



6

Towards Circular Luxury Entrepreneurship: A Saudi Female Entrepreneur Perspective

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6.1 Introduction

Saudi female entrepreneurs have increased and seemingly taken initiative to create value in the Saudi luxury fashion market (Ramadan & Nsouli, 2021; Obaid, 2021b). This may be partially linked with the country's introduction of the Circular Economy strategy, which supports the fashion industry, with the focus on sustainability goals guided by the Vision 2030. Thus, Saudi Fashion Futures focus on sustainability, diversity, culture, innovation, and entrepreneurship (Arab News, 2021b).

To reiterate this further, Saudi Arabia has adopted a circular carbon economy strategy known as the circular carbon economy (Hamdan,

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2021b; Malek, 2021; Kim et al., 2021b). The circular economy concept is based on a closed-loop economy (Brydges, 2021). Thus it is a model of production and consumption that emphasises the restoration and regeneration of ecosystems (Almulhim & Abubakar, 2021). It enables the utilisation of renewable energy for production and eliminates toxic chemicals while promoting the reuse and recycling of products (Niinimäki & Karell, 2020).

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation is often cited, as they have presented innovative ideas for business remodelling, product redesigning, and changing consumption patterns to ensure environmental sustainability (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021). Thus far, the circular economy remains a rather recent phenomenon (Athwal et al., 2019) as governments and academia have only recently focused on the circular economy as a viable alternative for a sustainable future (Ki et al., 2020). Within Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Vision 2030 is supportive of this transformation and calls for practical implementation of circular economy principles.

Saudi Arabia has developed a conducive policy environment supported by numerous plans and programmes which support fashion industry entrepreneurs (Basahal, 2020) to build a circular economy. This chapter focuses on fashion entrepreneurs, more specifically female Saudi luxury fashion entrepreneurs, who have increased in numbers and are a driving force in creating value in the Saudi luxury fashion market (Kim et al., 2021b; Ramadan & Nsouli, 2021; Obaid, 2021b). Even though they are seen as a driving force, female entrepreneurs may not have an adequate understanding of what sustainability is and how to implement it within their “businesses” operations, seeing as “sustainability” is a relatively new phenomenon in Saudi Arabia. While the Ministry of Culture and the Fashion Commission have developed various strategies related to sustainability, there is a lack of proliferation of concrete steps and processes those female entrepreneurs can follow to be part of the circular economy. Within this chapter, sustainability and the circular economy are closely interlined and interconnected. Thus, sustainability is seen as the overarching goal that is fostered through circular economy strategies.

The fact that female Saudi luxury fashion entrepreneurs lack awareness may hinder them from fully capitalising on available resources and often not achieving their sustainability goals (Basahal, 2020). Few studies have

investigated the effectiveness of public awareness, attitudes, and lifestyles in the transition to a circular economy (Almulhim & Abubakar, 2021). Moreover, there is a socio-cultural aspect to these challenges, as fashion entrepreneurs face a market that may not be ready to accept recycled or second-hand luxury goods, which form part of the sustainability strategy. The Saudi Vision 2030 and other governmental policies give female entrepreneurs direction and resources, but they do not consider the social stigma or bias that it may entail with recycled garments in the country. However, recycling materials is one aspect that is linked to having a circular economy strategy. According to Basahal (2020), there are almost no current studies focusing on the role of female entrepreneurs in supporting sustainability initiatives in the luxury fashion industry in Saudi Arabia. This is a gap in research and warrants an exploration of the current status of understanding and implementation of sustainability principles and circular economy strategies by Saudi female entrepreneurs.

This chapter, therefore, explores the challenges Saudi female entrepreneurs faced in successfully taking advantage of the Circular Economy Strategy from the Saudi Vision 2030. Thus, this chapter poses the following research aims:

1. To gain a better understanding of Saudi female fashion entrepreneurs' perceptions of the circular economy in light of the Saudi Vision 2030.
2. To evaluate the challenges Saudi female fashion entrepreneurs face in developing sustainable solutions in the luxury fashion market.

6.2 Literature Review

6.2.1 Sustainability in the Luxury Fashion Market

With the growth of globalisation and the increasing interlink and reliance of economies on each other, there has been a surge in luxury fashion consumption globally (Cabigiosu, 2020; Kim et al., 2021a), leading to an increased academic interest in developing markets. It is especially true in the Middle East, where people's high purchasing power capacity qualifies them as critical luxury fashion consumers (Centobelli et al., 2020b).

However, despite the market's rapid growth, the fashion industry is criticised for causing environmental damage and struggles to implement sustainability (Battle et al., 2018; Balconi et al., 2019; Henninger et al., 2021a). This industry is among the most polluting industries identified globally (Henninger et al., 2017; Balconi et al., 2019; Henninger et al., 2021b), which has been a cause of concern.

Within Saudi Arabia, this shift can also be observed, with the appearance of the new Arab audience—millennials—who are increasingly interested in sustainable options (Mishra et al., 2021). Millennials recognise luxury fashion companies as ones that have a worldwide reputation, excellent quality and innovation, and core competency (Ramadan & Nsouli, 2021), which has led to more research in the field of sustainable fashion technology and consumption in the middle east, especially in Saudi. Yet, whilst there is research on consumers, there is a gap addressing the role of entrepreneurship in generating innovative economic models and transforming the luxury fashion industry (Mishra et al., 2020; Almulhim & Abubakar, 2021), especially in the context of the Saudi Arabia (Ramadan & Mrad, 2017; Almulhim & Abubakar, 2021). Therefore, the fashion industry is on a path to transition as the emergence of a circular economy has made it possible to move away from linear processes like make-use-dispose to reuse, reutilise, and closed-loop approaches to consumption (Henninger et al., 2020).

6.2.2 Circular Economy and Luxury Fashion Industry

The circular economy is seen as a potential solution to enhancing sustainability in the fashion industry (Brydges, 2021), along with the investment in innovation that could enable the use of clean technology and processes in manufacturing. A circular economy presents a restorative economic model (Jain & Mishra, 2019), which can lead to overall environmental sustainability and community enhancement. By encouraging superior designing of products and utilisation of resources in an environmentally friendly manner, circular economy leads to better quality products at affordable costs (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2012). The benefits are multi-fold if the environmental regeneration and the prolonged

lifecycle of products from a circular economy are considered (ibid.). While the concept of second-hand luxury fashion is aligned with sustainability goals (Henninger et al., 2016), it involves decoupling economic processes from using non-renewable resources and ensuring minimal wastage (Bocken et al., 2016). The circular economy emphasises the re-designing of products, re-engineering processes, and ensuring a focus on regeneration. One prominent focus of the circular economy is to ensure that products and materials are not wasted and instead kept in use for more extended periods, and as such, the second-hand garment industry could be complementary to the circular model, though not only resell but also swapping, renting, or other models (Hidalgo et al., 2019). The circular economy is seen as a potential solution to enhancing sustainability in the fashion industry (Centobelli et al., 2020a, b), along with the investment in innovation that could enable the use of clean technology and processes in manufacturing. There are various definitions of the circular economy in literature, from a systemic shift in the economy to a more straightforward combination of activities that focus on reducing, reusing, and recycling waste (Niinimäki, 2017). However, the circular economy is explicitly linked with economic prosperity brought about by sustainable development (Bertassini et al., 2021). A more expansive view of the circular economy also includes generating social equality and empowering the weaker sections of society (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). However, academics have focused on circular economy in the last few decades, allowing for clarity on implementing the rather vague notion of sustainability (Murray et al., 2017).

The field of research in the circular economy is still emerging, with both the definition and concept of the circular economy expanding and becoming reconstructed with new evidence (Henninger et al., 2020). Several different theories around circular economy principles are based on sector or market focus (Henninger et al., 2021b). Therefore, it is critical to understand the circular economy's implications for the fashion industry, particularly the luxury fashion sector in Saudi Arabia, in this context. According to Niinimäki (2017), in a circular economy, the fashion industry is expected to focus on sustainability and reduce the long-term impact of its processes, through designing for longevity, service, material recovery, and reuse in manufacture. Niinimäki (2017) states that

developing a sustainable business model for the luxury fashion industry requires focusing on radical innovations in design and technology and implementing new strategies that include all stakeholders, including the community and the environment. Moreover, the circular economy entails that the methods of using textiles need to transform at a fundamental level—that the fabrication, use, and disposal of materials are undertaken in new and innovative ways which are different from the traditional usage. Shirvanimoghaddam et al. (2020) postulate that the circular economy requires that supplies and finished products be retained for a prolonged period while maintaining value creation. They further elaborate that there is a need to think of innovative ways to repurpose the products once they have been used and utilise them in designing and developing new products. There are also specific aspects of the circular economy that can be employed in the fashion luxury market. For example, Henninger et al. (2021a) have found that companies can contribute to the circular economy by collecting their products back from their customers and repurposing them. The recollected material is used for innovative designing of new material, and hence it can be kept in use for a longer time, instead of being sent to landfills as waste (Ræbild & Bang, 2017). Another approach is developing synthetic raw materials and fibres that last longer, resist wear and tear, and thus increase longevity (Niinimäki & Karell, 2020). Research has also revealed that companies are investing in new technologies that can enable them to develop textiles and clothes that are more environmentally friendly and reduce the overall carbon footprint (Hvass & Pedersen, 2019). Though this may not be directly related to the circular economy concept, it adds to sustainability.

Similarly, the second-hand luxury fashion market can be considered to contribute to the circular economy. Second-hand clothes are bought by local vendors and sold back to merchants that can repurpose or redesign and resell these at a profit, or simply resell second-hand goods, often at a lower price (Moorhouse & Moorhouse, 2017). Similarly, researchers have explored the utility of creative marketing in campaigns that encourage clothes swapping between people and thus maintain that the clothes stay in use for a prolonged period (Henninger, 2021a). While there is considerable work done within the fashion industry to become environmentally friendly, there appears to be a lack of academic research that

could explore the practical aspects of implementing a circular economy in the luxury fashion industry.

Moreover, an essential strategy that is inherently required for the circular economy to be effectively implemented is to create awareness around sustainability and the need for customers to be sensitive to the environmental impact of their consumption (Henninger et al., 2018). It is here that the role of the government becomes paramount, as it has the resources and the stake to ensure that both the entrepreneurs and the consumers are aware of sustainability and circular economy-related concepts. Therefore, the following section focuses on the Saudi government's role in generating sustainability in the fashion industry.

6.2.3 Role of Government in Saudi in Generating Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

Governments are critical in facilitating the ecosystem and establishing the regulatory framework within which businesses can operate (Centobelli et al., 2020a). In the context of Saudi Arabia, the government has taken a proactive role in supporting sustainability in businesses (Ramadan & Nsouli, 2021). It is evident in the provisions of the Saudi Vision 2030 that specifically pertains to the fashion industry's environmental and social sustainability and proposes a circular economy development (Hamdan, 2021a). The Government of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Fashion Commission (under the Ministry of Culture) have committed to developing sustainability initiatives driven by the Saudi Vision 2030. Under its "100 Saudi Brands program" scheme, the Saudi Fashion Commission aims to empower and support local luxury brands to attain international standards (Arab News, 2021a). This programme provides support and skill development to designers and entrepreneurs in the fashion industry to take advantage of the circular economy, improve their sustainability, and develop leadership capabilities (Fashion Commission, 2021a). Additionally, the Ministry of Culture has a Fashion Futures Programme that focuses on developing innovative solutions for sustainability and diversity management in the fashion industry (Obaid, 2021a). The underlying aim of the Saudi Fashion Commission is "to enable the

development of a thriving Saudi fashion industry, sustainable and inclusive, fully integrated along the value chain, maximizing local talent, experiences, and competencies” (Fashion Commission, 2021b).

The country’s commitment and confidence towards attaining the aforementioned things are also reflected in the words of Princess Reema Bandar Al-Saud, Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to the US, who had proclaimed that Saudi Arabia would be a leader in fashion in the future. The sentiments are matched in the words of Burak Cakmak, CEO of the Fashion Commission, when he said:

Saudi Arabia can serve as an example of how to build an innovative, sustainable and appropriate fashion sector, locally and internationally. By working with innovators in the sector, attracting retail experiences and establishing partnerships for education, business development and entrepreneurship, he added, the Kingdom will be able to develop the processes and brands of local businesses to improve them in line with international best practices. (Alkhudair, 2021, p. 2053)

Therefore, it can be observed that the Saudi government is committed to developing the sustainable fashion sector in the country and is focused on creating entrepreneurship support.

6.2.4 Female Entrepreneurship in Luxury Fashion Industry in Saudi Arabia

The luxury fashion industry in Saudi Arabia has seen the emergence of numerous female entrepreneurs that have been doing a commendable job (Basahal, 2020). However, as the luxury fashion industry has expanded, there have been several challenges that these female entrepreneurs face, such as the need to become a part of the circular economy paradigm initiated by the Saudi government (Aboumoghli & Alabdallah, 2019). While promoted and encouraged by the government, ensuring sustainability alignment largely falls on the business owners, as society holds them accountable for degrading the environment for their profit. Under pressure from society and the consumers, entrepreneurs have focused on

developing more sustainable production pipelines and adopting practices, such as re-looping or redirecting unused garments towards new supply chains and recycling processes for garments (AlSabban & Issa, 2020). However, there is also an emerging trend among entrepreneurs, driven by their values and ethics (Li & Leonas, 2019), which led to the emergence of female luxury fashion micro-entrepreneurs who deal in second-hand luxury fashion garments (Hu et al., 2019). It is also true in the context of Saudi luxury fashion entrepreneurs (Aljuwaiber, 2020), who have overcome substantial socio-cultural and educational barriers to succeed in business (Abdulghaffar & Akkad, 2021).

While on the one hand, these recycled luxury fashion garments or textiles are made from renewable sources and reduce the industry's carbon footprint, on the other hand, they compete with the traditional luxury fashion industry (Athwal et al., 2019). In Western countries, the second-hand consumption of luxury goods is already de-stigmatised (Battle et al., 2018), and the second-hand or vintage fashion markets are well-accepted (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2018). However, in the context of Saudi Arabia, recycled or pre-owned garments, or even garments made by using innovative processes such as renewable sources of material, may not necessarily be seen as acceptable.

In the Saudi context, through *zakat* (charity), second-hand is accepted and recycled and passed on to those in need (AlSabban et al., 2014). In addition, charitable associations created in Saudi have launched initiatives to help upcycle these unwanted items to help to promote a more sustainable environment (Hamdan, 2021a). It is also true in businesses, where left-over materials from production processes can be donated to charities, thus simulating a circular economy (AlSabban et al., 2014; Elshaer et al., 2021). Each year, Saudi Arabia discards tonnes of textiles and clothing in its recycling centres and landfills (Sakshi, 2021). To promote a sustainable environment, charitable organisations in Saudi Arabia have initiated programmes to assist in the recycling of these discarded items (Sakshi, 2021). Consumers from the Middle East generally prefer purchasing new goods (AETOSWire, 2021), and second-hand clothes are perceived as being for charity, and people do not sell or buy them (Alfawaz, 2014).

New luxury has always been popular with consumers across the Middle East to buy, although used goods are a new issue in the region (Assomull, 2021). Currently, online luxury in the Middle East is expanding. Farfetch, an online luxury retailer, wants to combine both by extending Farfetch Second Life, its handbag resale service, to the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia (Assomull, 2021). The reason for this is that younger and more environmentally conscious consumers want to buy high-end goods that are in good condition (AETOSWire, 2021; Ramadan & Nsouli, 2021). With the help of social media and the media, eco-fashion and sustainable trade values have played a vital role in promoting this development to the new generation of Saudis. Moreover, the current economic climate has encouraged a change in consumer opinions concerning wearing and utilising second-hand goods combined with vintage inspirations in current fashion designs (Obaid, 2021b).

The Middle East's passion for luxury stimulates rapid growth in the second-hand luxury goods sector. Whilst the pandemic has caused reduced in-person shopping, online platforms have benefitted from a significant increase in demand from millennials eager to purchase high-end goods at affordable prices (AETOSWire, 2021). More recently, in Saudi Arabia, there has been a shift in perceptions around pre-owned goods and positive acceptance of resale or recycled products (Obaid, 2021b). This shift is primarily attributed to the growth of Generation Z (Gen Z) and Millennials (Gen Y), who are known to prefer ethical, eco-friendly, and sustainable consumption (Kim et al., 2021a). These generations favour the second-hand luxury fashion market in Saudi Arabia (AETOSWire, 2021; Obaid, 2021b).

Moreover, with the expected rise in the country's population and the predominant percentage of young people in the population, second-hand luxury fashion can be expected to grow (Obaid, 2021b). However, second-hand luxury fashion forms just one aspect of the circular economy, as seen in the previous section (Centobelli et al., 2020a). Entrepreneurs need to develop more innovative approaches to ensuring that their production, design, and processes are leading to environmental sustainability and that they are focused on long-term usage of the clothes. Thus, entrepreneurs need to be vigilant about the latest technologies that can enable them to reuse material innovatively, repurpose and redesign

clothes, and develop outputs that are appealing and environmentally friendly (Santasalo-Aarnio et al., 2017). According to Veleva and Bodkin (2018), knowledge and awareness around the circular economy and the strategies and methodologies to adapt to ensure that they participate in and contribute to the circular economy are essential for luxury business (Centobelli et al., 2020b). It is here that the role of the government is highlighted, as the government is able to provide training and development for entrepreneurs (Welsh et al., 2014) in the circular economy, as well as to give them hands-on support to implement the principles of circular economy (Veleva & Bodkin, 2018). It also needs to renew its knowledge base and practices and harness new information on recycling technologies (Niinimäki & Karell, 2020).

6.3 Methodology

This research employed a qualitative methodology (Guba & Lincoln 1994; Symon & Cassell, 2012) to gain insights into female entrepreneurs and their experiences with the circular economy in Saudi Arabia. A sample of 22 Saudi female luxury fashion entrepreneurs were purposively selected (Table 6.1). A purposive sample was more suitable as it included participants who were likely to have insights and knowledge and were interested in discussing their problems and initiatives. Prior to conducting any research, ethical approval was obtained. Each interview lasted 60 minutes and was semi-structured.

Examples of the probing questions asked are as follows:

- How does the Saudi vision 2030 influence your business?
- What challenges have you faced in the past, if any?
- Are there any challenges you currently face in operating your business?

The interviews have been transcribed verbatim and carefully translated, ensuring the process is reliable and preserves the data's integrity (Al-Amer et al., 2016). Data were analysed using a grounded-analysis approach of Easterby-Smith et al.'s (2018) seven-step guide, involving

Table 6.1 Summary of participants

No.	Luxury fashion categories	Duration of interview
E1	Evening apparel	68.51
E2	Evening apparel and casual	56.43
E3	Ready-to-wear and evening apparel	59.15
E4	Evening apparel	65.33
E5	Evening apparel	53.42
E6	Evening apparel and casual	58.39
E7	Ready-to-wear and evening apparel	47.05
E8	Children, casual, weddings, and evening apparel	78.34
E9	Ready-to-wear and abaya	49.15
E10	Ready-to-wear and casual	39.07
E11	Ready-to-wear and evening apparel	51.50
E12	Ready-to-wear, sustainable fashion, and accessories, apparel	83.55
E13	Ready-to-wear, sustainable fashion, and accessories, apparel	59.28
E14	Ready-to-wear, sustainable fashion, and accessories, apparel	89.54
E15	Ready-to-wear and evening apparel	58.12
E16	Ready-to-wear and abaya	57.46
E17	Sustainable fashion and modern folk garment	89.55
E18	Ready-to-wear and evening apparel	40.25
E19	Ethical and modern national garment-abaya	55.48
E20	Bags, accessories, apparel	49.58
E21	Ethical and modern national garment-abaya	39.42
E22	Designer luxury womenswear fashion (bags, accessories, apparel)	44.54

familiarisation, reflection, open-coding, conceptualisation, focused re-coding, linking, and re-evaluation. It is important to note that grounded analysis is open to discoveries within the data. To ensure coherence, clarity, and continuity, the researchers examined the data independently.

6.4 Findings and Discussion

6.4.1 Understanding Concepts of Circular Economy and Sustainability

This chapter seeks to better understand how Saudi female luxury fashion entrepreneurs think about sustainability and the circular economy. The analysis of the interviews revealed that the participants had varying ideas about sustainability and circular economy techniques. Only a handful of attendees were familiar with the new circular economy strategy and how it may help the Saudi sustainable fashion industry's future. As stated by E17, "early 2020, I met with one of my employees at the Saudi Ministry of Culture to explore the circumstances of manufacturers in Saudi to help the Kingdom fulfil its Vision 2030 goals... in sustainability". These findings indicate that the participants are receptive to the idea of exploring how they can attain sustainability and are open to receiving information and support to guide them through their endeavour. This is also an important finding because it shows that the participants regarded the Saudi Vision 2030 as vital and desired to implement the circular economy strategy to achieve their sustainability goals.

However, the findings also indicate that the current level of understanding is limited for the concepts and constructs related to the circular economy and the strategies that they can implement to participate in the circular economy. Although the Ministry of Culture offers a variety of sustainability and circular economy training programmes (Arab News, 2021a; Fashion Commission, 2021a), female entrepreneurs are unfamiliar with the programmes due to a lack of effective communication and engagement from the Commission. For example, one of the participants, E3, said, "We need some courses to understand what sustainable means". Also, E6 stated, "we do not have enough awareness of the new plan. We need a link between the Ministry of Culture and us". It demonstrates a gap between female entrepreneurs and the organisers of circular economy programmes. E1, E2, E18, E21, and E22 also felt that they do not have sufficient knowledge or need a more direct connection and knowledge transfer from the Ministry of Culture to support them in their business.

These findings show that the respondents desire more hands-on guidance from the Ministry of Culture to help them understand and implement the circular economy concepts. They may even want greater clarity on the essential meaning of the terms like sustainability and circular economy. Therefore, training is required by establishing new knowledge about sustainable methods to adapt their practices to the new circular economy setting (Welsh et al., 2014; Dan & Østergaard, 2021). The E10 stated, “The implementation of Saudi Vision 2030 in the Saudi fashion industry has had limited success because It is important to raise fashion entrepreneurs’ awareness of the benefits of the circular economy so that they may better manage their businesses”. The findings reveal that the respondents believed that understanding sustainability concerning circular economy practices in their field is essential to achieving the Saudi Vision 2030.

The aforementioned theme is relevant and needs to be contextualised within the existing literature. As seen from the review of literature, the field of circular economy is emerging with many different theories and practical solutions being put forward (Santasalo-Aarnio et al., 2017). This means that there is a need for structuring the available knowledge and interpreting it for the entrepreneurs who can undertake practical implementation of the circular economy strategies without the need for deep diving into theory and research (Veleva & Bodkin, 2018). In the case of Saudi female entrepreneurs, the confusion and lack of direction was apparent from the interviews, and it indicated an unfulfilled need in the country. The participants appeared to be enthusiastic and passionate about their businesses as well as environmental protection, but they lacked specific understanding about how to conduct their businesses in an environmentally sustainable manner. There is therefore a need to provide them with effective communications and guidance on the subject.

6.4.2 Generation Y’s Evolving Conception and the Circular Economy of Luxury Fashion in Saudi Arabia

Although the findings’ underscored challenges were related to the socio-cultural barriers and stigma against using recycled products, especially

clothing. It was revealed in the interviews by several participants, who mentioned that it is not considered acceptable in Saudi society to reuse material that has been classified as waste. For example, E4 mentioned that “society’s culture is sometimes not accepting recycled or reused material, even the recycled raw material”, which probably meant that the Saudi society and culture opposed using recycled products.

It was an important finding, as it underscores the cultural barriers that luxury fashion entrepreneurs may be facing in the country. However, “the new generation is poised to push us toward greater inventiveness because they are more knowledgeable on sustainability” (E11). It is also imperative that fashion brands understand how Generation Y perceives their products and their impact on the bottom line. To successfully address consumer needs, fashion business owners need to understand their attitudes on circular fashion (Kim et al., 2021a). The study results confirmed that luxury fashion entrepreneurs indicate that Luxury fashion brands need to find innovative ways of communicating their sustainability business model to their consumers. “We need to be more creative to attract the new Generation” (E11). However, they currently lack a fuller understanding of the practical implementation of these strategies in their business processes.

Moreover, the interviews showed that new generations (the millennials and Generation Z) of entrepreneurs try to improve our business and seek international fashion standards and a desire to learn from the various resources available such as online. These findings imply that Saudi female entrepreneurs in the luxury fashion industry endeavoured to employ circular economy practices and perceived sustainability as vital to their business from resources. Additionally, they have assisted female Gen Y entrepreneurs to shape their collective online community: “We are a collection of entrepreneurs that constantly post and share comparable knowledge regarding circular economy to achieve the Saudi vision 2030” (E9). Study participants confirm the new generation (millennials, Gen Z) of Saudi entrepreneurs are more open to learning and developing in their approach to sustainability in a way to meet the Saudi vision 2030. “I believe that the majority of Saudi fashion entrepreneurs are from the younger generation, the millennials and Generation Z, and they will do a great deal of work demonstrating their approach to the circular

economy if they have sufficient understanding about the Saudi Vision 2030” (E10). This theme explains that when luxury fashion industry transitions to a more sustainable business strategy, Gen Y/Gen Z entrepreneurs value and appreciate sustainable luxury. It also indicates gaps at the policy level, as the government does not include any specific programmes or directions for overcoming this cultural barrier. However, governments and politicians can remove existing impediments at the market, society, and innovation system and promote the implementation of targeted initiatives because their actions can function as drivers or hurdles to companies’ move to a circular economy (Centobelli et al., 2020a). It also indicates that female entrepreneurs are eager to seek information and comprehensive support to enable and empower them to achieve their sustainability goals.

Additionally, the findings can also be interpreted to mean that the entrepreneurs, though eager and receptive to sustainability, are unable to find and take advantage of resources or education around sustainable business operations. These findings also highlight that the participants were vague on sustainability and how they can successfully implement circular economy strategies in their business strategies. Entrepreneurship is critical for advancing circular luxury on a sustainable basis. These entrepreneurs are transformational leaders who work to improve people’s lives and the environment (Gardetti & Torres, 2013). Nevertheless, the findings also indicate the eagerness to learn and a willingness to obtain more information and guidance.

6.4.3 The Beginning of Recycling Operations

Although it was seen from the interview analysis that despite the limited understanding of policy or information availability, some participants were using the available capabilities and available practices related to sustainability; for example, some participants had revealed that they could reuse old clothes and redesign and refurbish them into new dresses. However, the main challenge was the availability and supply of raw materials that could support their sustainability designs and marketing approaches. For example, participant E19 mentioned:

We are looking to start to recycle our product by asking the customer to bring the old product to get money off coupons and then sell this product as second-hand as a part of the realisation of (Saudi)Vision 2030 ... the revenues of the sale could be donated to charitable organisations.

By drawing on their past knowledge of culture, participants strive to execute a simple idea in that second-hand links to the circular economy and Saudi Vision 2030. Thus, rather than throwing clothes away, they should donate them to charities (AlSabban et al., 2014; Elshaer et al., 2021).

This is nevertheless a strategy already documented in literature where companies develop a subscription-based collection where people can subscribe to the company and give their old clothes to it, in return for which they are given coupons that they can redeem on their future purchases (Hvass & Pedersen, 2019; Dissanayake & Weerasinghe, 2022). Similarly, E8 mentioned, “I had a policy for our customers to return the old dresses from our brand and re-design them again with a new cut and affordable prices”. However, this finding underscores the fact that such redesigning could be limited in scope as the left-over pieces used in the redesigning could be scarce, and hence the overall number of dresses that can be made may be limited. Participants attempt to implement a sample idea of recycling that relates to the circular economy and Saudi Vision 2030 by drawing on their prior knowledge of recycling. It permits boosting product reuse and recycling (Niinimäki & Karell, 2020; Dissanayake & Weerasinghe, 2022). It is evident that by providing incentives to customers, the entrepreneurs were creating motivation for recycling old clothes and keeping them further in active use. It also displays creativity in managing waste and shows the entrepreneurs’ ingenuity in re-marketing the used garments and putting them back in the loop.

6.4.4 Lack of Circular Resource Loops

E24 claimed, “I try to select eco-friendly materials for design”. The fact that Saudi female fashion entrepreneurs started such a strategy without getting any direct information or support from the government is

commendable. However, it also underscores the need for the policymakers to compile a list of best practices and grass-root level strategies that similar other entrepreneurs can implement. Similarly, other participants also mentioned indulging in innovative strategies for sustainability and revealed the challenges they faced in doing so. For example, some of the participants, predominantly E12, mentioned that: “as a business usually try to be more sustainable. Although the limited resources use the left-overs fabric to design the patchwork (sewing together pieces of fabric) as reused for new design”. It was also reiterated by participants E14 and E17. The challenge here was the limited availability of reusable raw material, as though the entrepreneurs were attempting to use the innovative design strategy to ensure sustainability, the supply of their raw materials limited them.

Additionally, a related challenge was the availability of reusable and innovative fabrics for raw materials, as the entrepreneurs did not seem to have access to these. Some respondents mentioned that they were hesitant about using recycled processes or materials, as they believed that using recycled fibres to improve sustainability will limit resources. According to E14, “In Saudi Arabia, we do not have natural resources for the textile industry, but with innovations in recycled and sustainable sources, this is something we can do. However, these may restrict our fabric usage”. These findings indicate that there may be a need for investing in research and development so that more innovative and reusable raw materials can be developed that can be used effectively in the luxury fashion industry. Similarly, a challenge related to lack of resources was revealed.

Moreover, a challenge related to lack of resources was revealed in the form of lack of trained Saudi artisans, as E13 mentioned: “We need as entrepreneurs to empower Saudi artisans who are a part of the circular economy for Saudi fashion in our product and pass a message to the world for the future need of sustainability in fashion”. The aforementioned findings again point out a gap that needs to be addressed by the government and policy-making agencies, so that the supply chains and skilled and trained artisans can be made available for the Saudi female entrepreneurs to successfully implement innovative strategies for the circular economy.

The shift to the circular economy of people possesses the required competencies and knowledge of circular design (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2020, 2021). These findings are also important as they point out to the fact that the respondents have some tentative understanding of circular economy (which includes using innovative processes or raw material, as the patchwork that one of the participants suggested). They may not have full access to resources or knowledge that would assist them in efficiently implementing it, but they endeavour to complete the loop as a sort of sustainable development in which the objective is to transform an unsustainable situation into a sustainable one (Niinimäki & Karell, 2020). It implies that there is a need for improving access to environmentally friendly raw materials and resources for the fashion luxury entrepreneurs so that they can make the best use of circular economy resources.

6.5 Conclusion

The findings of this study answer the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's (2018) report on the circular fashion industry and reinforce the requirement of the luxury fashion industry to incorporate repairable and long-lasting design elements. The research's findings indicated that the female entrepreneurs in the fashion luxury market faced several challenges, prominent being a lack of clarity on the concepts like sustainability and circular economy. Other challenges they face include lack of availability of innovative raw materials or reusable raw material, lack of trained artisans, lack of knowledge around specific circular economy strategies, and lack of training and support for them as sustainability entrepreneurs. Additionally, despite the vague understanding of sustainability, these female entrepreneurs face socio-cultural barriers as Saudi society does not accept recycled or made-from-waste products. The Saudi Vision 2030 and the Circular Economy Strategy provide some information and guidance, but they seem inadequate. Policymakers need to develop more explicit and comprehensive strategies that female entrepreneurs can easily understand and interpret. There is also a need for policy changes to ensure that Saudi society becomes more accepting of the concepts of recycling

and reusing fabric and garments. The expectations of the fashion entrepreneur are high in terms of responsibilities and based on the interviews; the entrepreneur has the possibility for increased impact. However, being granted authority and mandate by management and being accepted by the entrepreneur is contingent on several factors, including management's willingness to train and then listen to designers; the entrepreneur's personality and the breadth of his/her knowledge bank regarding circular strategies, as well as enthusiasm to take on new responsibilities; and the general context and a more entrepreneurial mindset. Along with these elements, the unique organisational setting and structure can be considered significant.

This research fills a gap in understanding how entrepreneurs handle circular economy strategies (Centobelli et al., 2020a). Most research around fashion take-back programmes have focused on consumers' perceptions and participation to support take-back programmes (Balconi et al., 2019; Assomull, 2021). However, according to the researcher knowledge, no research in the Middle East has explored take-back programmes from an entrepreneur's perspective, nor has it shown how the entrepreneurs manage the circular economy strategies.

6.6 Limitations of the Research and Future Developments

The research suffered from some limitations that can be overcome in future research. For example, the current research used a purposive sample, which could have limited the number and diversity of participants. Additionally, the research relied solely on qualitative methods, which, while providing rich and contextual data, also suffered from the limitation that only a smaller sample size could be included. Therefore, a mixed methodology is recommended for future research to include larger samples. Further, the research focused only on Saudi Arabia, and any future research may benefit by adopting a comparative approach where other countries in the region can be explored. Finally, the research was focused on the perceptions of the entrepreneurs alone, and future research needs

to include the consumers' perceptions to present a more holistic understanding of the issue. Moreover, for future research, a more incredible amount of investigation is needed to build long-term business plans for a new environment for sustainable fashion in Saudi Arabia.

6.7 Practitioner Implications

Sustainable fashion is a collaborative effort involving industry sectors, consumers, and governments. All stakeholders must work cooperatively to effect change. They are committed to the circular economy and the development of restorative economic concepts (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2012). The fashion industry has demonstrated resilience by adopting more sustainable business practices; it may use textile recycling innovations to withstand a radical system transformation. Saudi female entrepreneurs apply the circular economy approach in the luxury fashion industry to highlight the importance and power of female entrepreneurs in making fashion circular. Identifying such key actors and showing how they operate is a starting point for change and essential to moving the fashion industry towards a new circular textile economy (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). This research shows that implementing circularity can increase business revenue. Moreover, the need to develop new products and methods of production is immanent, in that it can aid in attracting new customers such as Generation Y.

The study also encourages practitioners to explore technology that can enable them to develop and design renewable and reusable products and stay longer in use. By providing insights about the importance of collaborative effort and systemic change, the study encourages practitioners to develop networks and processes that enable them to align with the circular economy principles.

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