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Sustainable Fashion Through Reconstructed Denim: A Study on Consumer Perception of Upcycled Apparel

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Structured Abstract

Background: The conventional fashion industry operates on a linear economy model that significantly contributes to environmental degradation, water contamination, and escalating textile waste. Denim production is particularly resource-intensive, requiring approximately 7,500 litres of water for a single pair of jeans and involving harmful chemical dyeing processes. While upcycling offers a practical solution for extending garment lifespans and reducing waste, consumer adoption remains limited due to negative perceptions of the quality and aesthetics of repurposed apparel. This study explores consumer preferences toward upcycled denim to identify strategies that enhance its market appeal and support circular fashion.

Methods: This research employs a mixed-method design. The qualitative phase follows a Design Thinking Framework, involving the deconstruction and reconstruction of post-consumer denim garments into a new, wearable denim jacket. This process includes material mapping, iterative prototyping, and the application of transformative design techniques such as visible mending and hand embroidery. The quantitative phase consists of a structured online survey distributed via convenience sampling to 10 participants aged 18 to 35. The survey evaluates consumer perceptions of the product's aesthetic appeal, perceived quality, and overall purchase intention.

Results: The study produced a conceptualised upcycled apparel product that demonstrates the potential of transforming post-consumer waste. Anticipated findings suggest that emphasising unique design elements and artisanal craftsmanship can positively influence consumer appraisal. Preliminary data indicate that while price sensitivity remains a factor, consumers are increasingly open to eco-friendly alternatives when the garment's narrative and uniqueness are highlighted.

Conclusion: Upcycling denim is a viable strategy to reduce the fashion industry's environmental footprint. By aligning design aesthetics with consumer expectations, brands can overcome perception barriers and promote a more sustainable, resource-efficient fashion system.

Keywords: Upcycling, Sustainable Fashion, Reconstructed Denim, Consumer Perception, Circular Economy.

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