

The Evocative Wardrobe : Establishing Emotional Durability to Accelerate Circular Economy in Fashion



A Circular Design approach

Global fashion waste, sustainability, and the circular economy are concepts that are increasingly gaining popularity not only in the world but also in Sri Lanka. The Fashion Revolution, organizations such as the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and brands such as Patagonia spearhead this movement in which the idea of circular economy is promoted, and action is taken to reduce the impact on global fashion waste and issues such as overconsumption and overproduction of clothes. Sri Lanka's capital city Colombo itself, contains landfills filled with unwanted clothes and materials. Furthermore, garment manufacturing is Sri Lanka's single biggest industry, but it also produces tens of thousands of textile waste every year. However, it can be seen that there is an increase in online Thrift Stores selling secondhand clothing, fashion brands that upcycle clothes, movements such as the Goodlife Foundation, and companies such as the Hirdaramani Group carrying out projects related to fashion waste. It can also be seen that The Colombo Fashion Week (CFW) in association with the Responsible Fashion Movement (RFM), has come out with a specific action-oriented impact on each garment presented on the ramp, under a program titled Responsibility

In Fashion. Through this program they have aimed to epitomize their journey towards circularity and to leave a positive mark on the environment. Each garment comes with a Garment Enhancement Guarantee to prolong the life of the garment, a disposal plan and a return after use policy.

Why do we hold onto clothes?

While most clothes are donated or given away to friends or family it can also be seen that Sri Lankans keep holding onto their clothes for a very long time. Sri Lanka does not have a throwaway culture as it is deeply embedded and rooted in tradition and people tend to keep holding onto their clothes. Parents preserve the clothes and sometimes clothes are used until they become rags. This absence of a throw away culture as a result of tradition has resulted in many post-consumer waste being accumulated but some of the R concepts like Reuse, Repair, Remanufacture and Recycling etc are followed to a certain extent. The accumulation of clothing without use is a form of fashion waste that flies under the radar and the purpose of my research was to understand as to why a person keeps holding onto their clothes long after their use and to also explore the possibilities of how these clothes could be given a new life and thereby extend the life cycle of these garments. This was also an opportunity to accelerate, contribute and use circular design strategies.

A survey was carried out through a form to understand why people hold onto clothes and what they want to do to the clothes after they can't wear them but decide to keep them anyway. An investigation was also made as to why these users lost interest in wearing the clothes and why they still kept it in their wardrobes without any function. While some did not want the clothes to be changed in any way, a majority of people were open for the garments to be reconstructed completely or while they did not want the clothes to be drastically changed, they were open to alterations and adjustments being made and for the clothes to be redesigned. From the survey it was found that the types of clothes that were accumulated were as follows; clothes that had damages to fabric and colour, issues with fit and shape of garments, clothes that were not

the correct size, clothes that did not fit the customer's style and clothes that were only kept because there was an emotional attachment to it. In all these situations a common denominator of the clothing was that there was an aspect of product attachment and an emotional connection to a majority of the clothes. This exploration of product attachment led to research on emotional durability as a tool for design.

“
The Evocative Wardrobe:
Establishing emotional
durability to accelerate
Circular Economy in
fashion”

Emotional Durability

The Circular Design Strategy such as design for the long-life use of products where the utilization of the product was extended thereby extending the life of a product and offering reuse, repair, maintenance, and upgrade (2) as well as by enhancing longer lasting relationships between products and users through emotional durable design (1) were relevant to this project. A set of recommendations have been generated for design for a circular economy, one of which is design by identifying a new circular business model that the product/ service is designed for (4) which is in line with the circular design strategy and the aim of finding a solution to accumulated clothes as most people were willing to redesign their clothing.

This redesign of clothing to extend their use can be intertwined with Emotionally Durable Design 9 which is a framework that has nine themes and

factors that influence consumer's behaviour to retain their products for longer and there are strategies supporting the embodiment of each theme (5). The conceptual framework for emotional durability to understand the complexity of emotional durability and design could also be incorporated into this research (3).

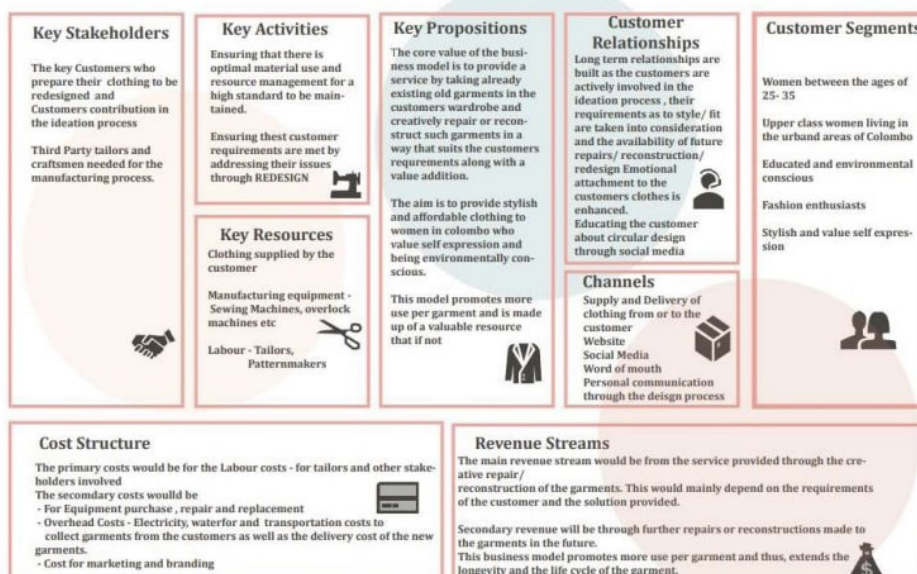
By incorporating emotional durability, a strategy of a business model for Circular Design was created and a Business Model Canvas was used to test out the way in which a business model could be created. Through testing the business model canvas the ways in which clothing could be redesigned were found, which were; Redesign through repair (according to the fabric) and visible mending (surface embellishments such as embroidery, darning and stitching etc) and invisible mending, Redesign through colour adjustability (dyeing and printing techniques), Redesign through size adjustability, reconstruction and transformability, and I realised that while I could be providing a product and a service to a customer there was also an opportunity to educate customers as well as society by creating Circular Design Tool-Kits and a database including all of these options that eventually even customers e themselves would be able to DIY (Do-it-Yourself) (RIY- Repair-it-yourself) thereby extending circularity via promoting emotional durability.

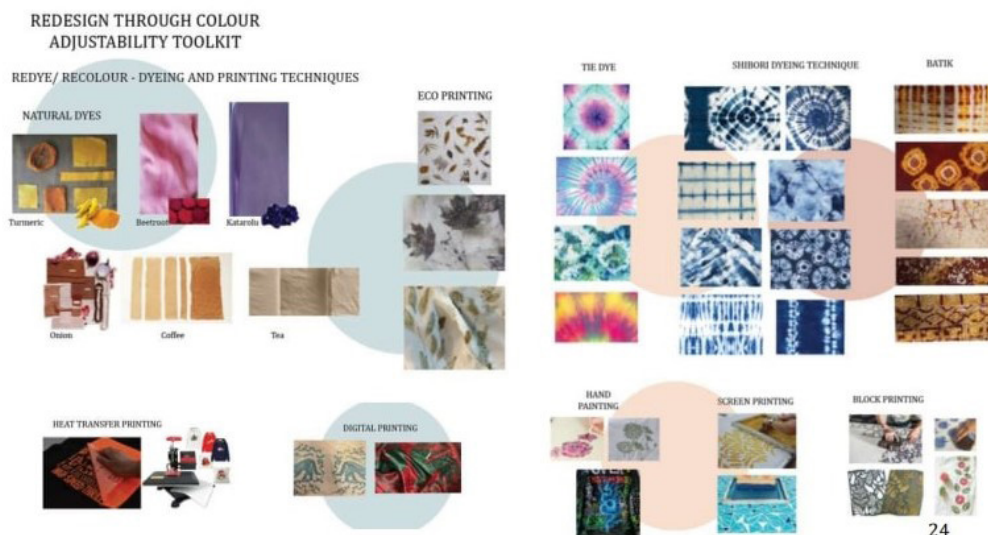
Testing the Evocative Wardrobe

The circular business model was tested where several accumulated garments were collected from potential customers, and I consulted them to understand the story of their clothing, why they didn't wear the clothes anymore and about the needs and wants of the consumer while also analysing the customers personal style. Once the customer's feedback was taken a consultation was made with them as to what can be done by the designer and considered how to incorporate emotional durability as was seen fit before redesigning or repairing the garment and then finally getting feedback for it. Through this a circular design strategy was created and the design process in which a customer would be able to redesign or reconstruct their garments in such a way that their emotional durability would be expanded and created the business model.

This business model could be used by customers to give new life to their clothing and could be scaled up in the future to not only provide a service but create a platform to educate people about circular design strategies and as the customer participates in the design process it introduces a new way for society to manage their wardrobes and be conscious about circularity for true sustainability.

BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS





References:

- [1] J. Chapman 2005 Emotionally Durable Design. London, UK: Earthscan Publishing.
- [2] F. W. Conny Bakker 2014 Products that go round: exploring product life extension through design. Journal of Cleaner Production, Volume 69, Pages 10-16. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.01.028.
- [3] Jensen, M. B. (2021). EMOTIONAL DURABILITY STRATEGIES AND FUTURE INTEGRATION –A CASE STUDY. The Swedish School of Textiles, Textile Management.
- [4] C. D. Mariale Moreno 2016 A Conceptual Framework for Circular Design. Sustainability. doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/su8090937
- [5] J. C. Merryn Haines-Gadd 2018 Emotional Durability Design Nine—A Tool for. Sustainability.

Article by

Nethni Fernando, Ruwani Rathnayaka

Department of Integrated Design, Faculty of Architecture, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka