



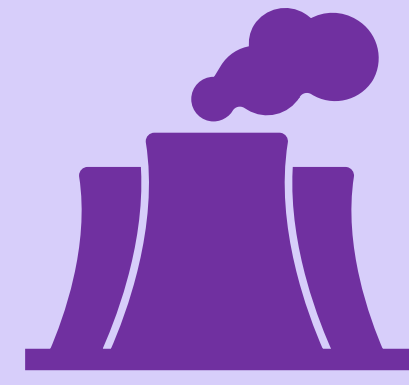
An Exploration of Circularity Practices in the Toronto Fashion Industry

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SSM1100Y: Research Paper

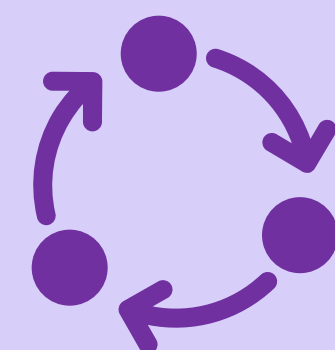


Background and Literature Review

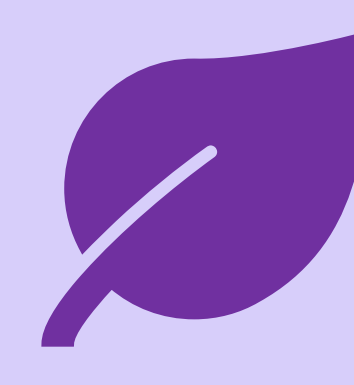
Drawing from three types of literature provided a background for this research paper:



The environmental costs of the fashion industry



Circular Economy Literature



Sustainable Fashion Literature

There are **four main environmental impacts of the fashion industry** (Niinimäki et al., 2020):

- 1. Carbon footprint:** Textiles generate the most greenhouse gases per unit of material of any product (alongside aluminum) (Kissinger et al., 2017).
- 2. Water use:** In 2015, the fashion industry used 79 billion cubic meters of water, and the industry produces ample wastewater (Anguelov, 2015; Niinimäki et al., 2020).
- 3. Chemical use:** The textile industry uses more than 15,000 different chemicals during the manufacturing process, contributing to harmful pollution of local ecosystems (Roos et al., 2019).
- 4. Pre- and post-consumer textile waste:** 100 billion clothing items are produced each year and more than 50 billion garments are discarded within a year of being made (Schumacher, 2022).

Toronto is a **“tier-two” fashion city**, placing it behind global fashion capitals like Paris or New York City (Brydges & Pugh, 2021; Molloy & Larner, 2013). There is also **limited research highlighting sustainability and circularity practices in the fashion industry in Toronto** (Leslie et al., 2014). This demonstrates a **gap in the literature** relating to sustainable fashion practices in the Toronto context.

Research Questions

1. What is currently being done by **key actors and institutions in the Toronto fashion industry** to **address issues of sustainability**?
2. What **challenges** have different actors confronted in trying to implement a **circular economy model**? What could be done to confront these challenges?
3. What **policies** might help foster **a move towards a circular economy** in the **Toronto fashion industry**?

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Methodology

To investigate the research question, qualitative methods – **semi-structured interviews** and **document analysis** – were triangulated to gather data on sustainable fashion in Toronto. Interviews were conducted with **four fashion industry professionals**. One was the co-founder of a traveling **sustainable fashion clothing market**, one volunteered at a **non-profit organization** advocating for sustainable practices in fashion, and two were heads of **clothing “reworking” brands** that redesigned or re-crafted vintage or second-hand garments. The document analysis drew from **industry reports**, and **relevant newspaper, trade journal, and magazine articles** on sustainability in Toronto's fashion sector. Key themes, practices, and common issues were derived from the data using the **“coding” method of analysis**.

Discussion and Results



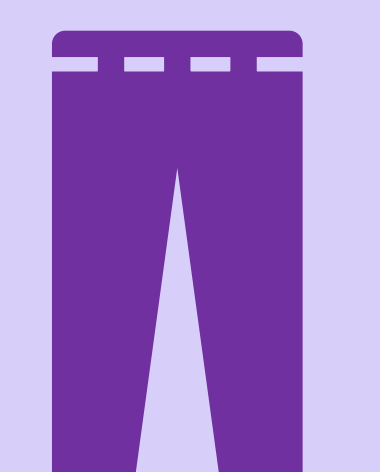
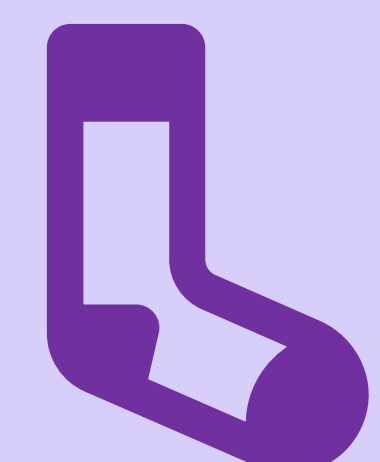
What are actors and institutions doing to foster sustainable fashion in Toronto and address issues of sustainability?

More **non-traditional modes of production and clothing sales**, such as using and selling **vintage pieces** and **upcycling** second-hand pieces and fabrics, are **paving the way for sustainable fashion**. **Practices** such as **upcycling, zero-waste design, and fabric choice** (such as opting for vintage, long-lasting, or eco-friendly options) can allow actors to increase the sustainability of their garments.



The **utilization of second-hand garments** offers both the **uniqueness** factor and **environmental** angle for consumers.

There are key **support structures** for sustainable fashion in Toronto: **local markets, non-profits and charities, educational institutions**, and to an extent **social media and customers**.



What challenges are different actors facing in implementing a circular economy in fashion?

Circularity is not seen as a priority and **Toronto lacks a fashion identity**. This can pose **barriers to attracting talent** and **innovative brands**.

Minimal Canadian industry infrastructure and support at present keeps Toronto from being a sustainable fashion leader. **Reduced availability of materials and networks**, such as **textile and hardware recycling systems**, can pose barriers to reducing non-circular components.

Support from federal or provincial governmental bodies and bigger industry can be limited. There is a **lack of support, incubators, and institutions centered on sustainable fashion in Toronto**.

Being based in Toronto was largely based on **personal factors** (like family life) for interviewees.

Policy Recommendations

Based on findings from the interviews and document analysis, **three overarching policy recommendations** can be made to foster a circular economy of fashion and the sustainable fashion scene in Toronto:

Technical and Logistical Changes

- Improving recycling and collection infrastructure
- Making the textile waste collection system and resources for sustainable materials more centralized
- Investing in pollution-control technology
- Mandating supply chain transparency

Socioeconomic and Cultural Factors

- Extending talent-attraction efforts to the fashion industry
- Fostering a “fashion identity” based on sustainability and supporting fashion events
- Supporting sustainable fashion entrepreneurship

Education and Shareholder Engagement

- Pressuring shareholders to prioritize sustainability through extended producer responsibility, waste and pollution reduction, and “green” taxation policies
- Incentivizing corporate collaboration
- Investing in sustainable fashion education programs