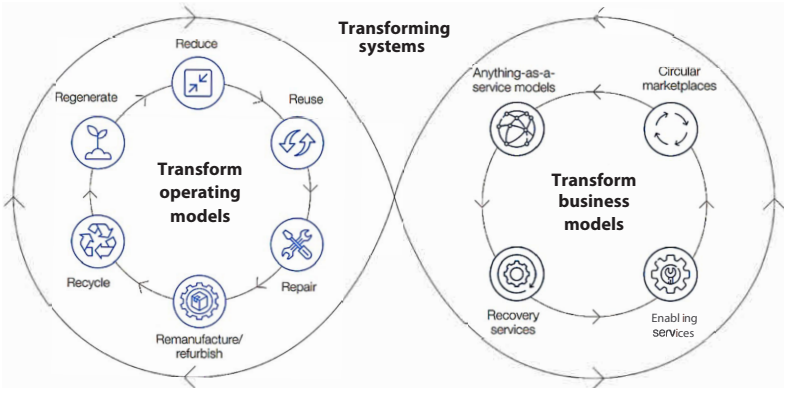

Figure 1. Transition to a circular economy: the need for operational changes and new business models
Source: Driven automotive industry powered by circular economy (2023)

The transformation of business models in the fashion industry has also significantly improved brand image and customer loyalty. As A. Koriakina *et al.* (2024) argued, sustainable fashion represented not only an environmental or aesthetic movement but also a crucial aspect of creative brand strategy. Their research examined the practices of Ukrainian and international clothing brands that incorporated sustainability principles into design and production. The authors demonstrated that environmentally conscious branding fostered stronger emotional connections with consumers, particularly among millennials and Generation Z, who were more inclined to associate themselves with brands that reflected their ethical and ecological values. They highlighted that sustainable fashion brands benefitted from increased visibility, positive word-of-mouth, and a growing base of loyal customers willing to pay premium prices for responsible production. The study also emphasised that integrating sustainable creativity into brand development enhanced long-term competitiveness and differentiation in an increasingly saturated market. Therefore, the findings of A. Koriakina *et al.* (2024) supported the argument that adopting circular and ethical practices strengthened customer trust and brand reputation, which are essential to modern entrepreneurial success in the fashion industry.

In addition, a strong brand reputation positively influenced the companies' investment attractiveness and financial stability. C. Jaynes (2024) investigated the economic dynamics of the second-hand clothing market in the United States. They revealed that it grew seven times faster than the general retail clothing sector in 2023. This growth indicated a broader global trend towards sustainable consumption and demonstrated that resale and recommerce models were becoming mainstream in the fashion economy. The author observed that this shift reflected a change in consumer behaviour, where environmental responsibility was increasingly associated with social prestige and rational economic choice. Moreover, C. Jaynes suggested that sustainable fashion brands participating in the circular economy through resale and take-back programmes became more appealing to investors seeking alignment with ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles. Such enterprises attracted "green" investments and gained access to financing on more favourable terms. These findings reinforced the conclusion that sustainability and transparency were not merely ethical imperatives but strategic business advantages that improved financial resilience, reduced operational risks, and expanded opportunities for partnership and innovation in the fashion industry.

Economic drivers and barriers of circular transformation in the fashion industry

The transition to a circular business model is not just about environmental responsibility but also about significant economic and social benefits that can turn these challenges into opportunities, ensuring the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of enterprises (Gerasymenko *et al.*, 2023):

- Cost reduction is an obvious advantage. The optimisation of resources (water, energy, materials) and the minimisation of waste in production lead to a direct reduction in operating costs. For example, implementing closed water cycles or transitioning to renewable energy sources can significantly reduce utility bills in the long term. Introducing repair and reuse programs can also be economically beneficial, turning potential waste into valuable resources and reducing disposal costs.
- New sources of income are opening up. Recommerce, clothing rental, and repair services create new market segments previously ignored by traditional business models. Brands can profit from goods that have already been sold (for example, through commissions from resale or rental fees), doubling their potential income from one item of clothing and creating more stable and diversified profit flows.
- The transparency and traceability of the product creation chain have direct consequences for reputation and compliance. Reporting and certification through obtaining recognised ecological certificates (for example, GOTS, OEKO-TEX, Cradle to Cradle Certified) and the regular publication of detailed, independently verified sustainability reports are key to building trust, improving reputation, and accessing "green" investments.
- The creation of new jobs. Developing a circular economy requires new skills and specialists in textile processing, repair, secondary use logistics, recommerce platform management, ecological design, sustainability auditing, and certification. This can contribute to the development of local economies, improving the qualifications of the workforce and creating more stable and diverse employment, often with better working conditions.

A lesser dependence on primary resources and the diversification of business models make companies more resilient to external shocks, such as fluctuations in raw material prices (for example, cotton or oil), geopolitical crises, trade barriers, or disruptions in global supply chains. They become less vulnerable to resource scarcity and can better adapt to changes in market conditions and the regulatory environment, ensuring stability in the long term. This can also improve relations with regulatory bodies and local communities, creating a favourable operational environment.

Despite the apparent benefits and urgency, transforming business models in the fashion industry is a complex, multifaceted process. It comes with significant challenges and barriers that pose direct business risks and require coordinated efforts to overcome them. The principal barriers hindering the transition towards circularity are summarised in Table 2, which provides an overview of the main challenges identified through the literature review and case study analysis.

Table 2. Main barriers to circular transformation in the fashion industry

Barrier	Description / Explanation
Defining "circularity" and understanding its full potential	Many companies consider themselves circular if they incorporate recycled materials into a well-established, fully optimised supply chain. Leaders often see this as an expensive step, and it frequently is. Adding circular elements to a modern linear economic model usually does not improve a company's performance or create enough momentum for change. To achieve fundamental transformation, leadership teams must completely redesign their operational and business models, customer engagement methods, product development processes, and supply chain structures to support a new way of doing business. Making minor adjustments to an existing model only leads to gradual changes. New operational and business models that are circular by design can provide the necessary transformative change.
High initial investment	The transition to new, eco-friendly production technologies (e.g., waterless dyeing), investment in new materials (biomaterials are often more expensive initially), and the development and implementation of circular models (creating re-commerce platforms, logistics infrastructure for reverse flows) all require significant financial investment. The fashion industry is characterised by extremely fragmented and geographically scattered supply chains, involving hundreds of suppliers, factories, and contractors worldwide. Making such a chain fully transparent, traceable, and controlled for environmental and social standards is a huge task.
The need for a change in consumer behaviour and mentality	Despite growing environmental awareness, widespread adoption of circular models requires profound consumer habits and preferences changes. For many, a psychological barrier or social stigma exists around buying used clothing. Additionally, the appeal of "fast fashion", with its low prices and constant collection updates, remains strong. Persuading consumers to choose durable, more expensive or pre-owned items that do not align with the latest "microtrends" is a difficult task that requires effective educational and marketing strategies.
Lack of standardisation and uniform regulatory frameworks	The absence of these creates confusion and complicates the implementation of sustainable practices. Specifically, a lack of unified international standards for "green" fashion, methods for calculating carbon footprints, and certification of circular materials and processes can lead to "greenwashing" and hinder fair competition.
Technological limitations in recycling	While mechanical and chemical textile recycling technologies are developing, large-scale, cost-effective, and high-quality recycling of complex fibre blends and clothing with accessories and other additives remains a difficult challenge.

Source: developed by the author based on O. Vodzinska & V. Paukova (2023)

As shown in Table 2, the barriers to circular transformation in the fashion industry are closely interrelated and reveal the structural complexity of the sector. The main challenge lies in the limited understanding of circularity: many companies still perceive it as an optional improvement rather than a strategic foundation. This results in incremental rather than systemic change, preventing the full potential of circular models from being realised. The high initial investment required for new technologies, materials, and recommerce infrastructure remains a critical obstacle, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. This highlights the need for financial incentives, "green" investment tools, and collaborative funding mechanisms to support sustainable transformation. Equally significant are behavioural barriers. Consumer attachment to fast fashion and persistent social stigma around pre-owned clothing hinder mass adoption of circular practices. Overcoming these obstacles requires educational campaigns and marketing strategies promoting the appeal and value of reuse and durability. The lack of regulatory consistency creates further uncertainty, as the absence of common standards for carbon accounting and eco-certification allows greenwashing and limits comparability across markets. Technological challenges also persist: despite progress in recycling, large-scale, cost-effective processing of blended fibres and complex garments remains problematic. Overcoming these challenges requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that includes innovation, investment, government support (through tax incentives and subsidies), a shift in consumer culture, and close cooperation among all stakeholders. For clarity, the main barriers and ways to overcome them are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Main barriers and ways to overcome them on the path to a circular economy in the fashion industry

Barrier	Description	Ways to overcome
Insufficient understanding of circularity	Companies are limited to partial changes without transforming their business model.	Complete redesign of operational models and business processes; strategic partnerships.
High investment costs	Significant initial investments in new technologies, materials, and infrastructure.	Government support (tax incentives, subsidies); attracting "green" investments and ESG funds.
Consumer resistance	The existing psychological barrier toward used clothing, and the appeal of "fast fashion".	Educational and marketing campaigns; collaboration with influencers; emphasis on the uniqueness and quality of recommerce items.
Lack of uniform standards	Difficulties in certification, calculating footprints, and combating "greenwashing".	Development of unified international standards; government regulation (EPR); industry coalitions.
Technological limitations	Difficulties in recycling blended fibres and clothing with accessories.	Investment in R&D; development of new chemical and mechanical recycling technologies; design for recycling (mono-materials).

Source: developed by the author based on O. Vodzinska & V. Paukova (2023)

The data in Table 3 suggests that the challenges of the fashion industry's circular transformation extend beyond technological or financial aspects. Other significant barriers include an insufficient understanding of circularity, consumer resistance, and the lack of unified regulatory standards. However, Table 3 shows that comprehensive measures can overcome these challenges. These range from completely redesigning business models and attracting "green" investments to implementing educational campaigns and developing standardised regulations. Thus, the content of Table 3 illustrates that a successful transformation requires the coordinated efforts of all stakeholders. For businesses, this means the need for strategic planning, a readiness to adapt, and the ability to turn challenges into opportunities (Fig. 2).

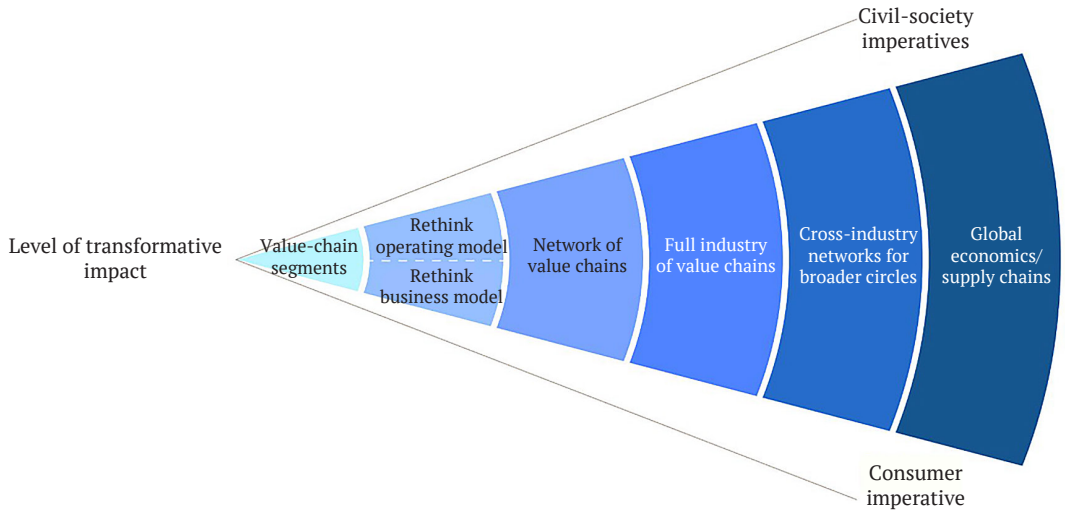

Figure 2. Amplifying Circular Transformations through Systems Thinking
Source: V.I.C. Belchior (2023)

Figure 2 illustrates that a successful circular transformation in the fashion industry requires a phased expansion of influence, moving from local changes to global integration. It shows how transitioning from rethinking individual business models and operational processes to forming industry-wide networks and coalitions significantly increases transformative impact. The ultimate goal is to create circular networks that meet the demands of both consumers (Consumer imperative) and civil society (Civil-society imperatives). Thus, Figure 2 emphasises that achieving sustainable change requires a systemic approach, not a fragmented one. This approach will facilitate successful circular transformation, enhance competitiveness in international markets, expand product ranges, and create socially responsible businesses. This will enable Ukraine to strengthen its position in the fashion industry and ensure the sector's sustainable development, even in the face of modern challenges.

Forward-thinking strategies and the role of recommerce in a sustainable future

Successful leaders begin their journey with self-reflection and developing a profitable circular business model, transforming operations accordingly and at scale. Ralph Lauren, for example, addressed this challenge through a partnership with the resale platform Vestiaire Collective (alongside the World Economic Forum and Bain & Company), creating a digital architecture for reselling authenticated products. This partnership, which uses digital ID technology developed by Digimarc (formerly EVRYTHNG), has benefited all parties. Ralph Lauren expanded its brand reach, enhanced brand equity, and pioneered a new resale market. Vestiaire Collective increased its customer base and reduced the risks and costs of counterfeit products. Consumers also benefited, as they can confidently purchase authenticated second-hand products. Partnerships offer the opportunity to elevate and scale circular models beyond a single product, value chain, or company. Governments should encourage companies to account for their negative impact on the environment and take responsibility for their inputs, outputs, and practices. The EU has led this process with its Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs, which require manufacturers to manage their products at all stages of their lifecycle, shifting financial and operational responsibility from governments and consumers to businesses. Similar frameworks are being implemented worldwide (including in the US, China, and Kenya), but they must be expanded and harmonised across regions and materials to maximise their impact. Specifically, the EU estimates that its circular transformation legislation will lead to €600 billion in cost savings, €1.2 trillion in other economic benefits (about 10% of the EU's 2022 GDP), and create approximately 2 million additional jobs (Vodzinska & Paukova, 2023).

To build a network of connected value chains and self-sustaining ecosystems, industry coalitions must understand the economic fundamentals that support circular models at scale. This requires:

- *Promoting new standards and certifications*. Developing circular-oriented capabilities within companies and among suppliers and consumers, and supporting new regulatory frameworks. Company coalitions can define the "rules of the game", creating an ecosystem with standardised industry metrics – and rely on governments to integrate rapid policies that support the implementation of circular practices (Kozlowski *et al.*, 2019) and the manufacturing of clothing that is safe for both the environment and consumer health (Tilna, 2024).
- *Scaling the secondhand market*. With over half of all consumers buying used clothing last year, it is clear that resale is now firmly embedded in the fashion landscape. Secondhand shopping transcends generations, and the role of resale changes throughout consumers' lives. Younger buyers turn to secondhand for self-expression and to help build their personal style; parents rely on secondhand to outfit their families cost-effectively and eco-consciously; and older generations turn to secondhand for accessible, high-end brands and the thrill of the hunt. Secondhand's flexibility in meeting such diverse needs is a key reason it has become popular and has a promising growth trajectory. On average, the secondhand apparel market is expected to grow three times faster than the overall apparel market (Tkanko & Tkanko, 2019). In addition to clothing, soft toys also require a secondhand system, which is currently being implemented in EU countries, particularly in the Czech Republic (Kriuchkova *et al.*, 2024).
- *Harnessing the opportunities of the metaverse*. Harnessing the opportunities of the metaverse involves several innovative strategies that combine digital engagement with consumer experience. One such approach is metaverse launches, which involve releasing products in the digital world to gauge audience interest and demand before manufacturing them physically. Users can then purchase these products online and use them in the real world. This method, the Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) model, enables brands to test market reactions efficiently. For instance, Balenciaga created its video game, Afterword, to showcase its 2021 autumn collection. Another approach includes virtual events, which help brands attract attention and strengthen audience engagement. Companies also experiment with "meta-events", such as establishing virtual stores in the metaverse to present new collections, foster direct communication with users, and study their preferences in real time. Furthermore, gaming-based advertising is gaining traction as brands shift from traditional formats to more interactive, game-oriented experiences. Modern consumers often ignore conventional advertisements, while gamified promotion methods offer higher engagement and entertainment. This trend is evident in the sports industry: in 2021, footwear and apparel manufacturer Vans created its virtual skatepark within the metaverse platform Roblox, where users could perform tricks, earn bonuses, and buy or customise skateboards and sneakers. Nike took this concept further by developing its own immersive sports world, NIKELAND, where users can explore different sports activities and visit various branded stores (Kozlowski *et al.*, 2019).
- *Implementing circular design*. This involves creating closed loops of production and consumption to eliminate waste entirely through reuse, repair, upcycling, and material recycling. Products created with circular design principles should be durable, modular, and suitable for refurbishment or complete disposal without harming the environment (Chornostan & Myrhorodska, 2025).

Therefore, the future development of the fashion industry requires a comprehensive approach that combines technological innovation, economic incentives, and environmental requirements (Fig. 3).

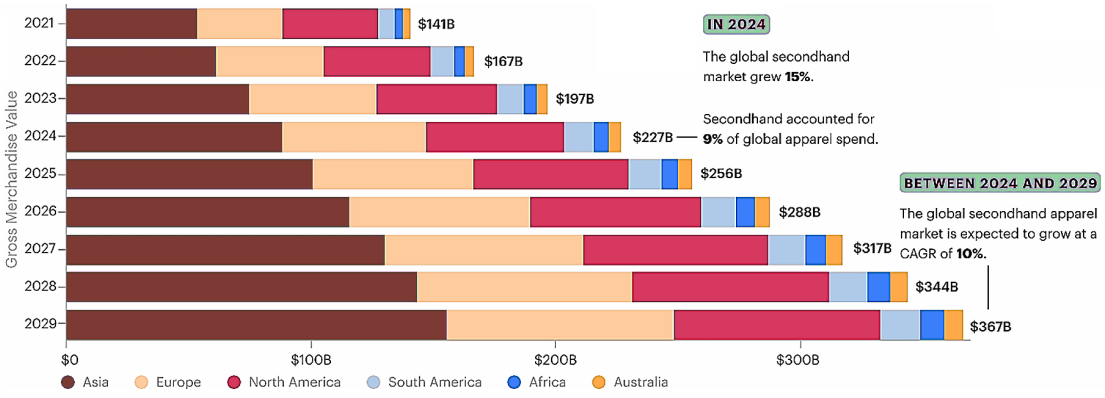

Figure 3. Expected growth in the second-hand market by 2029

Source: N. Silberstein (2025)

Figure 3 illustrates the global secondhand apparel market dynamics by region between 2021 and 2029, expressed in gross merchandise value (GMV). The data show a steady upward trend, confirming the growing economic significance of the secondhand fashion segment within the global apparel industry. In 2021, the market was valued at $141 billion, dominated by Asia and North America, with smaller shares contributed by Europe, South America, Africa, and Australia. Over the following years, the market demonstrated rapid expansion, reaching $197 billion in 2023 and

$227 billion in 2024. Notably, in 2024, the global secondhand market grew by 15%, accounting for 9% of total global apparel spending. The figure also highlights the projected trajectory between 2024 and 2029, during which the secondhand apparel market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10%, reaching approximately $367 billion by 2029. This sustained growth reflects structural shifts in consumer behaviour, driven by increasing environmental awareness, affordability concerns, and the expanding accessibility of digital resale platforms. Regionally, Asia maintains the most significant share throughout the period, followed by Europe and North America, suggesting a diversification of recommerce activity across developed and emerging economies. The gradual increase in contributions from South America and Africa indicates the diffusion of sustainable consumption models beyond traditional fashion markets. Overall, the data in Figure 3 reinforce that recommerce is evolving from a niche trend into a global economic driver, offering both environmental and business benefits. The continuous growth trajectory underscores the potential of the secondhand sector to become a central element of the circular economy within the fashion industry.

Thirty per cent of the top 20 global fashion brands have already implemented specialised resale programmes, integrating circular business models into their core operations (Fig. 4). These initiatives reflect a growing strategic shift within the fashion industry toward sustainability-driven innovation and consumer engagement. By creating digital resale platforms and take-back systems, leading brands seek to reduce textile waste, extend product lifecycles, and build long-term customer relationships based on shared environmental values.

Figure 4. Brands that, as of 2023, offer specialised resale programs

Source: IPMARK (2023)

Figure 4 presents the top 20 global fashion brands that have adopted resale or recommerce initiatives, indicating the increasing normalisation of circular business practices among mainstream fashion companies. Brands such as Patagonia, Levi's, The North Face, Madewell, and Lululemon have been pioneers in this domain, developing comprehensive programmes for product take-back, refurbishment, and resale through in-house and third-party platforms. For instance, Patagonia's "Worn Wear" initiative and Levi's "SecondHand" platform illustrate how resale systems can become profitable while promoting environmental responsibility. Similarly, The North Face's "Renewed" programme extends the lifespan of outdoor apparel through professional repair and repackaging. At the same time, brands like Madewell and Lululemon focus on online resale ecosystems that attract younger, sustainability-conscious audiences. The remaining 70% of brands represented in the figure, including major fast fashion companies such as Zara and Free People, have yet to integrate recommerce strategies fully. However, many are experimenting with limited sustainability initiatives or pilot projects. This gap highlights the uneven progress of circular transformation within the global fashion industry, revealing that while some brands have already institutionalised circularity, others remain bound by traditional linear models of production and consumption (IPMARK, 2023).

Figure 4 thus demonstrates a clear trend toward diversification of business models and strategic innovation in sustainability. Resale programmes have evolved from marginal experiments into mainstream business practices, driven by growing environmental awareness, regulatory pressures, and consumer demand for authenticity and responsibility. As the recommerce sector expands, the brands that proactively embrace these changes will likely gain a competitive advantage through enhanced brand reputation, customer loyalty, and operational efficiency.

Based on the above, it can be stated that the fashion industry is facing an urgent need for radical transformation. The traditional linear model of production and consumption, which is based on a constant increase in volume and rapid trend changes, generates a significant climate footprint, depletes resources, and creates a tremendous amount of waste. This threatens the environment and the economic security of the businesses themselves. Increasing regulatory pressure, changing consumer preferences, and reputational risks force businesses to seek practical and sustainable alternatives. In this context, recommerce acts not just as a trend but as a strategic imperative for ensuring

the sustainable development of the fashion industry. The adoption of sustainability by brands, the reduction of fast fashion, and the promotion of mindful consumption and a caring attitude toward items and nature are beginning to significantly impact the fashion industry at both the production and consumption stages (Cherkach, 2023).

The current study results were consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of sustainability and circularity as fundamental drivers of transformation in the global fashion industry. I. Budnikevych *et al.* (2024) argued that sustainable development had evolved from a theoretical framework into a practical mechanism for restructuring the light industry in Ukraine and beyond. Their findings confirmed that environmental responsibility, social awareness, and innovation served as interconnected factors that determined the competitiveness of fashion enterprises. In line with this view, the present study demonstrated that recommerce – a business model integrating resale, reuse, and upcycling – represented an ecological necessity and an economic opportunity that enhanced brand resilience and adaptability. O.I. Garafonova *et al.* (2021) examined sustainable business models in the circular economy context and emphasised that long-term success required systemic innovation across value chains. They highlighted the need for collaboration between producers, consumers, and intermediaries to achieve closed-loop production and distribution systems. Current research findings complemented those conclusions by empirically illustrating how leading brands had begun to embed recommerce into their operational and marketing strategies. In doing so, they moved from isolated ecological initiatives to comprehensive circular systems that simultaneously reduced waste and generated new revenue streams. I. Soloviy (2025) examined how global principles of sustainable fashion are adapted in Ukraine, showing that local designers reinterpret sustainability through regional materials, traditional crafts, and community-based production. However, she noted that many initiatives remain largely declarative rather than systemic. Compared with international brands such as Patagonia and Levi's, which have successfully implemented *recommerce* and circular models, the Ukrainian context still reflects an early stage of practical transformation. I. Soloviy's findings thus highlight the gap between theory and practice, reinforcing that true circularity requires design innovation, economic incentives, technological infrastructure, and changes in consumer culture.

Researchers O.D. Gerasymenko *et al.* (2023) analysed upcycling and minimalism as cultural and behavioural trends that moderated the overconsumption typical of fast fashion. His research underscored that the success of sustainable fashion depended not only on technological and managerial innovation but also on a paradigm shift in consumer consciousness. This observation corresponded with the present study's conclusion that changes in consumer behaviour – particularly among younger generations – played a decisive role in expanding the global recommerce market. By perceiving pre-owned clothing as a symbol of ethical consumption rather than social stigma, consumers contributed to redefining fashion value. Similarly, O. Kolosnichenko *et al.* (2021) viewed sustainable fashion as an evolving aesthetic and ethical movement that reshaped design philosophy and business practice. They identified sustainability as a modern trend that reflected the growing interdependence between creative innovation and environmental accountability. These insights supported the current study's assertion that circularity could be a unifying principle linking creativity, production efficiency, and responsible consumption. I.M. Mytsenko & I.V. Khadzhynov (2022) examined the conceptual foundations of circular business models adopted by leading European companies. Their study revealed that the effectiveness of circular transformation largely depended on how deeply sustainability principles were integrated into corporate strategy rather than being treated as peripheral initiatives. They identified that successful companies prioritised innovation in logistics, product design, and customer engagement while fostering cross-sectoral collaboration. These findings complement the results of the present study by confirming that recommerce, as part of the circular model, functions not only as an environmental solution but also as a strategic management tool for enhancing competitiveness and mitigating operational risks.

N. Lytvynenko *et al.* (2022) examined the principles of secondary material use in clothing design, emphasising the artistic and functional dimensions of sustainable fashion. Their research explored how designers could creatively integrate previously used materials into new garments without compromising aesthetic quality or consumer appeal. The authors argued that the reuse of textiles reduced waste and encouraged innovation in design thinking, fostering a culture of conscious production and consumption. Importantly, they demonstrated that material reuse could bridge environmental responsibility and creative expression, allowing fashion brands to align sustainability goals with artistic distinctiveness. These findings resonated strongly with the current study, which positioned recommerce as a business-level extension of the same philosophy. While N. Lytvynenko *et al.* focused primarily on design processes, the present research expanded this perspective to the economic and managerial level, analysing how recommerce operationalised the principles of reuse and circularity within corporate strategy. Both approaches underscored the importance of prolonging product lifecycles and redefining the value of clothing in the context of sustainable development. Consequently, the study by N. Lytvynenko *et al*. and colleagues reinforced the view that the future of fashion depends not only on technological or economic transformation but also on the reconfiguration of cultural and creative paradigms in design practice.

The report by J. Reinhart (2025) provided up-to-date empirical evidence on the rapid expansion of the global second-hand market. The report showed that resale grew fifteen times faster than traditional retail in 2023, indicating a fundamental shift in consumer behaviour and brand

strategy. These data supported the current study's findings that recommerce was no longer a niche activity but a mainstream business model reshaping the fashion industry's value chains. The report also highlighted the increasing involvement of major brands in developing take-back programmes and digital resale platforms, confirming that circularity had become a new vector of growth, profitability, and brand differentiation. These studies reinforced the argument that recommerce represented a crucial stage in the evolution of circular business models. It bridged the gap between sustainable production and responsible consumption, creating new opportunities for innovation and long-term economic resilience within the global fashion industry.

The findings outlined above demonstrate that the transformation of the fashion industry through circular and recommerce models is not merely a temporary trend but a structural shift in global business logic. While only a portion of leading brands have fully embraced circularity, the growing diffusion of resale initiatives signals an irreversible movement towards sustainable production and consumption. This transformation is supported by both market dynamics and societal expectations, indicating that environmental responsibility has become a key component of competitiveness.

Conclusions

The transformation of business models in the fashion industry is an inevitable and vital process in the transition to a green economy. It is no longer just a matter of following trends or engaging in "greenwashing", but a strategic imperative for survival and prosperity in the face of growing environmental and regulatory demands and a fundamental shift in consumer values. The move from the traditional linear model – based on the "take-make-use-dispose" principle – to a circular one is key to achieving sustainable development goals. This transition is built on foundational principles like eco-design, production optimisation, and expanding consumption models, including recommerce, renting, repairing, and upcycling.

While the path to significant decarbonisation and circularity comes with significant challenges—high initial investments, complex logistical solutions, overcoming consumer barriers, and technological limitations in recycling – the potential economic, environmental, and social benefits are enormous. Businesses that successfully make this transformation will gain substantial competitive advantages. They will reduce their climate footprint and minimise environmental risks, boost customer loyalty, attract new, valuable market segments, and improve access to sustainable and ESG-focused financing. Furthermore, adopting circular practices will strengthen a brand's reputation and resilience to external economic shocks. Thus, companies that become leaders in shaping a new, more sustainable, responsible fashion industry will secure long-term prosperity. Conversely, those who ignore these changes risk facing a series of serious problems. These include rising waste disposal costs, reputational damage from criticism by environmentally conscious consumers, a shrinking market share, and a threat to the business's existence as regulatory requirements become stricter. Implementing recommerce as a priority model is not just a trend but an urgent necessity for ensuring the industry's long-term viability and achieving the overarching objective of sustainable fashion transformation – aligning economic development, social well-being, and the preservation of the planet. Given the dynamic nature of this field, further research will focus on studying the effectiveness of new textile recycling technologies, analysing the efficiency of marketing strategies aimed at popularising recommerce, diagnosing the long-term economic impact of recommerce programs on brand profitability, and examining the factors that influence changes in consumer behaviour and the overcoming of psychological barriers to buying used clothing.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Від загроз до зростання: як рекомерція формує нову економіку та зменшує кліматичний слід індустрії моди

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Анотація. Індустрія моди, яка є одним із найбільших джерел забруднення довкілля, потребує переходу від лінійної моделі виробництва до сталих бізнес-підходів, серед яких рекомерція виступає ключовою стратегією зниження кліматичного впливу. Метою статті був комплексний аналіз рекомерції як ключового чинника трансформації індустрії моди. У роботі теоретично обґрунтовано та емпірично досліджено, як ця бізнес-модель сприяє переходу від лінійної до циркулярної економіки. Особливу увагу приділено вивченню економічних переваг для брендів, зменшенню кліматичного сліду та зміні споживацької поведінки в умовах сталого розвитку. Охарактеризовано основні механізми, за допомогою яких рекомерція сприяє досягненню цієї мети, включаючи подовження життєвого циклу одягу, скорочення потреби у виробництві нових товарів, зменшення обсягів відходів та економію ресурсів (води, енергії, сировини). Розглянуто різні формати рекомерції – від секонд-хендів до онлайн-платформ для перепродажу, оренди одягу та програм зворотного викупу товарів брендами. Особливої уваги приділено викликам та можливостям, що стоять перед розвитком рекомерції, таким як логістичні складнощі, питання якості та гігієни вживаних товарів, а також необхідність зміни споживчих звичок. Обґрунтовано переваги рекомерції не лише для навколишнього середовища, але й для споживачів (доступність, унікальність, економія коштів) та бізнесу (нові джерела доходу, посилення репутації, залучення еко-свідомих клієнтів). Підкреслено, що для досягнення максимального ефекту необхідна комплексна стратегія, яка поєднує інновації у рекомерції з переосмисленням дизайну одягу (з акцентом на довговічність та можливість перепродажу). Доведено, що запровадження рекомерції як пріоритетної моделі в індустрії моди є не просто трендом, а нагальною необхідністю для формування більш стійкого майбутнього та значного скорочення кліматичного сліду

Ключові слова: економічна безпека; сталий розвиток; циркулярна економіка; «зелена економіка»; повторне використання; текстильні відходи; споживчі звички