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Beyond Purchase: Aftercare Services as a Driver of Sustainable Fashion Retail

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**Designing Retail
& Services
Futures**

Proceedings of
the 2nd Designing Retail
& Services Futures Colloquium

Sustainable Retail and Services Futures

Milan—14-15 May 2025

EDITORS

Katelijn Quartier
Valeria M. Iannilli,
Alessandra Spagnoli
Tommaso Elli
Ilse Prinsloo

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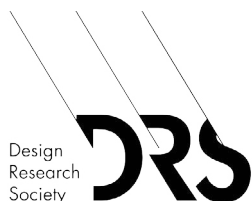
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Table of Contents

About the Colloquium	1
Section 1: Visual Storytelling & Brand Experience	1
Vittorio Linfante. The Shop Window as a Communication Platform: From Product Showcase to Experiential Narratives.....	2
Giulia Gerosa and Federica Guarnieri. The facade as communication tool between brand identity, localism and sustainability	11
Jinze Lyu. Matching the Narrative Fragments and Customer Identity Fragments in Omni-Channel Fashion Retail	27
Elena Elgani and Francesco Scullica. Fashion brand extension processes in hospitality	45
Session 2: Collaborative & Sustainable Retail Systems	66
Gabriela Fabro Cardoso. Drivers and Obstacles to Collaborative Fashion Consumption (CFC): A Literature Review	67
Alessandra Spagnoli, Francesca Bonfim Bandeira, Chiara Anceschi, and Valeria M. Iannilli. Beyond Purchase: Aftercare Services as a Driver of Sustainable Fashion Retail.....	85
Tommaso Elli. Unveiling Ecosystems of Sustainable Fashion Initiatives: A Visual Network Analysis Approach	104
Ilse Prinsloo. The Resilience of Informal Trade: Lessons for Sustainable Retail Design	120
Session 3: Digital & Participatory Design Innovation	137
Marina Ricci, Alessandra Scarcelli, and Annalisa Di Roma. How Digital Transformation Drives Sustainability in Fashion Retail: The “Moda 4.0” Research Project	138
Quartier Katelijn. The impact of Midjourney on students’ design and design process: an exploratory study.....	151
Constant Berkhout and Katelijn Quartier. The Role of Consumers in the Retail Design Process.....	159
Session 4: Future formats & Adaptive Retail	174
Mia B. Münster and Hanne Kirstine Adriansen. Reimagining Empty Retail Spaces: Sustainable Potential for Pedestrian Streets Facing Retail Decline	175
Maximilian Perez Mengual and Frank Danzinger. Designing Retail Development Spaces – The Case of the Future Retail Store	187
Daniela Maurer and Xue Pei. Mapping trends of the evolution in the retail sector: a case study of a design research project.....	202

About the Colloquium

The Special Interest Group (SIG) **Designing Retail & Services Futures** was established in 2021 under the guidance of the **Design Research Society (DRS)**. It seeks to advance knowledge on the role of design within contemporary retail and hospitality contexts, focusing on how design contributes to the development of spaces, services, and experiences. The SIG addresses multiple disciplinary domains, including interior architecture, branding, marketing, strategic and service design, design management, and consumer psychology, to better understand the interplay between physical and digital environments and the shifting expectations of users.

Although the value of design has been the subject of scholarly investigation for decades, such inquiries have often developed in a fragmented manner. Disciplinary silos and divergent methodologies have limited the integration of insights across interconnected domains such as retail, services, and hospitality. This colloquium responds to the need for more cohesive perspectives, aiming to consolidate definitions, align research approaches, and foster dialogue among academic and professional communities.

The 2025 edition places particular emphasis on sustainability as both a design imperative and a catalyst for innovation. Key themes include the transformation of retail and hospitality spaces, the integration of narrative and visual storytelling, and the adoption of co-creative and participatory design processes. Contributions also examine the adaptive reuse of urban spaces, the resilience of informal economies, and the role of emerging technologies—such as AI and immersive media—in shaping future scenarios.

Bridging theory and practice, the colloquium positions design not merely as a means to support transactions or aesthetic enhancement, but as a strategic and ethical tool for fostering environmental responsibility, social inclusion, and cultural relevance. The proceedings collectively reflect a commitment to reimagining the future of retail and hospitality in ways that are sustainable, inclusive, and context sensitive.

Organizers

The colloquium was hosted by the Design Department of Politecnico di Milano and organized with the support of the Communication office of the Design Department.

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Beyond Purchase: Aftercare Services as a Driver of Sustainable Fashion Retail

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Abstract: As the fashion industry moves toward a circular economy, retail is evolving beyond a simple point of sale to become a hub for sustainability and long-term product care. This study explores how aftercare services, including repair, maintenance, and second-life initiatives, help brands shift from one-time transactions to service-driven customer relationships. By analyzing a diverse range of fashion brands, the research identifies six different aftercare models, each offering varying levels of digitization, channel integration, service coverage, process transparency, brand control, and customer autonomy. The findings highlight that aftercare is more than just a post-purchase service—it is a key strategy for circularity, strengthening consumer engagement and brand sustainability commitments.

Keywords: aftercare services; retail servitization; circular economy; product lifecycle extension

1. Introduction

The fashion industry is a driving force in the global economy. It ranks as the fourth-largest industry worldwide, valued at \$3 trillion, contributing 2% to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing 33 million textile workers, a significant increase from 19.7 million over the past 25 years. Projections suggest that, within the circular economy framework, the industry could generate an additional \$4.5 trillion in economic output by 2030 and \$25 trillion by 2050 (Goldman Sachs, 2022).

Despite these economic figures, the fashion industry is the second most polluting sector globally, following the oil industry (Woodside & Fine, 2019). It exerts negative economic, environmental, and social impacts across all phases of its value chain (Bick et al., 2018; European Commission, 2022). The sector accounts for 20% of global water consumption (79 billion cubic meters) and emits 1.7 billion tonnes of CO₂ annually, equating to 10% of

global emissions (Abbate et al., 2023). It is also a major contributor to microplastic pollution (Mazotto et al., 2021) and generates 40 million tonnes of textile waste annually, most incinerated or sent to landfills.

As the industry transitions from a linear economy model (take, make, use, dispose) to a circular economy model (produce, use, reuse) (Alves et al., 2022), it faces growing pressure to adopt environmentally and socially responsible practices, driven by both government regulations and increasing consumer awareness of the ethical implications of fashion production (De Angelis et al., 2017; Grazzini et al., 2021).

The circular economy, which requires a systemic approach, represents a new production and consumption model focused on transforming waste into new resources or raw materials. This transition aims to extend product lifecycles (Li et al., 2024) through reuse, repair, and remanufacturing processes, as well as the implementation of maintenance and aftercare services (Cruz & Rosado da Cruz, 2023; Stål & Jansson, 2017).

This approach goes beyond waste management, shifting towards circular business models that mitigate fashion's environmental impact (Armstrong et al., 2016). It promotes closed-loop cycles (Gharfalkar et al., 2016) and "slowing loop" strategies (Terzioğlu, 2021), which recent studies (Mrad et al., 2025) have shown to be particularly beneficial for fashion and luxury brands. These models enable companies to integrate service-based solutions to extend product lifecycles, reducing waste and fostering a more sustainable consumption paradigm. Going beyond mere product restoration, they preserve and enhance product longevity, promoting more responsible consumption while also increasing durability (Sun et al., 2021) and encouraging more sustainable consumer behaviors (Wang et al., 2019).

In this context, the role of retail is undergoing a fundamental transformation, shifting from a transaction-based model to a service-driven approach that actively supports circular economy practices. Fashion and luxury brands are increasingly leveraging retail spaces as enablers of circularity, embedding services that not only extend product longevity but also engage consumers beyond purchase. This transition aligns with Product-Service System (PSS) strategies (Armstrong et al., 2015; Spadafora & Rapaccini, 2024; Vezzoli et al., 2015), which underpin the rise of business models such as sharing (Christodoulides et al., 2021), repair (Schiaroli et al., 2024), pre-owned/second-hand (Turunen et al., 2020), and rental/collaborative consumption (Pantano & Stylos, 2020).

Building on this shift towards retail servitization, this study examines aftercare services as a critical enabler of circularity in fashion retail. Unlike traditional aftersales services, which broadly cover customer care and logistics (Shokouhyar et al., 2020; Syahrial et al., 2019), aftercare focuses specifically on preserving product longevity through repair, maintenance, and refurbishment. It represents a holistic framework encompassing post-purchase engagement, take-back schemes, and second-life solutions, ultimately fostering responsible and sustainable consumption behaviors.

Within this scope, the study presents a systematic analysis of aftercare services currently being implemented by fashion brands to extend product lifecycles, enhance consumer engagement, and mitigate the environmental impact of fashion consumption.

2. Methodology

To investigate how fashion brands implement aftercare practices—extending product lifespan and redefining responsibility-sharing with consumers—a structured case study methodology was adopted, consisting of multiple phases that sequentially build upon one another. The first step involved identifying and selecting a diverse set of brands based on their engagement with aftercare practices, ensuring representation across different market segments, including sustainability leaders, luxury brands, high-end fashion, and accessible fashion. This initial phase allowed to construct a comparative foundation by selecting 40 brands that exhibited relevant aftercare strategies. In addition to fashion brands, service providers specializing in circularity services for fashion were initially considered, through mapping of their B2C service journeys. However, to ensure a directly comparable industry framework, the focus was ultimately decided to be exclusively on fashion brands, allowing for a more precise and sector-specific analysis. The selection was considered complete once the different market segments were significantly represented, and the cases provided a comprehensive overview of the various approaches to aftercare strategies.

Once the selection process was complete, a structured analytical lens through which to examine the aftercare journeys was established. This approach was fundamentally customer-centric, employing an *outside-in* perspective that prioritizes the consumer experience rather than internal brand operations. This perspective was critical in gaining a comprehensive view of the service structure, both in its extended temporal dimension and across various channels, while also highlighting the most interesting practices. However, this approach inherently presents a limitation, as it does not provide full visibility into the behind-the-scenes operational processes of brands. While it allows to capture how services manifest from the user's perspective, it does not reveal the internal decision-making, logistics, or operational challenges that shape these services. Recognizing this gap, future research could benefit from participatory mapping activities conducted in collaboration with brands to gain deeper insights into the internal mechanisms and strategies driving aftercare service development.

To collect relevant data, multiple information sources were employed. The primary channel was the brand's official website, particularly sections dedicated to customer service, sustainability, and repair policies. Secondary channels included all digital and physical touchpoints involved in the aftercare process, such as mobile applications, retail stores, customer support interactions, and additional online resources, including reports, articles, and customer testimonials. This multi-channel analysis approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of how brands communicate and operationalize aftercare services across different platforms.

For each selected case study, an in-depth examination was conducted using a structured documentation process. The analysis was systematized in an extensive dataset where each brand was assessed through distinct stages of the aftercare journey, thus creating detailed customer journey maps (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). These stages included: (1) Warranty/Repair Purchase, covering the initial acquisition of repair services or extended warranty plans; (2) Maintenance Onboarding, referring to tools that help customers set

up and manage product maintenance and service information; (3) Product Care & Maintenance, encompassing brand-provided resources to enable customers to take care of products independently, preventing damage; (4) Repair & Support, detailing repair and alteration services offered directly by the brand or through third-party partnerships; (5) Post-Repair, addressing the return of the repaired product to the customer; (6) Collection, analyzing brand initiatives to take back discarded products for further use; and (7) Post-Collection, examining how brands give a second life to collected items through resale, donation, recycling, or upcycling efforts (see Figure 1).

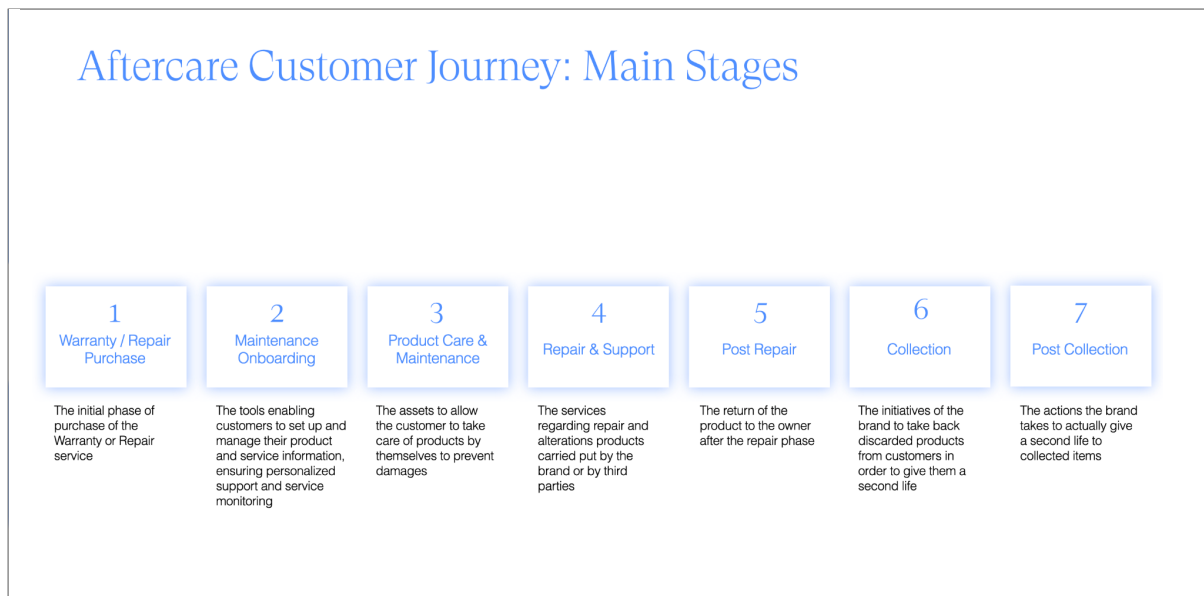


Figure 1 Main stages of a conceptualized Aftercare Customer Journey extracted from the case study analysis.

Within each stage, specific service components –physical, digital, or hybrid elements that enable aftercare services at each step were identified and categorized. These components included, for example, *physical item assessments* in the *collection stage* or *DIY repair kits* under the *product care and maintenance* phase (see Figure 2). By mapping these components across multiple brands, patterns in aftercare service structures were observed and a checklist approach was developed to determine the presence or absence of specific components across different brands. As new service components emerged, they were systematically integrated into our framework and used to reassess other brands.

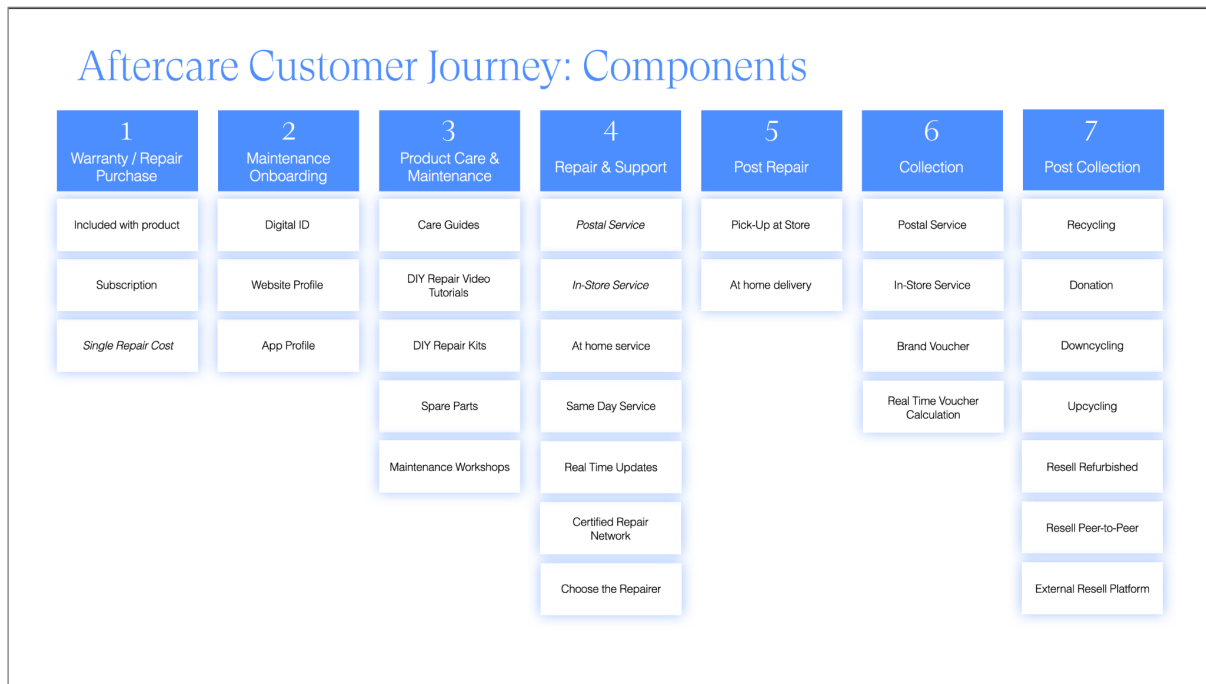


Figure 2 Stages and detailed service components of a conceptualized Aftercare Customer Journey extracted from the case study analysis.

Beyond mapping the structural aspects of aftercare journeys, the analysis was further enriched by assigning specific themes to each case study, capturing the differentiating characteristics of each brand’s approach (Clarke & Braun, 2017). These themes facilitated a qualitative assessment of service models, highlighting unique value propositions and strategic differentiations. Additionally, text-based descriptions were developed for each case, synthesizing the findings into narrative accounts that contextualized each brand’s aftercare strategy within its broader business model.

The next phase of the research involved comparing aftercare journeys to identify patterns and commonalities. The compilation of the checklist data allowed to systematically detect recurring service structures, as well as the presence or absence of specific stages and service components across brands. To deepen the comparative analysis, key qualitative variables that characterized aftercare models were identified, including *digitization level*, which reflects the extent to which aftercare services rely on digital tools; *channels integration*, indicating how seamlessly different touchpoints are connected; *service coverage*, assessing how extensively a brand supports the aftercare journey; *process disclosure*, measuring the transparency of aftercare operations; *brand control*, defining the level of direct management a company maintains over its services; and *customer autonomy*, capturing how independently users can access and manage aftercare. Each of these variables provided a different perspective on how brands structure their aftercare services, offering insight into their strategic priorities and operational capabilities.

Based on these key variables and the similarities identified through the journey analysis, an affinity diagram approach (Plain, 2007) was employed to group brands with comparable aftercare strategies. This process led to the development of six distinct archetypes,

each representing a different conceptualization of aftercare within the fashion industry. Each archetype was described through a comprehensive synthesis of key characteristics, representative journey structures, and the strategic priorities that define its approach to aftercare.

Through this methodological process, a systematic framework for analyzing aftercare practices in fashion, identifying emerging patterns, and constructing an archetype-based classification was established. This approach provides a structured way to examine how brands operationalize aftercare, positioning it within a broader discourse on product lifecycle extension and shared responsibility between brands and consumers.

3. Results

The research resulted in six archetypes of Aftercare Services Models: the Connected Care Model, the Distributed Network Care Model, the Community-centric Care Model, the Integrated Care Model, the Minimalist Aftercare Model, and the Artisanal Care Model. For each of them a description of distinctive traits was produced from the analysis of the customer journey provided by sample brands.

3.1 The Connected Care Model

The Connected Care Model represents a paradigm shift in aftercare and sales services, with a specific focus on digitally centralized systems that enable brands to offer proactive assistance, continuously monitoring product performance and providing preventive care before issues even arise. This model leverages advanced digital technologies to create a seamless, product-centric approach to customer service and product lifecycle management. At the core of this model is the concept of a Digital Product Identity, as retrieved from the analyzed brands, including Zalando and Nanushka. This unique identifier allows every service interaction to originate from the product itself, creating a direct link between the physical item and its digital footprint. The digital ID enables highly personalized and individualized aftercare services tailored to each specific product, ensuring service efficiency and customer satisfaction. By tracking products throughout their lifecycle, companies can gather valuable data to improve product design, optimize resource use, and enhance recycling processes, contributing to overall sustainability goals.

The focus of the journey provided by this archetype is quite extended, with a focus on product tracking, real time assistance, and multiple immediate repair solutions (see Figure 3).

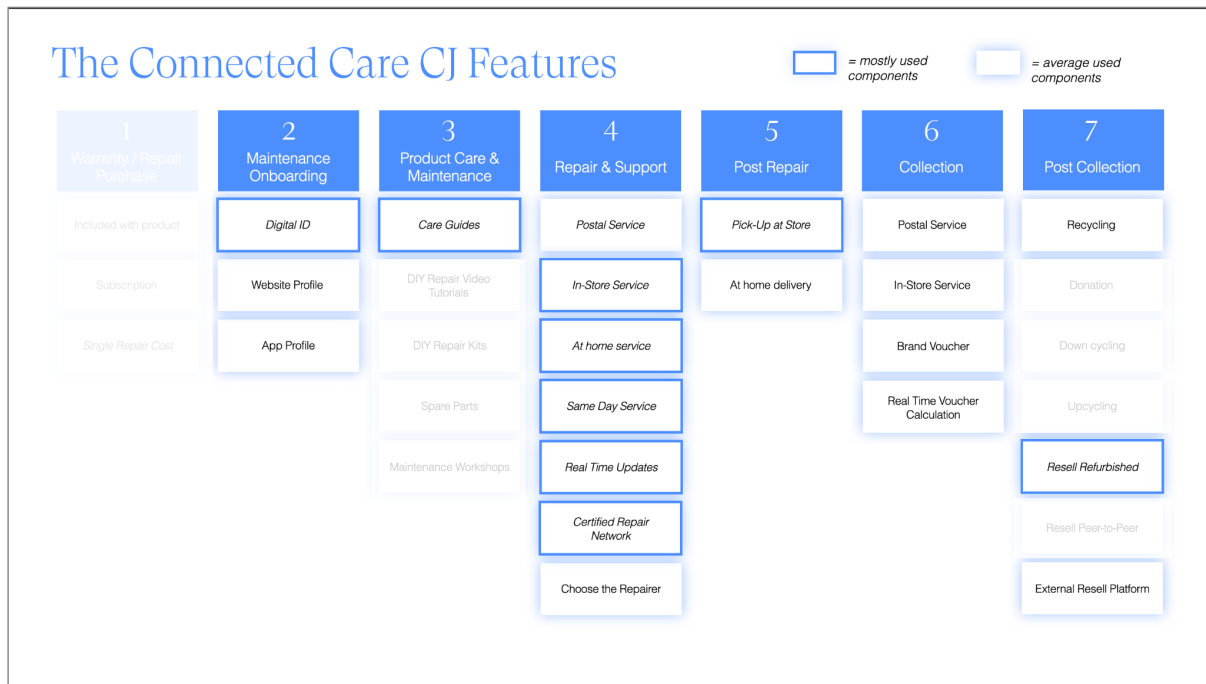


Figure 3 Customer journey diagram of the Connected Care Model, highlighting the frequency of service component implementation.

3.2 The Distributed Network Care Model

The Distributed Network Care Model represents a collaborative approach to aftercare and sales services, with a strong emphasis on ensuring holistic approaches through third-party service providers. This model leverages a network of partnerships to provide comprehensive care, with a distributed service delivery, while maintaining centralized control over brand standards, processes, data management, and sustainability goals, as evidenced by the sample brands Tentree, Mud Jeans, Reformation, and Adidas. The core of this model is a carefully curated ecosystem of third-party service providers, each bringing specialized expertise to the aftercare process. By leveraging partners, brands can rapidly scale their sustainability initiatives and service coverage, often reaching markets and offering services that would be challenging to provide in-house.

The Distributed Networkers offer a high coverage of aftercare services, focusing on providing at least one solution for each phase rather than multiple solutions for fewer steps. However, they do concentrate on the stages of *Repair* and *Collection* (see Figure 4).

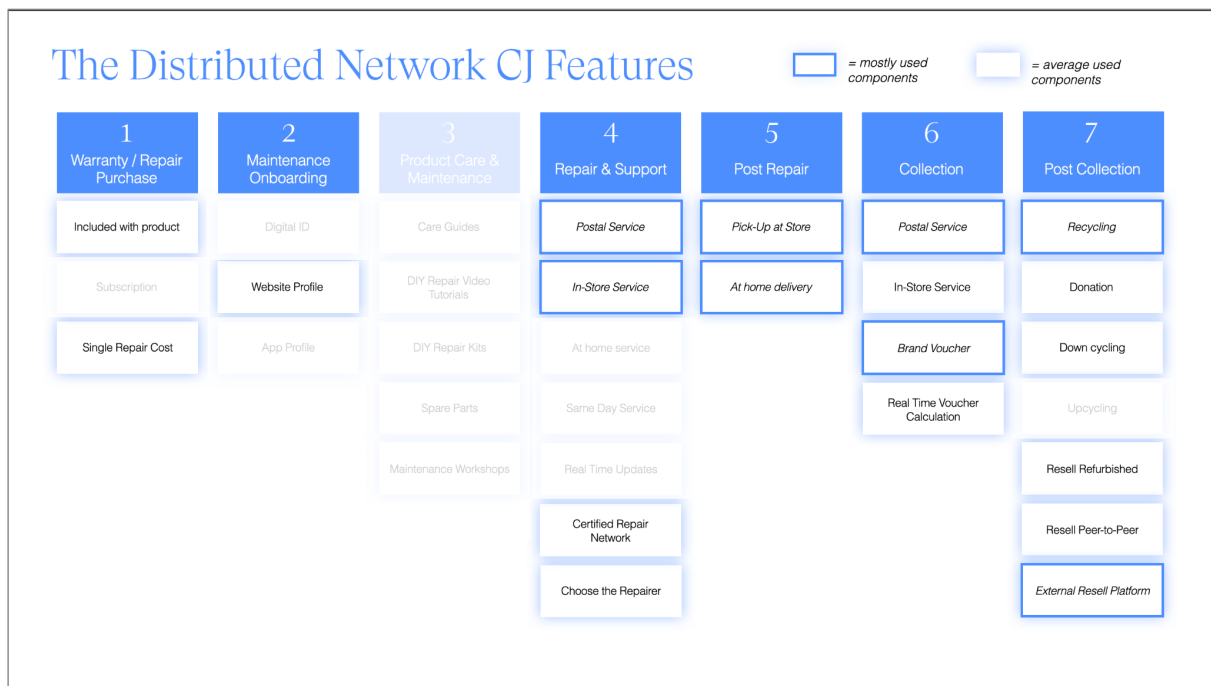


Figure 4 Customer journey diagram of the Distributed Network Care Model, highlighting the frequency of service component implementation.

3.3 The Community-Centric Care Model

The Community-Centric Care Model represents a hands-on, participatory approach to aftercare and sales services, with a strong emphasis on sustainability and customer empowerment. This model leverages community engagement and education to extend product life cycles and promote sustainable consumption habits. Examples of brands that apply this service archetype are Patagonia, Freitag, Nudie Jeans, Veja, Eileen Fisher, and Toast. Sure enough, at the core of this model is the active involvement of customers in product care and maintenance, fostering a sense of shared responsibility. The focus of brands that belong to this archetype is on providing customers with the knowledge, tools, and resources to maintain and repair products themselves. While digitally enabled, this model emphasizes in-person interactions through workshops, repair clinics, and community events. In this archetype we can find two distinct approaches: on the one hand a focus on physical services and activities aimed at engaging the local communities, on the other broader, virtual initiatives for global customer bases. The Community Centric journey is again quite extended, with a distinctive focus on the product care and maintenance phase, and on physical services when the target community is local (see Figure 5).

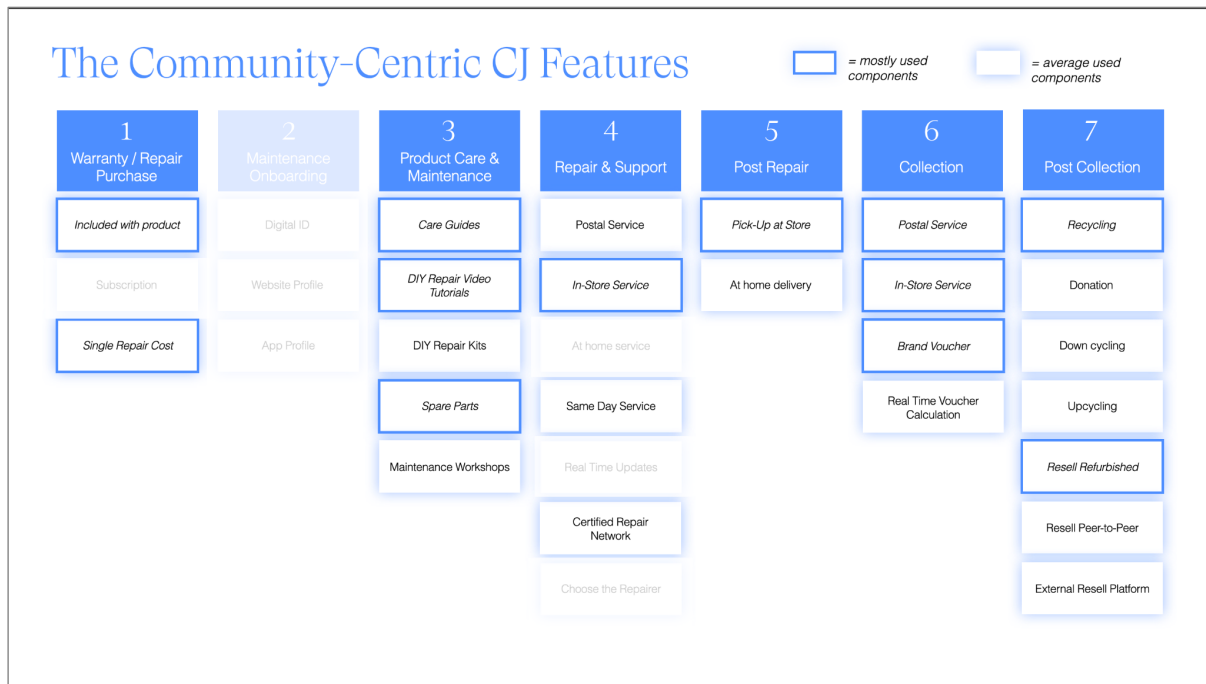


Figure 5 Customer journey diagram of the Community-Centric Care Model, highlighting the frequency of service component implementation.

3.4 The Integrated Care Model

The Integrated Care Model represents a branded and fully accountable approach to aftercare and sales services, with a focus on seamlessly blending sustainability initiatives with brand identity and lifestyle messaging. This model leverages digital integration and brand control to create a cohesive customer experience throughout the product lifecycle, harnessing product tracking and identification to enable personalized care services. This approach is clearly recognizable in brands such as Cos, Ganni, Zara, Lululemon, Pangai, and Golden Goose. All provided sustainability initiatives are carefully crafted to align with and enhance the brand’s image and values, for the label maintains tight control over aftercare processes, ensuring consistency in quality and messaging across all touch-points. If third party service-providers are involved, it is not declared to the final customer. The coverage provided by the Integrated Care Model is medium, with a specific focus on the repair and collection phases. It is important to notice that for the *Post Collection* phase they can offer various options, with however more than half of the example brands offering a branded resell space of preloved items (see Figure 6).

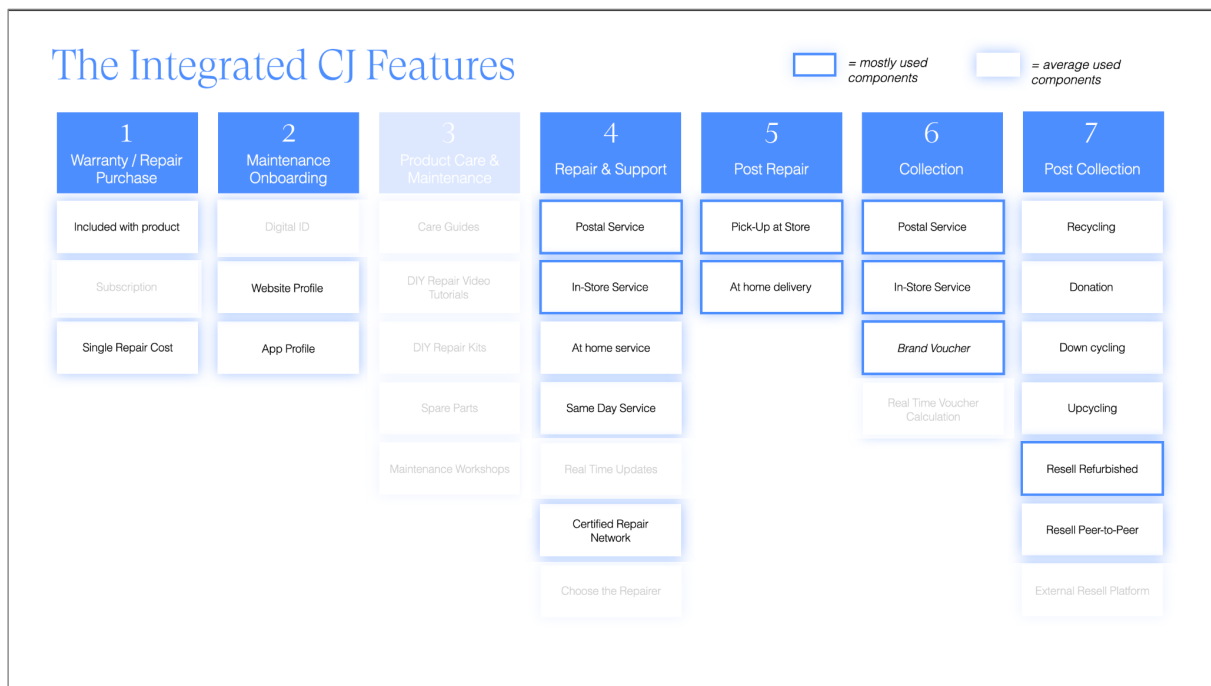


Figure 6 Customer journey diagram of the Integrated Care Model, highlighting the frequency of service component implementation.

3.5 The Minimalist Aftercare Model

The Minimalist Aftercare Model is characterized by an essential approach to aftercare services, where the brand focuses on a limited range of post-sale options, typically emphasizing a single aspect of aftercare, such as resale or simple repairs, rather than offering a broad range of services. Namely, their overall coverage of the aftercare journey is quite low, since they focus on specific stages, such as the Collection of pre-loved items, treating post-sale services as an optional extension rather than a core part of the brand's offering. This narrow focus allows the brand to allocate minimal resources while maintaining some presence in the aftercare space. The responsibility for repairs or resale is often outsourced, and the brand's control over quality and customer experience is limited, for once the product is sold, the brand's involvement in its lifecycle is minimal. The main effort is placed on maintaining a cohesive brand image through storytelling and strategic communication, even if the practical aftercare services are minimal.

The minimal approach typical of this archetype can be found in brands such as Balenciaga, Mother of Pearl, Chloé, Burberry, and Girlfriend Collective. (see Figure 7).

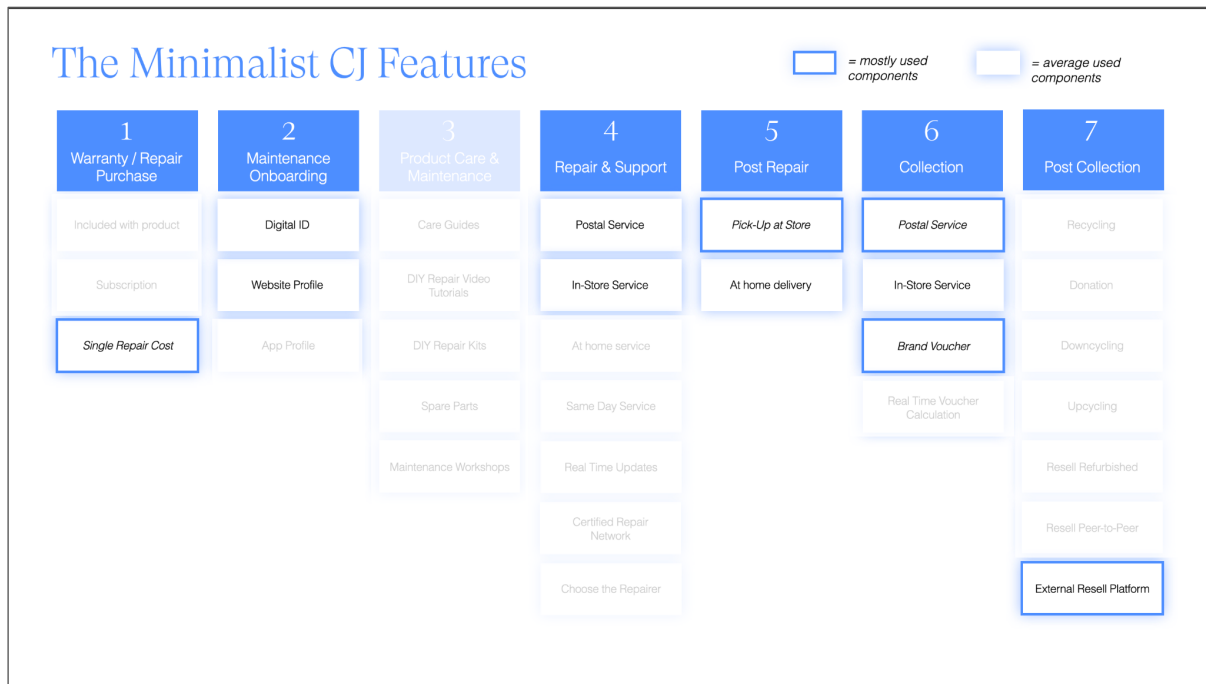


Figure 7 Customer journey diagram of the Minimalistic Care Model, highlighting the frequency of service component implementation.

3.6 The Artisanal Care Model

The Artisanal Care Model represents a hands-on, craft-focused approach to aftercare and sales services. This model emphasizes personal interactions, skilled artisans’ craftsmanship, and traditional techniques in both product creation and repair, ensuring the longevity of high-quality products. It often caters to luxury or specialized markets where individual attention and expertise are highly valued. The Artisanal Care Model typically involves a single-channel strategy, with a minimal digital presence. Customers are primarily directed to in-store interactions, with appointments and concierge-style support for basic needs such as repairs and product advice. Service coverage is concentrated around repairs and resell efforts, ensuring the longevity of the product.

Brands such as Hermès, Paul Smith, Prada, Saint Laurent, Proenza Schouler, and Bottega Veneta exemplify this model by prioritizing face-to-face services and personalized care. These brands focus on maintaining product quality and longevity rather than high-volume servicing, with the key phases of the customer journey being warranties and repairs (see Figure 8).



Figure 8 Customer journey diagram of the Artisanal Care Model, highlighting the frequency of service component implementation.

4. Discussions

The analysis of Aftercare Services Models in the fashion industry has led to the extraction of the main qualitative variables that define their effectiveness, sustainability and customer involvement. These variables (*digitization level, channels integration, service coverage, process disclosure, brand control and customer autonomy*) provided a structured way to understand how aftercare services work within different models. The six archetypes of aftercare services apply these variables differently, giving shape to distinct strategies (see Figure 9).

4.1 Digitization level

The level of digitization affects the efficiency and continuity of the services provided. Some models, such as Connected Care, rely on advanced digital tools such as IoT-based diagnostics, automatic service monitoring, and AI-based suggestions to optimize aftercare service operations. Others, such as Distributed Network Care, integrate moderate digital support, using mobile applications to connect customers with repair or resale services. In contrast, models such as Community-Centric Care and Artisanal Care deliberately limit digitalization, favoring hands-on repair shops and in-store services over automation. Minimalist Aftercare also employs low digital integration, typically limiting services to basic in-store repairs and resale. Digitization affects customer convenience, process efficiency, and the brand's ability to monitor sustainability efforts, with high-tech models excelling in automation, while low-tech models favor human interaction and a more hands-on approach.

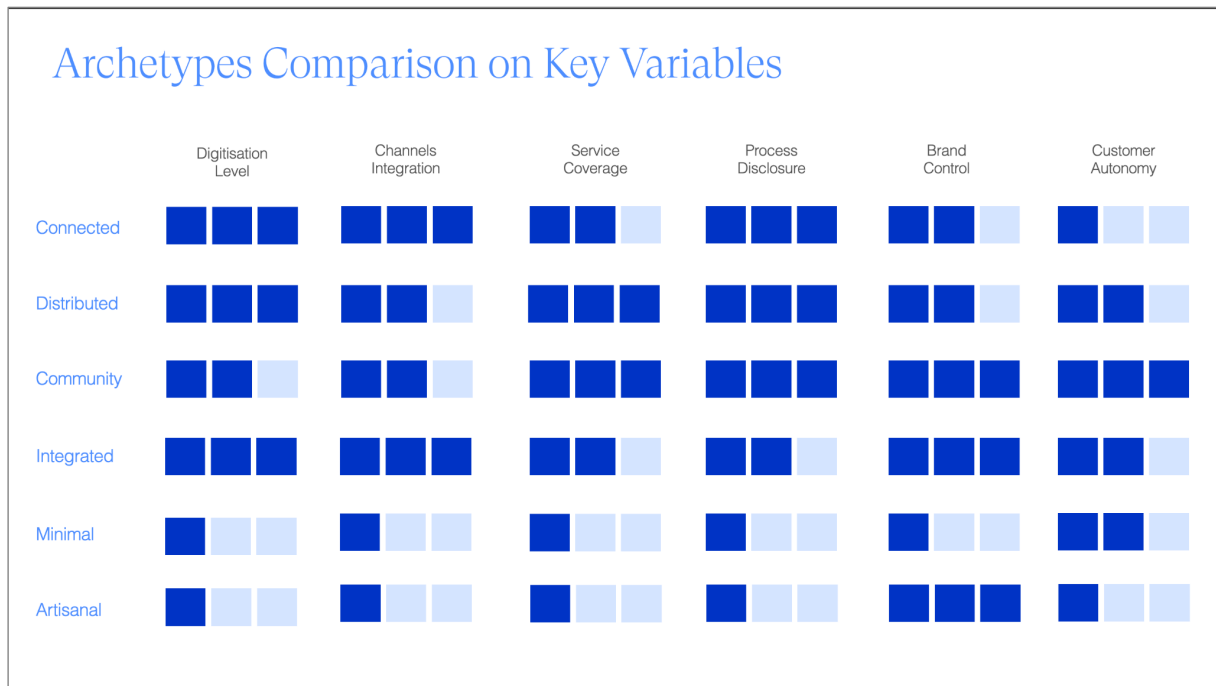


Figure 9 The six archetypes of Aftercare Services Models and their qualitative positioning according to the identified the key qualitative variables.

4.2 Channels integration

How brands connect digital and physical care services to the different channels they activate determines accessibility and ease of use. Models such as Connected Care and Integrated Care show strong omnichannel integration, ensuring that digital platforms, physical stores, and third-party service providers are seamlessly connected. Others, such as Distributed Network Care, are based on multi-channel approaches, allowing customers to access a wide range of external service providers without full integration into brand-controlled ecosystems. Community-Centric Care prioritizes in-person interactions, organizing repair workshops and sustainability events led by the community, with limited use of digital platforms. The Minimalist Aftercare Model involves a low level of channel integration, often limiting services to in-store repair or resale without significant digital support. The Artisanal Care Model, on the other hand, operates almost exclusively through physical interactions in the store, with an emphasis on quality craftsmanship and personal advice. The level of integration affects customer engagement, operational efficiency, and service accessibility, while omnichannel approaches maximize flexibility and consumer participation.

4.3 Service coverage

The breadth of services offered in Aftercare Service Models varies considerably, influencing their sustainability, effectiveness, and consumer engagement. The Connected Care and Distributed Network Care models provide comprehensive service coverage, including repair, refurbishment, resale, and recycling, ensuring customers can engage in multiple circular economy strategies. Integrated Care focuses on core aftercare service func-

tions, primarily repair, and collection, ensuring brand consistency and high service quality. Community-Centric Care extends its coverage beyond products owned by the brand, supporting DIY repair, upcycling, and second-hand resale through local initiatives and knowledge sharing. In contrast, the Minimalist Care Model offers limited-service coverage, often limiting its scope to basic repair or resale without additional sustainability services. While offering high-quality services, Artisanal Care is very selective in its coverage, focusing on luxury or bespoke items rather than mass-market solutions. Service coverage is a determining factor in a brand's commitment to circularity, with broad service portfolios enabling a more significant impact on sustainability.

4.4 Process disclosure

Transparency in aftercare services builds customer trust, supports sustainability awareness, and improves brand credibility. Models such as Connected Care and Integrated Care prioritize high disclosure of processes, providing real-time monitoring, supply chain transparency, and detailed information on repair and recycling routes. Distributed Network Care maintains moderate disclosure, ensuring quality control through third-party assessments but offering less direct visibility to consumers on procedures. Community-Centric Care promotes high transparency, encouraging consumer participation in circular practices through workshops, repair events, and open discussions on the life cycle of products. On the other hand, Minimalist Aftercare and Artisanal Care Models operate with a low disclosure of processes, offering little information on sustainability strategies, often due to the exclusive or reduced nature of the services provided. High disclosure encourages consumer involvement and participation, while low disclosure can lead to a reduction in trust and perceived risks of greenwashing.

4.5 Brand control

The level of brand control over aftercare services plays a crucial role in ensuring the quality of the service, consistency of the customer experience, and fulfillment of sustainability commitments. Models such as Connected Care and Integrated Care maintain close oversight, handling repairs, resale, and recycling within brand-managed facilities or through carefully selected partners. On the contrary, Distributed Network Care delegates part of the control to external service providers, relying on quality monitoring systems to maintain standards. Community-Centric Care takes a more decentralized approach, empowering consumers and independent providers to drive aftercare initiatives rather than imposing strict brand oversight. Minimalist Aftercare heavily outsources its services, resulting in limited brand oversight and potential inconsistencies in service quality. At the other extreme, Artisanal Care maintains strict control, with the aftercare assistance managed directly by the brand or entrusted to highly specialized artisans. The degree of brand involvement directly influences service reliability, sustainability compliance, and consumer trust, shaping how aftercare assistance is perceived and experienced.

4.6 Customer autonomy

The customer's role in the aftercare services process varies from highly automated solutions managed by the brand to self-managed service and repair initiatives. Models such

as Connected Care and Integrated Care limit customer autonomy by offering fully managed, scheduled, and concierge-type services, ensuring convenience but reducing the consumer's active participation. Distributed Network Care offers moderate autonomy, allowing customers to choose between third-party service providers within a structured network. Community-Centric Care strongly encourages autonomy, providing consumers with repair kits, knowledge-sharing platforms, and community-led workshops to engage in DIY and collaborative aftercare support solutions. Minimalist Care offers low autonomy, as services are predefined, limited in scope, and brand oriented. Similarly, the Artisanal Care Model minimizes customer autonomy, offering exclusive and highly controlled services that require direct engagement with expert artisans. High autonomy favors consumer empowerment and active participation in sustainability, while low autonomy provides high-level, controlled experiences that prioritize service quality over consumer independence.

5. Conclusions and future research directions

This study identifies the growing importance of aftercare services in shaping a more sustainable fashion retail landscape. By conceptualizing six different Aftercare Service Models, it demonstrates how brands integrate repair, maintenance, resale, and refurbishment services to prolong product lifecycles, reduce waste, and build stronger consumer relationships. The findings suggest that aftercare is not just an after-purchase function but an underlying pillar for the circular fashion strategy, with different strategies according to levels of digitization, service accessibility, and engagement level of consumers.

While high-tech, integrated models such as Connected Care and Integrated Care prioritize automation, real-time monitoring, and fluid service flows, Community-based and Artisanal models prioritize hands-on engagement, craft heritage, and local sustainability. Distributed Network and Minimalist Aftercare models, by contrast, map out opposing directions towards scalability, balancing external partnerships and measured service provision. These results provide a clear roadmap for understanding aftercare's double role—as both a sustainability tool and business opportunity—allowing brands to adapt to shifting consumer needs and regulatory forces. Although these archetypes were developed based on an analysis of medium-to-large, structured brands, this does not imply that smaller brands—especially in light of recent European policies—should be excluded from these processes. The increasing presence of aftercare service providers, such as The Seam and Sojo, illustrates both the sector's recent dynamism and the scalability potential of these models. Even brands with limited resources can integrate aftercare strategies by leveraging qualified third-party partnerships, ensuring access to specialized expertise and extended service networks.

From a policy perspective, the European Union has placed growing emphasis on circular economy principles in fashion, introducing legislation that incentivizes repair, reuse, and sustainable textile management. The EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles (2022) establishes eco-design requirements aimed at enhancing durability, reparability, and recyclability. It also introduces Digital Product Passports (DPPs) to increase transparency and facilitate material traceability throughout the product lifecycle. In addition,

the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) (Regulation (EU) 2024/1781) is set to define new design criteria for textiles, ensuring that garments are produced with longevity and circularity in mind. Another key mechanism is the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework, which will become mandatory for textiles by 2025, as stipulated by the revised Waste Framework Directive (WFD) (European Commission Press Release, 2025). This policy requires brands to assume financial and operational responsibility for the end-of-life management of their products, including collection, repair, and recycling initiatives. Some EU countries have already implemented national EPR schemes, while others are currently developing measures to align with European objectives, with direct implications for fashion brands and industry stakeholders.

Looking ahead, some areas warrant further research. One key area is evaluating the long-term impact of different aftercare models, particularly in influencing consumer behavior and reducing fashion's environmental footprint. Future studies could explore how regional and demographic factors shape aftercare adoption, offering valuable insights into market-specific opportunities and challenges.

In addition, technology use in aftercare is a rapidly evolving yet relatively under-researched topic. Technologies such as AI-based diagnosis, blockchain as product tracing, and digital ID systems can enhance transparency, optimize functions, and enhance aftercare accessibility to customers. Understanding how these technologies integrate into circular retailing platforms will be critical for brands that seek to enhance aftercare programs efficiently.

By bridging these gaps, future research can inform the ongoing development of fashion retail, establishing aftercare as a central aspect of circular business models and an enabler of more sustainable, consumer-led fashion practices.

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