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Slow fashion development opportunities in Lithuania

Kamilė Povilaitytė
Kaunas Faculty, Vilnius University, Kaunas, Lithuania

Abstract

In recent decades, fast fashion has become the dominant model in the global fashion industry; however, its significant negative environmental and social impacts have increasingly raised concerns regarding sustainability. As a response to these challenges, the concept of slow fashion has emerged, emphasizing durability, responsible consumption, and ethical production. The aim of this article is to assess the potential of slow fashion as an alternative to fast fashion in Lithuania by analyzing consumer attitudes and economic factors influencing purchasing decisions. A quantitative research method was applied using a consumer survey to examine purchasing behavior, the importance of price, and the impact of economic conditions on fashion choices. The findings reveal that consumer awareness of sustainable fashion in Lithuania is increasing; nevertheless, the development of slow fashion remains constrained by higher prices, limited accessibility, and economic uncertainty. The article concludes that slow fashion has the potential to become a viable alternative to fast fashion in Lithuania; however, this transition requires changes in consumer behavior as well as more favorable economic and market conditions.

Keywords: slow fashion, fast fashion, sustainable consumption, consumer behavior.

1. Introduction

The contemporary fashion industry is one of the fastest-growing sectors worldwide and, simultaneously, one of the most critically assessed due to its substantial negative impact on the environment and society. The fast fashion model, characterized by mass production, low prices, and extremely short product life cycles, promotes excessive consumption and significantly increases textile waste (Hayes, 2022). Research indicates that the fashion industry is responsible for a considerable share of global carbon dioxide emissions, water pollution, and natural resource depletion, making sustainability a critical global challenge (Bailey, Basu, & Sharma, 2022; Niinimäki, 2018b).

Growing public concern for environmental protection and social responsibility has encouraged the search for alternative fashion production and consumption models (Duong, Ngoc, & Nhi, 2024). One of the most prominent alternatives is slow fashion, which prioritizes durability, quality, ethical production, and conscious

E-mail address kamile9povilaityte@gmail.com
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consumption (Fletcher, 2010; Štefko & Steffek, 2018). Unlike fast fashion, slow fashion focuses not on quantity but on value, aiming to reduce the negative environmental and social impacts of the industry (Radek, 2023).

In the Lithuanian context, the issue of slow fashion is becoming increasingly relevant; however, academic research addressing its development potential at the national level remains limited. Although consumer awareness is growing, the expansion of slow fashion is constrained by economic factors, price sensitivity, and established consumption habits (Feeley, 2023). Therefore, this article addresses the following research problem: can slow fashion become a realistic alternative to fast fashion in Lithuania?

The aim of the article is to evaluate the potential of slow fashion as an alternative to fast fashion in Lithuania by analyzing consumer attitudes and economic factors. The object of the research is the development of slow fashion in Lithuania from a consumer perspective.

2. Literature review

Two opposing yet closely interconnected trends dominate the contemporary fashion industry: fast fashion and slow fashion (Table 1). Fast fashion has long been considered the primary driving force of the fashion market, ensuring high consumption levels, rapid trend adaptation, and economic growth (McKinsey & Company, 2024). However, increasing environmental and social pressures have exposed the limitations of this model and prompted the search for more sustainable alternatives (Owusu-Wiredu, 2024).

Fast fashion is defined as a business model focused on mass clothing production, short product life cycles, and low prices (Cuc & Tripa, 2014). This model enables consumers to frequently update wardrobes and quickly respond to changing fashion trends, but it simultaneously encourages impulsive consumption and short-term product use (Radek, 2023). The dominance of fast fashion is associated with intensive use of natural resources, high carbon emissions, water pollution, and growing textile waste (Bailey, Basu, & Sharma, 2022). In addition to environmental concerns, fast fashion is widely criticized for its lack of social responsibility, particularly regarding labor conditions and fair wages in developing countries (Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Owusu-Wiredu, 2024).

Slow fashion emerged as a response to the problems caused by fast fashion and developed as part of the broader sustainable consumption movement (Fletcher, 2010; Pires et al., 2024). It is based on principles of quality, durability, and responsible consumption (Štefko & Steffek, 2018). Unlike fast fashion, slow fashion focuses on value rather than volume, aiming to create garments designed for long-term use with minimal environmental impact (Seock, Shin, & Yoon, 2023). Within this concept, attention is paid not only to the final product but also to its entire life cycle—from material selection and production processes to consumption and potential recycling (Niinimäki, 2018a).

From a theoretical perspective, slow fashion is closely linked to the principles of the circular economy, which emphasize resource efficiency, reuse, and waste reduction (Niinimäki, 2018a; Bienkowska, 2023). In this way, slow fashion contributes to the formation of a more sustainable economic system that balances environmental, social, and economic objectives (Musova et al., 2021). The concept also highlights the role of consumers, emphasizing conscious decision-making and responsibility for the long-term consequences of purchasing behavior (Colasante et al., 2025).

The differences between slow and fast fashion are evident in their objectives, production scale, materials used, environmental impact, and consumer behavior. Fast fashion prioritizes profit maximization and mass production, whereas slow fashion emphasizes sustainability, quality, and ethical manufacturing (Radek, 2023). These distinctions influence not only environmental outcomes but also shape different consumption patterns (Pelikánová & Sani, 2023).

Table 1
Comparison of slow and fast fashion based on key characteristics

Property	Sustainable fashion	Fast fashion
Purpose	Promote sustainability, durability, and quality	Maximize production volume and profits
Materials	Eco-friendly, recycled, renewable	Synthetic, inexpensive
Manufacturing and production methods	Small scale, ethical and/or organic production	Mass production, cheap labor, low production costs
Usage	Long-term, conscious consumption	Short-term, impulsive consumption
Product durability	Large, designed for longer use	Small, often designed for short-term use
Environmental impact	Small: reduces pollution and waste	Large: contributions to water and air pollution
Price	Higher, reflecting quality and ethics	Lower, appealing to a mass audience
Examples	Upcycled by LT, local designers	H&M, Zara, Shein

Source: compiled by the author based on McDowell (2022), Metaverse Fashion Council (2023), Fletcher (2010), Bailey et al. (2022), Turker and Altuntas (2014)

Fast fashion encourages frequent shopping and impulsive decisions, while slow fashion seeks to change these habits by promoting fewer but higher-quality purchases (Puente, Castro-Lopez, & Iglesias, 2021). However, the theoretical advantages of slow fashion are not always reflected in practice, particularly under conditions of economic uncertainty, where consumer choices are strongly influenced by price (Feeley, 2023; Wyman, 2023).

In Lithuania, the development of slow fashion faces additional challenges. Although public awareness of sustainability is increasing, fast fashion remains attractive due to its accessibility and affordability (Ramonienė, 2022). This creates a paradoxical situation in which consumers express support for sustainable initiatives yet often choose fast fashion products in practice (Riesgo, Lavanga, & Codina, 2022). This gap between declared values and actual behavior highlights the need for empirical analysis of slow fashion development opportunities.

In summary, slow fashion represents a theoretically grounded and sustainable alternative to fast fashion; however, its establishment in the market depends not only on consumer awareness but also on economic and structural factors (Štefko & Steffek, 2018). The interaction of these factors and their influence on consumer decisions forms the basis for the empirical analysis presented in the following sections.

3. Methods

To assess the development potential of slow fashion as an alternative to fast fashion in Lithuania, a quantitative research approach was applied using a structured consumer survey. This method was selected due to its suitability for systematically examining consumer attitudes, purchasing behavior, and the influence of economic factors on fashion-related decisions.

The survey enabled the collection of standardized data from a broad group of respondents, allowing for the identification of prevailing trends in the Lithuanian consumer market. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate as it facilitates comparison across socio-demographic groups and provides measurable insights into factors affecting slow fashion adoption.

Research Instrument and Data Collection. The research instrument (Table 2) consisted of a structured questionnaire developed on the basis of theoretical assumptions related to slow and fast fashion concepts and sustainable consumption. The questionnaire included several thematic sections: respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, clothing purchasing habits, attitudes toward price and economic conditions, perceptions of slow fashion, and the likelihood of choosing slow fashion products.

Data were collected through an online survey, ensuring accessibility and respondent anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. Certain methodological limitations should be acknowledged. As the study relied on self-reported data, responses may be affected by social desirability bias. Nevertheless, the chosen methodology provides a reliable empirical basis for evaluating slow fashion as an alternative to fast fashion in the Lithuanian context. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the sample.

Table 2
Structure of the survey questionnaire

Topic	Objective
Consumer behavior and purchasing habits	Assess respondents' clothing purchasing habits, their frequency, and the circumstances that determine their purchases.
Consumer attitudes towards slow fashion	Determine respondents' attitudes towards slow fashion and their willingness to choose slow fashion
Factors influencing consumption and purchasing decisions	To determine respondents' purchasing behavior and the factors influencing their decisions to buy clothes
Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents	To find out the gender, age, education, place of residence, and monthly income after taxes of the respondents who participated in the survey

Source: compiled by the author

Table 3
Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Value	N	Percentage
Gender	Women	260	66.50
	Men	131	33.50
Age	18-29 years old	266	68.03
	30-39 years old	51	13.04
	40-49 years old	41	10.49
	50-59 years old	20	5.12
	60 years old and older	13	3.32
Education	Secondary	28	7.16
	Higher/vocational	81	20.72
	Higher (bachelor's degree)	221	56.52
	Higher (master's degree)	61	15.60
Residential area	Large city	131	33.50
	City (other)	165	42.20
	District/rural area	95	24.30
Monthly income after taxes	500 euros and less	13	3.32
	501-1000 euros	79	20.20
	1001-1500 euros	167	42.71
	1501-2000 euros	101	25.83
	2001 euros and more	31	7.94

Source: compiled by the author based on survey data, 2025

4. Results

The respondents suggested they tend to buy clothes when needed and prefer durable goods (Fig. 1). The results indicate that Lithuanian consumers' clothing purchasing behavior is still strongly influenced by the fast fashion model. The majority of respondents reported frequent purchases of new clothing, reflecting established patterns of impulsive consumption (Fig. 2).

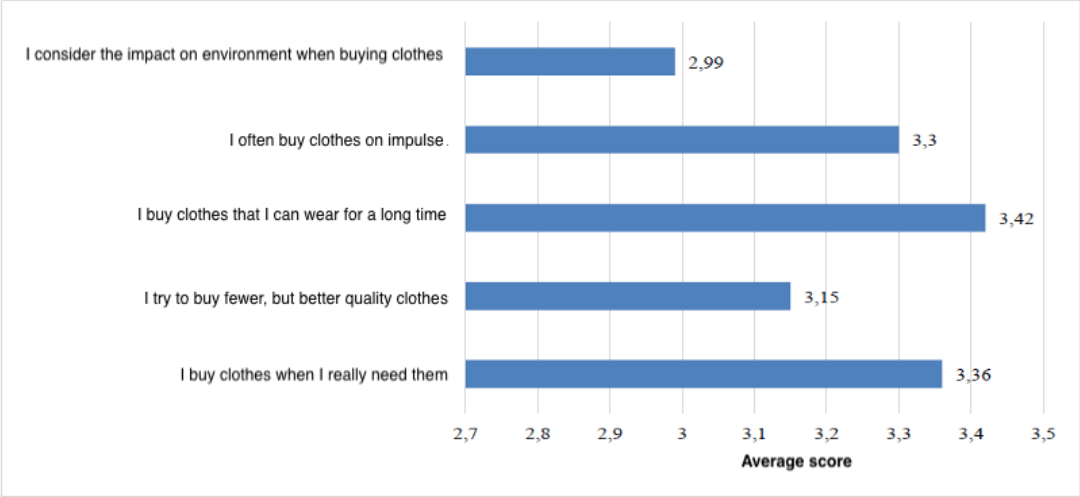

Fig. 1. Consumer behavior when purchasing clothing.
Source: compiled by the author based on survey data, 2025.

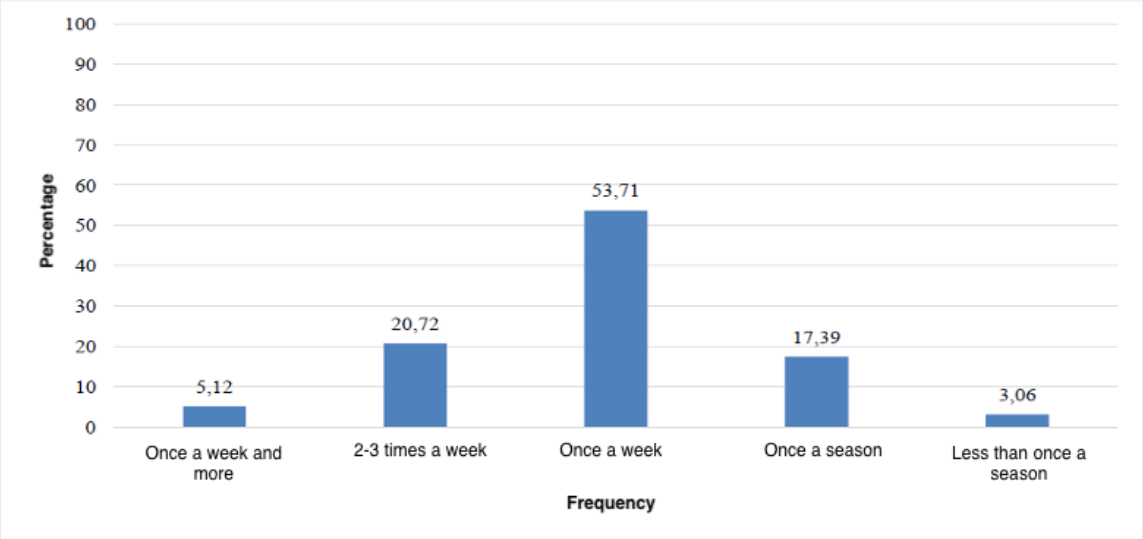

Fig. 2. Frequency of purchasing new clothing.
Source: compiled by the author based on survey data, 2025.

Analysis of expenditure patterns (Fig. 3) revealed that most consumers allocate a limited budget for clothing purchases, making price a decisive factor. The presence

of discounts also appeared to be an important factor (Fig. 4). This explains the continued dominance of fast fashion, which offers affordability and wide availability.

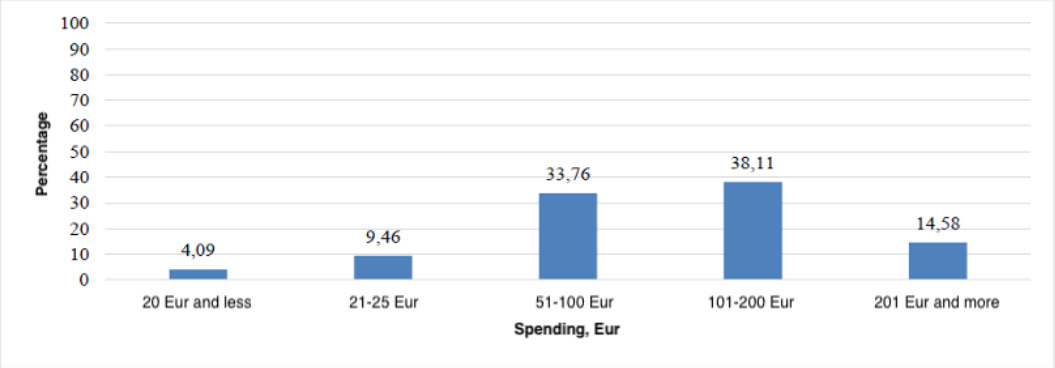

Fig. 3. Average consumer expenditure on new clothing.
Source: compiled by the author based on survey data, 2025.

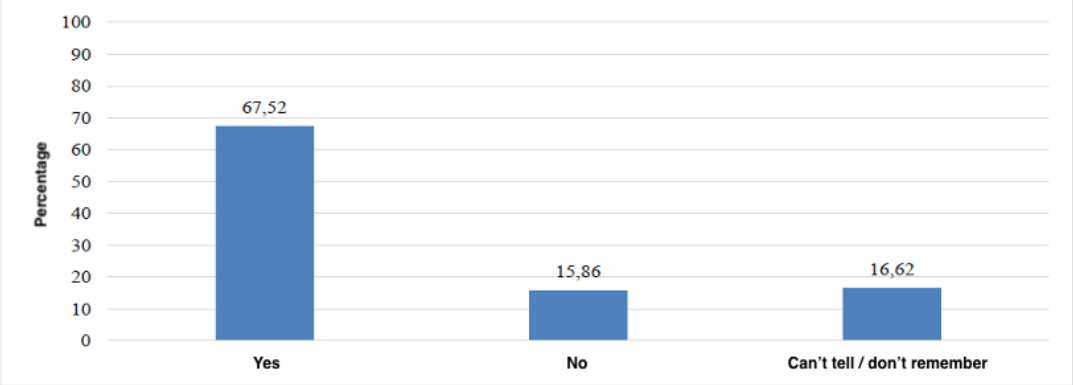

Fig. 4. Purchasing clothing due to discounts or lower prices.
Source: compiled by the author based on survey data, 2025.

Regarding attitudes toward slow fashion, respondents generally associated it with higher quality, ethical production, and reduced environmental impact (Fig. 5). Nevertheless, positive perceptions did not consistently translate into actual purchasing behavior.

Price considerations and their relationship to slow fashion was also analysed (Fig. 6). In general, the respondents suggested that they agree to pay for slow fashion and related practices, yet this inclination was not particularly high. Indeed, no scores exceeded 3.5 on a five-point scale.

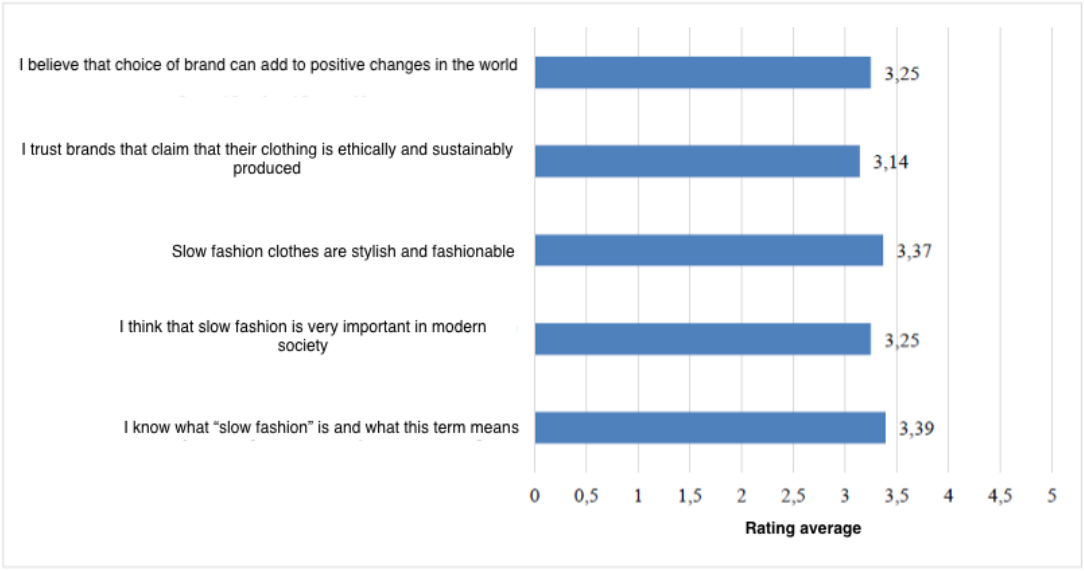

Fig. 5. Consumer attitudes toward slow fashion.
Source: compiled by the author based on survey data, 2025.

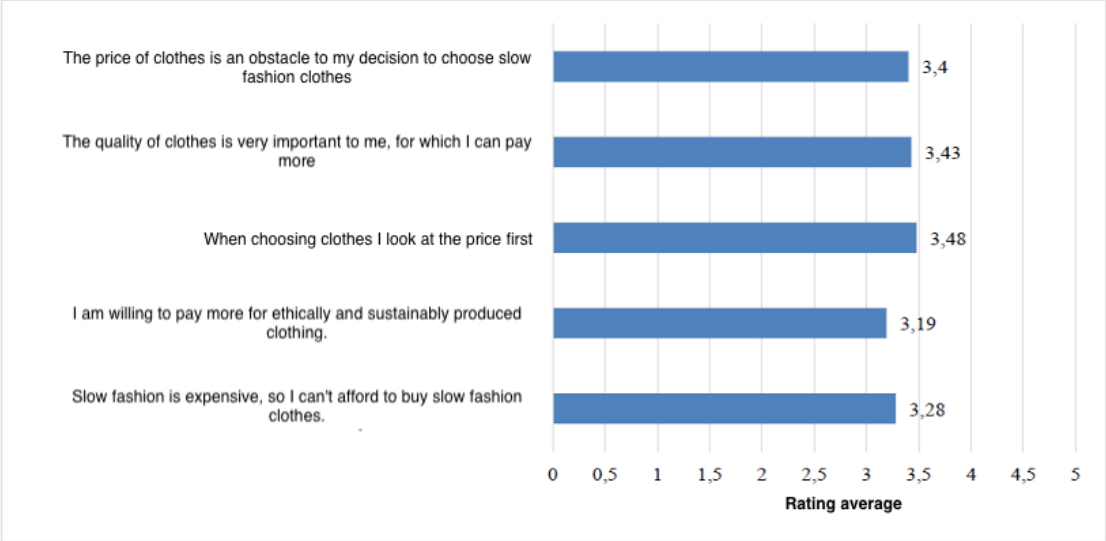

Fig. 6. Influence of clothing price on purchase decisions.
Source: compiled by the author based on survey data, 2025.

Economic factors, particularly inflation and income uncertainty, were found to significantly influence decisions related to sustainable fashion choices (Fig. 7). The respondents were also asked about the potential for slow fashion development in Lithuania (Fig. 8).

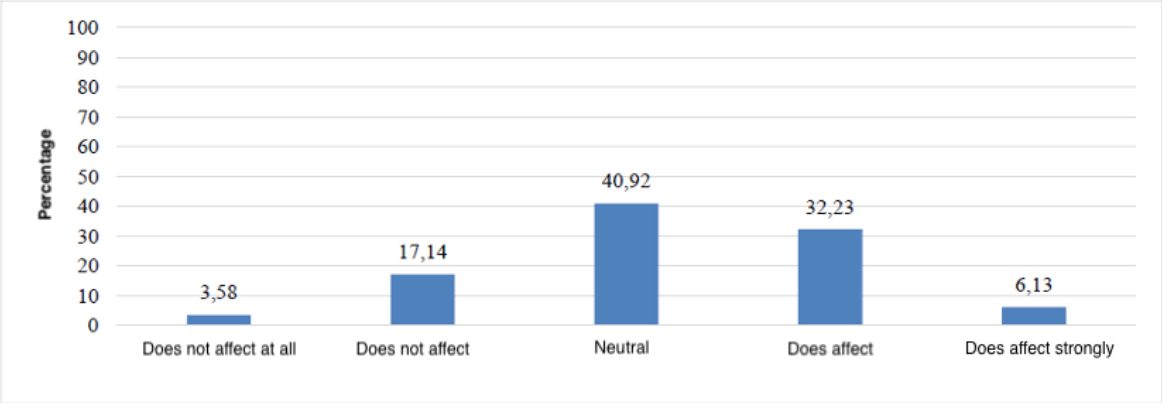

Fig. 7. Impact of economic conditions on consumer decisions.
Source: compiled by the author based on survey data, 2025.

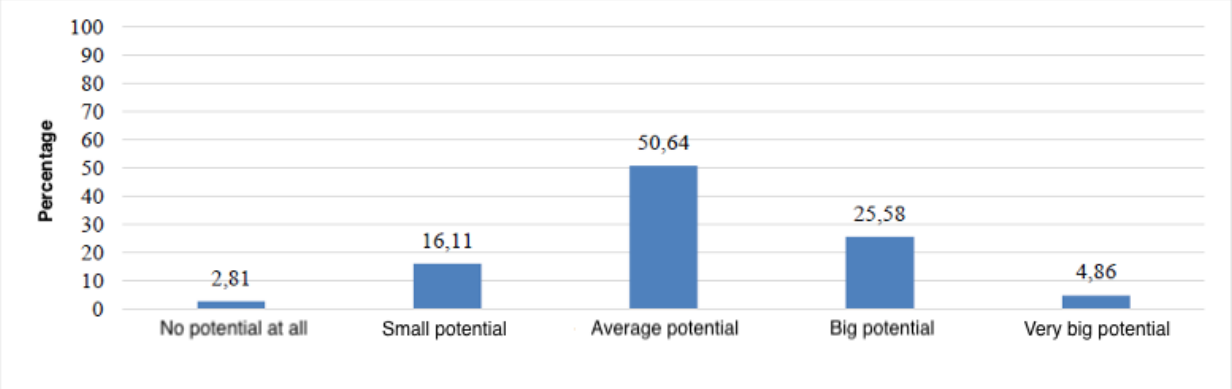

Fig. 8. Evaluation of slow fashion brand development potential in Lithuania.
Source: compiled by the author based on survey data, 2025.

The results suggest that Lithuanian population is rather inconclusive over the potential for development of slow fashion in Lithuania. The largest share of respondents (more than 50%) suggested that the average potential for development of slow fashion brands is perceived. Noteworthy, some 26% suggested that they see a big potential for development of slow fashion brands in Lithuania.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that slow fashion is conceptually recognized by Lithuanian consumers as a desirable and value-based alternative to fast fashion. Respondents associate slow fashion with higher product quality, ethical production practices, and reduced environmental impact. These perceptions are consistent with the theoretical assumptions of slow fashion, which emphasize durability, sustainability, and responsible consumption (Fletcher, 2010; Štefko & Steffek, 2018). However, despite these positive attitudes, the empirical results reveal that slow fashion remains a marginal choice in actual purchasing behavior.

One of the most significant insights emerging from the analysis is the evident gap between consumers' declared values and their real purchasing decisions. While respondents express concern for environmental issues and support sustainable initiatives, these considerations often become secondary when confronted with economic constraints (Riesgo, Lavanga, & Codina, 2022; Puente, Castro-Lopez, & Iglesias, 2021). Price sensitivity remains a dominant factor shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the context of economic uncertainty (Wyman, 2023; Feeley, 2023). This finding suggests that value-based preferences alone are insufficient to drive behavioral change in the fashion market (Colasante et al., 2025).

Economic conditions play a crucial role in limiting the adoption of slow fashion in Lithuania. Inflation, income instability, and rising living costs reduce consumers' willingness to invest in higher-priced garments, even when they recognize their long-term benefits (International Monetary Fund, 2025; Statista, 2024a). As a result, fast fashion continues to dominate due to its affordability and accessibility (Hayes, 2022). This outcome highlights the structural nature of the challenge, indicating that the slow fashion transition cannot rely solely on individual consumer responsibility (Owusu-Wiredu, 2024).

The results also indicate that slow fashion currently occupies a niche position within the Lithuanian fashion market. While a segment of consumers demonstrates openness toward sustainable alternatives, slow fashion brands often face difficulties in reaching a broader audience (Sarokin & Bosken, 2024). Limited availability, insufficient visibility, and restricted distribution channels further constrain market expansion (Murzyn-Kupisz, Szilagyi-Csullog, & Kiss, 2023). Consequently, the development of slow fashion depends not only on demand-side factors but also on supply-side strategies and market infrastructure.

From a broader perspective, the findings suggest that promoting slow fashion requires a multidimensional approach. Consumer education remains important; however, it must be accompanied by supportive economic and market mechanisms (Duong, Ngoc, & Nhi, 2024). These may include pricing strategies that increase affordability, initiatives that emphasize long-term value rather than short-term cost, and greater integration of slow fashion principles into mainstream retail practices (Pelikánová & Sani, 2023).

In the Lithuanian context, the development of local slow fashion initiatives presents a particularly relevant opportunity. Supporting local designers, small-scale producers, and circular fashion practices could enhance the accessibility of slow fashion while simultaneously strengthening the local economy (Ramonienė, 2022). Such initiatives may help reduce the perceived distance between sustainable values and everyday consumption choices (Musova et al., 2021).

Overall, the discussion highlights that slow fashion has the potential to evolve into a viable alternative to fast fashion in Lithuania. However, this transition requires systemic change that extends beyond individual consumer awareness (Štefko & Steffek, 2018). Aligning economic conditions, market structures, and sustainability principles is essential to bridging the gap between positive attitudes and actual purchasing behavior (Pires et al., 2024). Without addressing these interconnected

factors, slow fashion is likely to remain an aspirational concept rather than a mainstream alternative.

6. Conclusions

Fast fashion remains the dominant clothing consumption model in Lithuania due to low prices and wide accessibility, despite its negative environmental and social impacts. Slow fashion is perceived as an ethical and environmentally friendly alternative to fast fashion; however, its adoption is limited by higher prices and economic uncertainty. Consumer awareness of sustainable fashion is increasing, yet purchasing decisions are still largely driven by economic considerations.

The development of slow fashion in Lithuania is feasible, but it requires changes in consumer behavior, favorable economic conditions, and targeted market initiatives. Slow fashion can become a meaningful alternative to fast fashion in Lithuania only if consumer expectations, pricing policies, and sustainability principles are effectively aligned.

The findings reveal a clear gap between consumers' declared sustainability values and their actual purchasing behavior, highlighting the need to address structural economic barriers rather than relying solely on individual consumer responsibility. Supporting local slow fashion initiatives and improving market accessibility could contribute to reducing this gap by strengthening the connection between sustainable values and everyday consumption practices in Lithuania.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the limited body of research on slow fashion development in small European markets, emphasizing the importance of integrating consumer behavior analysis with economic context when evaluating sustainable fashion transitions.

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