# Navigating sustainability in retail: the challenges and opportunities ahead



As the fashion and retail industries navigate the complexities of sustainability in the near future, a blend of economic pressures and evolving consumer demands continues to shape their strategic direction. Experts from various sectors, including retail, technology, and consumer behaviour, highlighted these trends in a recent discussion published by Women's Wear Daily, focusing on the landscape leading up to 2025.

Jill Standish, the global retail lead at Accenture, emphasised the existing challenges that retailers face in integrating sustainability into their core business strategies. She noted a significant gap between immediate business needs and environmental priorities, suggesting that true progress in sustainability must be woven into every facet of the retail value chain. Standish highlighted potential cost reductions and waste limitations through practices such as standardising raw materials, designing for circularity, and utilising technologies like AI-powered merchandising and dynamic inventory planning.

Scot Case, vice president of CSR and sustainability at the National Retail Federation, pointed out that consumer definitions of sustainability vary widely. While a substantial number of shoppers express interest in purchasing sustainable products, their perceptions of what constitutes sustainability often differ. For instance, some may focus on the materials used, while others consider manufacturing processes or the price associated with these more sustainable options. According to Case, many retailers are experimenting with circular retail models—offering both new and gently used products—which can foster customer loyalty and generate profits while also contributing to environmental sustainability.

Nikki Baird, vice president of strategy and product at retail technology firm Aptos, observed the industry's ongoing struggle with the price consumers are willing to pay for sustainability. Despite consumers opting for sustainable products when prices are equivalent, many remain hesitant to spend more. Baird noted that retailers are beginning to recognise the financial implications of ignoring sustainability; escalating costs associated with climate change, government regulations, and supply chain challenges are becoming increasingly apparent.

In alignment with this, Ian Fredericks, the chief executive officer of Hilco Consumer Retail, expressed skepticism about the commitment to sustainability amidst economic constraints. He suggested that, while companies may not openly advertise a retreat from sustainability initiatives, it could be one of the first areas to experience cuts during cost-saving measures—especially for brands not fundamentally rooted in sustainability.

Conversely, Nicole Rycroft, founder and executive director at Canopy, argued that sustainability is not only an ethical necessity but also a critical business imperatif. Rycroft highlighted the resilience of brands committed to sustainable practices, citing that they have navigated economic difficulties and are aligning with market expectations while maintaining their focus on long-term sustainability strategies.

The article also pointed to upcoming European regulations, such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, which are poised to drive significant changes within the industry. These regulations are aimed at ensuring minimal environmental impacts, greater transparency, and designing products with longevity and circularity in mind. Rycroft indicated that these changes might push brands towards adopting Next Gen materials, which include recycled textiles and sustainable packaging options.

In summary, the discussion illustrates a complex interplay of factors influencing sustainability in the fashion and retail sectors as we approach 2025. While consumer demand for sustainable products rises, the industry's ability to adapt to both economic pressures and regulatory changes will be crucial in determining the trajectory of sustainability initiatives across the marketplace.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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3. <https://ronntorossian.com/navigating-the-future-of-fashion-retail-marketing-in-2025-trends-shaping-the-industry/> - Discusses the shift towards sustainability in fashion retail marketing, including consumer demand for eco-friendly products and practices, and the need for transparency and ethical sourcing.
4. <https://ronntorossian.com/navigating-the-future-of-fashion-retail-marketing-in-2025-trends-shaping-the-industry/> - Highlights the importance of circular retail models and the integration of sustainability into core business strategies, aligning with Scot Case's observations.
5. <https://www.springfair.com/news/6-fashion-retail-trends-expect-2025> - Supports the idea that consumers have varying definitions of sustainability and that retailers are experimenting with circular retail models to foster customer loyalty and environmental sustainability.
6. <https://ronntorossian.com/navigating-the-future-of-fashion-retail-marketing-in-2025-trends-shaping-the-industry/> - Corroborates Nikki Baird's point about the financial implications of ignoring sustainability, including escalating costs associated with climate change and supply chain challenges.
7. <https://www.springfair.com/news/6-fashion-retail-trends-expect-2025> - Supports Ian Fredericks' skepticism about the commitment to sustainability during economic constraints, noting that sustainability might be one of the first areas to experience cuts.
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