

Fashion niche market strategies: a systematic literature review

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Journal of Fashion
Marketing and
Management: An
International
Journal

Received 18 June 2024
Revised 15 July 2024
Accepted 15 July 2024

Abstract

Purpose – This study systematically explores the literature on global niche market strategies within the fashion industry to allow the mapping of niche practices and examine the benefits, success factors and characteristics of a niche strategy. Additionally, it identifies data gaps and necessitates a detailed examination to uncover areas with inadequate information.

Design/methodology/approach – This study utilized the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA 2020) method for systematic review and included 70 studies to analyze their findings.

Findings – This systematic literature review pinpoints niche strategies shaping the future of the fashion industry while developing sectors of the textile and apparel industry, fashion technology, fashion retail business, fashion media and communication, luxury fashion, sustainable fashion, adaptive clothing and transgender fashion within the fashion supply chain. A niche market strategy utilizes both pull and push marketing in the fashion industry. Scholarly literature commonly underscores the understanding of the consumer as a pivotal factor in the success of fashion niche market strategy.

Practical implications – This review offers a comprehensive overview of fashion niche strategy practices, aiming to inspire fashion industry professionals. It also serves as a guide for fashion industry professionals, summarizing best practices across various fashion industry sectors to help develop effective niche strategy competencies for firms.

Originality/value – This review thoroughly analyzes niche strategy implementation in the fashion industry, presenting an important resource for individuals new to this sector. It highlights the significance of niche strategies in improving the comprehension of emerging participants in the fashion business.

Keywords Niche market strategy, Fashion industry, PRISMA method, Systematic literature review, Fashion business

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

During the last few years, a growing body of scholarly literature has underscored the significance of niche market strategy usage within the fashion industry. Industries such as apparel, fiber, textile, natural dye, sustainable fashion, and retail businesses could gain advantages by understanding how niche markets affect retailers' perspectives (Parrish, 2010). Scholarly literature explores fashion niche markets through various perspectives and analytical frameworks, examining strategies employed by enterprises to target niches effectively. Key tactics include product differentiation, brand positioning, and marketing communication (Parrish, 2010). Researchers also look at how the dynamics of the fashion niche market are affected by societal changes, technical breakthroughs, and cultural trends (Parrish *et al.*, 2006; O'Hare *et al.*, 2018). Thus, this current research aims to clarify the intricacies present in this field by synthesizing empirical investigations. This helps illuminate retailers' possibilities and problems in the always-changing niche fashion scene.

A niche strategy is a practical worldwide competitive approach many firms employ (Parrish *et al.*, 2006; Popescu, 2013; O'Hare *et al.*, 2018; Choi *et al.*, 2022). Diverse academics have presented niche approaches as “target marketing, micro marketing, regional marketing,



focused marketing, and concentrated marketing” (Parrish *et al.*, 2006; O’Hare *et al.*, 2018; Choi *et al.*, 2022). Parrish *et al.* (2006) identified three fundamental components of niche: strategy, product, and market. It is a strategy that is a comprehensive business approach centered on consumer focus, which uses a bottom-up approach to address the unique needs of a small market that is gradually expanding its consumer base. Aligning with the long tail theory, niche markets thrive when diverse consumer preferences are supported by well-developed storage and circulation channels, generating market energy comparable to mainstream markets (Li, 2020).

Given this context, this study aims to present a systematic review of the niche market strategy to address the underexplored area of implementing niche market strategies in the fashion industry by synthesizing published data from 2000 to 2023. This study reveals distinct characteristics, success factors, benefits, and marketing approaches associated with a niche strategy. Besides, niche strategies have been utilized across various sectors, including the textile and apparel industry, fashion technology, fashion retail business, fashion media and communication, luxury fashion, sustainable fashion, adaptive clothing, and transgender fashion within the fashion supply chain. These concepts are utilized in the retail businesses of the fashion industry to gain profit and overcome global challenges. This research seeks to thoroughly examine specialized practices within the fashion industry, emphasizing the identification of gaps in data regarding niche market strategies and offering insights into potential future requirements. Based on the research gap, the study aims to map niche market strategy practices usage across the fashion industry by conducting a systematic literature review and examining characteristics, success factors, and benefits associated with fashion niche market strategy.

The paper is structured as follows: Section two elaborates upon the methodology employed in this investigation. Subsequently, section three provides a comprehensive analysis of the pertinent literature. Section four entails the results and discussion of the findings, offering insights and implications. The paper concludes by addressing the study’s limitations and presenting avenues for future research, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

2. Methodology

The research employs a systematic review to clarify a specific research issue in fashion niche market strategy, providing a thorough summary of the data currently available in the area, identifying knowledge gaps within the fashion niche market, and driving future studies (Petticrew and Roberts, 2008; Crossan and Apaydin, 2010). The developed review protocol (see Table 1) serves as a comprehensive plan essential for achieving objectivity in research by ensuring a systematic and transparent process, enhancing the overall integrity of the review (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003).

2.1 PRISMA method

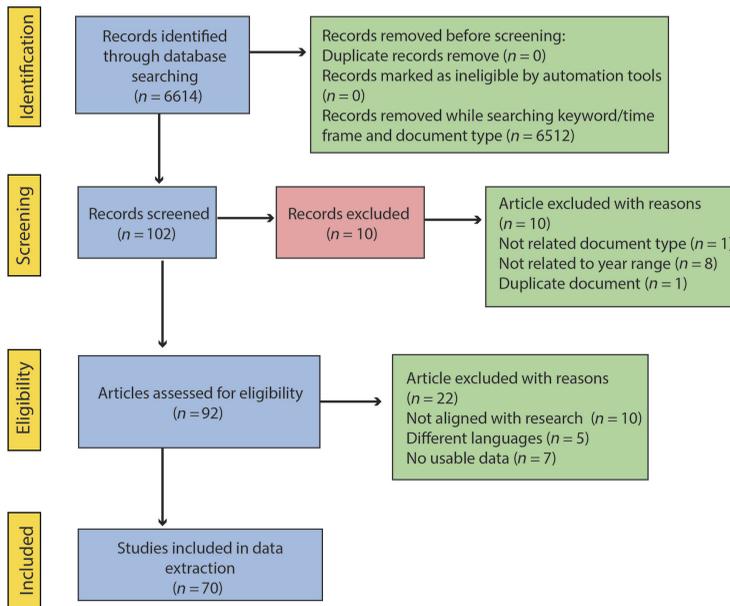
The study follows the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA 2020) approach, which serves as a template for reporting systematic reviews. It includes a four-phase flow diagram including identification, screening, eligibility, and included (Moher *et al.*, 2009, 2010; Page *et al.*, 2021). The scholars widely embrace the PRISMA 2020 method for conducting systematic literature reviews in many fields (Tremmel *et al.*, 2017; Canto *et al.*, 2021; Abdelmeguid *et al.*, 2022). Figure 1 visualizes and provides details of the four steps of PRISMA 2020.

2.1.1 Identification. The author initiated the materials collection process by collaboratively formulating inclusion and exclusion criteria for the articles. The Web of Science database, considered one of the most extensive databases, encompassing over 10,000

Step	Description
Research question	How does the literature approach the fashion industry niche market strategy?
Population targeted	Papers related to niche market strategy concerning the fashion industry
Search strategy	Databases: Web of Science Search terms a: “niche market,” “Niche market AND fashion”
Inclusion and exclusion criteria	Timeframe: June 2000–January 2023 Document type: peer-reviewed journal articles, proceeding papers, review articles, book chapters Area – Niche market strategy related to fashion Align with the study Language – English Other industries
Data tabulation	Coding categories: subject area, document type, year, terminology, citation, aim, marketing approach, type of study, methodological procedures, geographical scope of the analysis, concept of niche strategy, characteristics/factors of niche market, main findings, limitations, future agenda
Data analysis	Content analysis
Expected results	Overview of the literature on the fashion niche market strategy Analysis of papers Future research agenda

Source(s): Authors’ own creation

Table 1.
Review protocol



Source(s): Authors’ own creation

Figure 1.
PRISMA flow diagram

journals (Aghaei Chadegani *et al.*, 2013) was utilized to find relevant documents for this investigation. The selection criteria encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles, proceeding papers, book chapters, and review articles, chosen to yield comprehensive information across a diverse spectrum of topics, thus facilitating the attainment of the research objectives. As a

quality control measure, incorporating peer-reviewed sources guarantees measurable scholarly rigor in the collected information. Articles were identified using the keywords “niche market”, and “fashion”. Boolean search technique used as “niche market AND fashion” keyword. Database searches have discovered 6,614 paper records using “niche market” as a keyword. Then changing the timeframe from 2003 to 2022 identified 5,802 paper records. This period covers more than twenty years of fashion progress, thoroughly examining trends, changes, and advancements in the field. This enables us to study a significant body of literature for deeper insights into different aspects of the fashion industry. Only selecting articles, proceeding papers, review articles, and book chapters 5,714 record papers were identified. After searching with “niche market AND fashion” as the keyword, 102 record papers were identified.

2.1.2 Screening. Ten research papers were eliminated from the 102 screened after their titles and/or abstracts were assessed to determine their significance to the study goal. The chosen document types encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles, proceeding papers, and review articles. One paper was excluded due to a mismatch with the specified document type, while 8 records were eliminated based on their non-compliance with the stipulated timeframe of June 2000 to January 2023. One paper was excluded from consideration because it was identified as a duplicate.

2.1.3 Eligibility. Consequently, 92 records were identified for retrieval, and eligibility was assessed comprehensively. Nonetheless, a total of 22 records were excluded from the dataset identified through databases for several reasons: not aligned with the study ($n = 10$), no useable data ($n = 7$), and language non-conformity (restricted to English language papers only) ($n = 5$).

2.1.4 Included. Following the rigorous screening process, 70 studies were found to be eligible for inclusion in the review, aligning with the overarching objective of the study.

3. Analysis

3.1 Niche strategy usage within studies

Table 2 displays the adoption of niche strategies within the fashion industry across various dimensions. Most academic scholars prioritize sustainable principles and technological advancements, indicating a greater emphasis on future-oriented concepts by researchers.

3.2 Distribution and evolution of research papers

The summary of selected publications and distributions of papers published between June 2000 and January 2023 is shown in Figure 2. This chart gives an overview of the publishing patterns during the designated period and sheds light on the dynamics of research or academic production in each year. The greatest number of papers was published in 2020 and 2021. Less than five papers were published before 2020, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2018, 2019 years only five papers were published.

3.3 Subject area focus on research papers

The research was conducted across various subject areas, predominantly in business and economics, with 31 articles, while 10 papers were concentrated on arts and humanities. (Figure 3)

3.4 Geographical focus of research papers

All the studies were conducted in both developed countries and developing countries (see Figure 4). The majority of the studies were conducted in the USA (12) and the UK (11). India and Italy also show some growth in publications regarding fashion niche strategy.

Paper	Main focus
Amubode (2009)	Niche marketing as a strategy for the renaissance of resist dyeing industries
Argyris <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Influencers in various niches on social media sites
Arora and Aggarwal (2020)	Assist designers, manufacturers, marketers, and advertisers in gaining deeper insights into the clothing preferences of niche consumers
Ashworth <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Sustainable e-retail employs a multi-niche strategy with five fashion-related cyberstores in its e-portfolio
Beard (2008)	Branding and marketing in ethical fashion concerning niche
Brydges (2018)	Niche market usage in the Canadian fashion industry
Childs and Jin (2014)	Fashion retailers targeting niche markets with a strong brand image and specific assets may adopt a gradual internationalization pattern similar to the Uppsala model
Chitrakorn (2014)	Wool niche market
Cho <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Niche Smartwatches within the consumer electronics market
Choi and Lodish (2012)	Niche market concerning online retailing
Choi <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Identify a profitable niche market for startups and small- and medium-sized companies
Crane (2016)	Ethical fashion niche market
Crini <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Hemp as a niche crop
Cunningham <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Develop niche markets paying fair prices for sustainably harvested <i>M. cochinchinensis</i> dye-wood
Das and Mukherjee (2019)	Utilize generalized findings on globalization-linked cultural dispositions to shape marketing strategies for niche groups like aboriginal tribes in India
De Massis <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Niche usage in German Mittelstand firms
Dickenbrok and Martinez (2018)	Niche market potential for sustainable fashion
Elmazi and Stojanoski (2010)	Evaluate ecotourism's perceptions and intended applications in Eastern Europe targeting niche market
Evans and Smith (2006)	Development of new functions in the supply chain, repositioning about specific market niches
Faust <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Asian maternity wear niche market
Feng and Hui (2023)	The niche market of disabled consumers in Hong Kong
Fernandes <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Niche market usage in the edible flower market
Finn and Smith (2013)	Niche usage in the New Zealand knitwear market
Gazzola <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability concept usage in niche as a market opportunity
Gomes <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Brazilian niche textile industry
Guercini and Milanesi (2017)	Internationalization process concerning niches
Gülümser <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Organic textile niche market
Hong Lan and Watkins (2023)	Pre-owned fashion as a high-end niche market
Jain, O'Brien and Gloria (2021)	Craft-based niche market usage in up-clothing consumption system reuse and upcycling products
Khan (2015)	Identify and explore the critical supply chain success factors
Kim and Ko (2010)	Korean fashion niche market
Kim <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Niche market usage in influencers social networks to develop brands
Leinbach and Brunn (2002)	Identification of core competencies and the development of niche markets within the telecommunication sector
Lewis (2019)	Niche usage in the Muslim modest fashion industry
Li (2020)	Niche usage in the internet era, the development of electronics, and the proposal of long tail theory
Lima Guilherme and Gondim (2018)	Entrepreneurship uses creativity and innovation to make unique products that can open up new markets
Ling <i>et al.</i> (2009)	Market niche for luxury fashion goods
Maciejewski (2020)	Niche usage in dandyism

(continued)

Table 2.
Adoption of niche
strategies within the
fashion industry

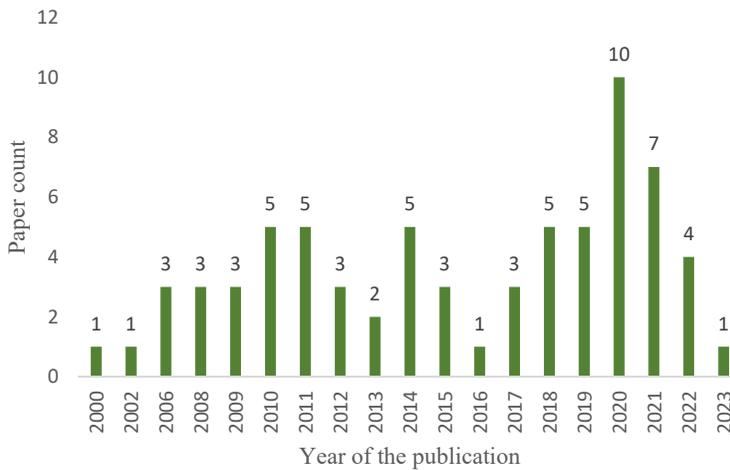
Paper	Main focus
Mcallister and Decarvalho (2014)	Niche usage in the male consumer gaze concept
Merlo (2011)	Niche usage in the Italian fashion business
Mukendi and Henninger (2020)	Fashion rental niche market
Nistoreanu (2008)	Ethics of tourist development as a niche
O'Hare <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Examine and identify the unique characteristics of Scotland's niche market for independent fashion retailers
Orzan <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Smart textile niche market
Otieno (2008)	The usefulness of creating efficient sizing in the niche market
Park and Kincade (2010)	Identifying Nike's advanced marketing strategies through branding and niche segmentation
Park (2013)	Gaps of plus-size consumers in footwear niche market
Park (2014)	The niche market targets luxury brands
Parrish (2010)	Usage of niche marketing strategy by retailers to develop private labels
Parrish <i>et al.</i> (2006)	The textile and apparel industry employs niche market strategies to compete with low-cost imports
Patichol <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Thailand's potential niches in the Thai silk industry
Patvardhan and Ramachandran (2020)	Invoke niche construction to describe shaping the future as a forward-looking strategic orientation
Pedersen and Netter (2015)	Clothes-sharing concept as an emerging niche market in sustainable fashion
Popescu (2013)	Using niche market strategy to help companies maintain and succeed during a global economic crisis
John (2011)	Niche marketing usage of Italian designer Giorgio Armani
Ramaswamy and Gereffi (2000)	India's apparel exports relating to niche market
Ryu (2011)	Pop-up retail as a feasible distribution channel for testing niche markets
Sankaralingam and Gupta (2012)	Niche application in smart clothing
Seram and Kumarasiri (2020)	Sri Lankan plus-size women's wear niche market
Tarlo (2010)	Hijab as niche fashion
Tay (2009)	Fashion magazines establish their niche and attract their desired readership
Townsend <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Fashion design for older women in niche market
Tremblay and Yagoubi (2017)	Niche usage in fashion designers' career
Tullio-Pow <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Transgender fashion niche market
Tunisini <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Italian industrial cluster companies that are leading firms in specific niches of the mechanical industry
Tymoshenko <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Marketing tools usage in shaping a brand's image and pinpointing niche
Vorobiova <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Seeking new market niche in the fitness industry
West <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Slow fashion niche market
Yu <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Direct-to-garment printing growing niche market
Zeba and Ganguli (2019)	Niche fashion apparel consumption among adult career women is shaped by the lived experiences of fashion innovators

Table 2. Source(s): Authors' own creation

Through applying crosstabulations, an analysis was conducted to examine the annual distribution of citations in academic journals since 2000. Notably, this approach facilitated pinpointing the highest citation numbers for the years 2020 and 2021, providing valuable insights into ongoing scholarly recognition within the specified period. However, between 2000 and 2019 period, there is a clear decline in citations (see [Figure 5](#)).

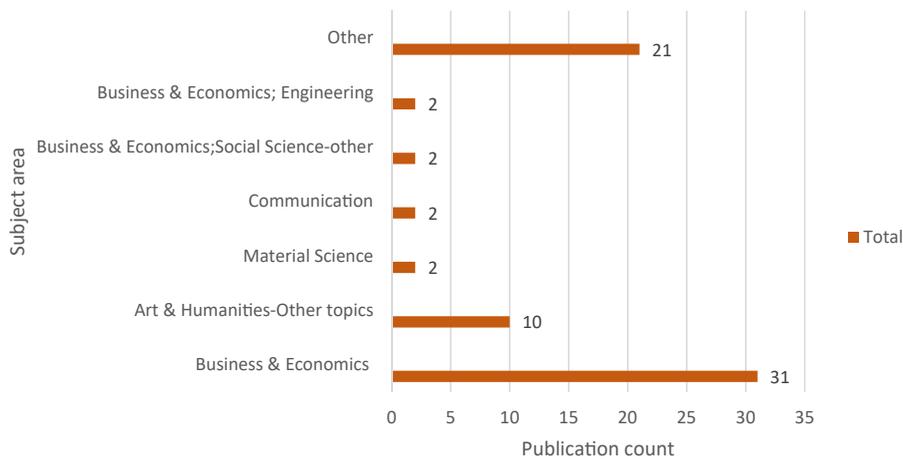
3.5 Distribution of document categories

[Figure 6](#) illustrates the distribution of document types, indicating that the study includes peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and review articles. The most founded document



Source(s): Authors' own creation

Figure 2. Published year



Source(s): Authors' own creation

Figure 3. Subject area distribution

type is journal articles, with a significant majority of 60 articles presented in this form. Also, 7 conference papers and 3 reviews were published regarding fashion niche strategy.

According to Figure 7, there was a distribution between the sources as the articles were published in 50 academic journals, conferences, and other venues. The Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management published more papers on the fashion niche market. Five other journals published more than one paper. Most of the journals were focused on marketing aspects of the niche.

3.6 Research methodologies usage within research papers

The distribution of research methodologies in Figure 8 shows theoretical and conceptual as the most popular research technique. Additionally, case studies, reviews, and surveys emerge as other popular research techniques.

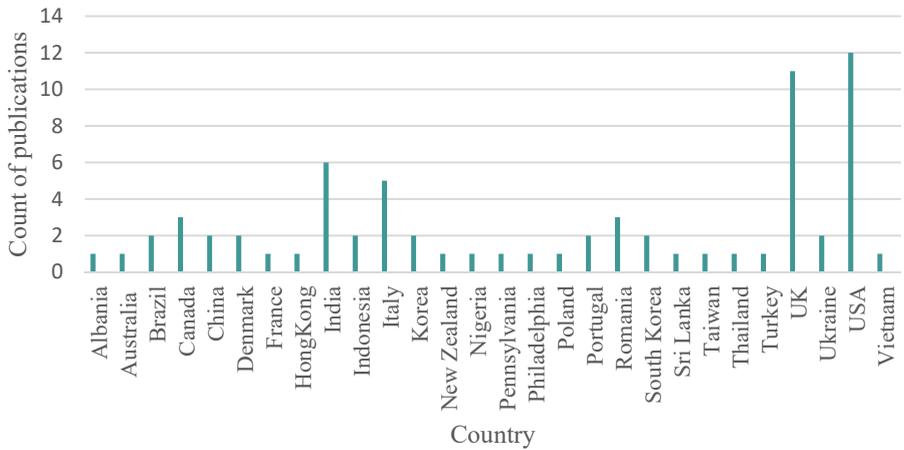


Figure 4. Geographical distribution of publications

Source(s): Authors' own creation

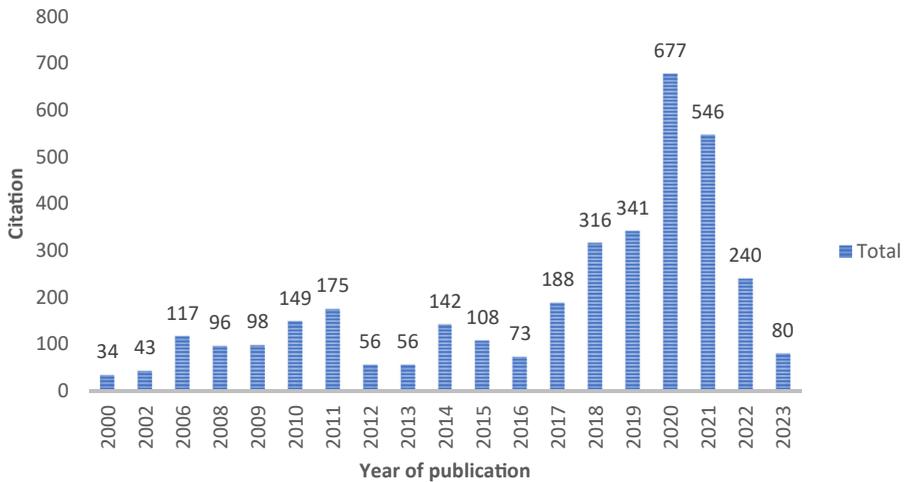


Figure 5. Citation distribution according to publication year

Source(s): Authors' own creation

3.7 Niche terminology usage within research papers

The term “niche strategy” is commonly used in different fields, specially textile and apparel, fashion, tourism, etc. (Gülümser *et al.*, 2010; Parrish *et al.*, 2006; Yu *et al.*, 2021). Numerous niche terms were identified in the papers, with “niche market” standing out as the most used term. Figure 9 shows unique terms relevant to niche strategy within the fashion industry. Researchers in sustainable fashion, fashion retail business, and fashion technologies often use various niche terms to express detailed ideas. Particularly in the textile and apparel sector, niche market, niche product, and niche strategy terms were utilized.

3.8 Niche market strategy usage within the fashion industry

The papers most frequently explored niche market strategy behaviors related to sustainability and fashion technology (Beard, 2008; Cho *et al.*, 2019; Crane, 2016; Elmazi and Stojanoski, 2010;

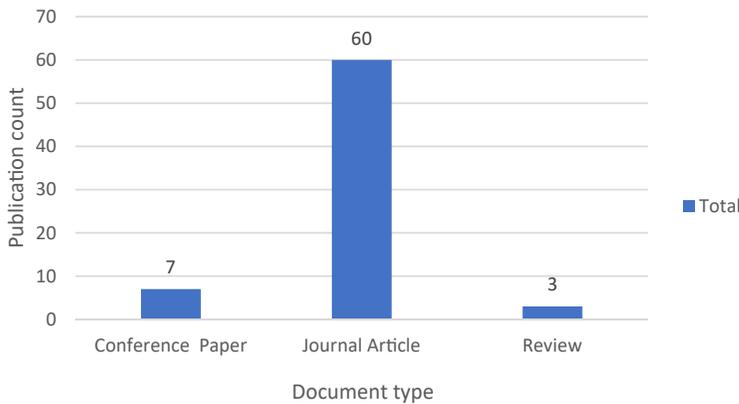


Figure 6. Distribution of document type

Source(s): Authors' own creation

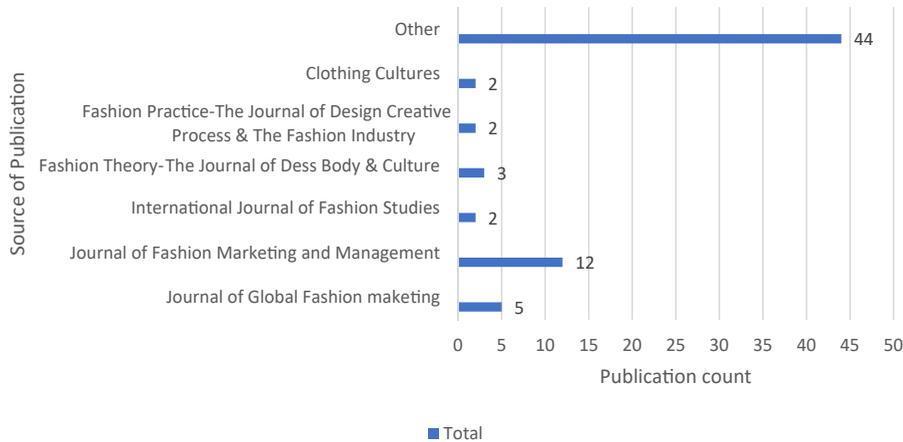


Figure 7. Source of the publication

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Orzan *et al.*, 2020; Gazzola *et al.*, 2019). Other behaviors were related to fashion marketing, textile industry, clothing developments, and fashion business (Faust *et al.*, 2012; Popescu, 2013; Childs and Jin, 2014; Tremblay and Yagoubi, 2017). Fewer papers mentioned historical backgrounds, luxury fashion, brand development, the dyeing industry, supply chain, and fashion accessories (Amubode, 2009; Ryu, 2011; Fernandes *et al.*, 2020; Maciejewski, 2020) (see Figure 10).

3.9 Fashion niche strategy usage within the product life cycle stages

The product life cycle encompasses various stages: product development, raw material selection, supplier engagement, fabric manufacturing, clothing manufacturing, distribution, retailing, consumer usage, and post-consumer waste management. Existing studies reveal a predominant focus on niche strategy within the clothing manufacturing stage (Crini *et al.*, 2020; Seram and Kumarasiri, 2020; Hong Lan and Watkins, 2023). Retailing and product development stages also receive attention in niche strategy research. Conversely, there is

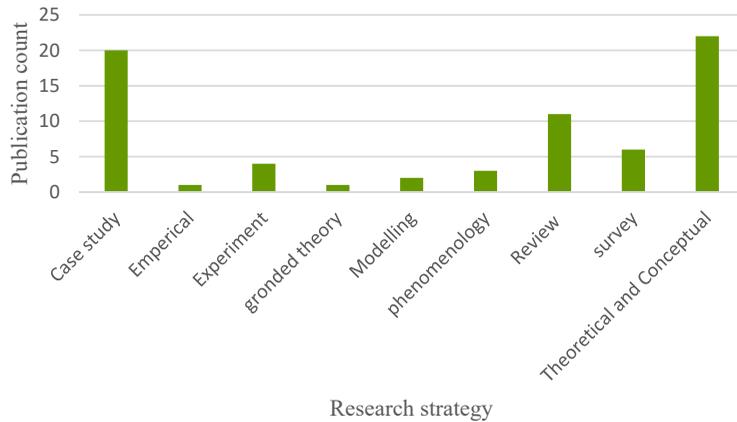


Figure 8.
Distribution of research methodologies

Source(s): Authors' own creation

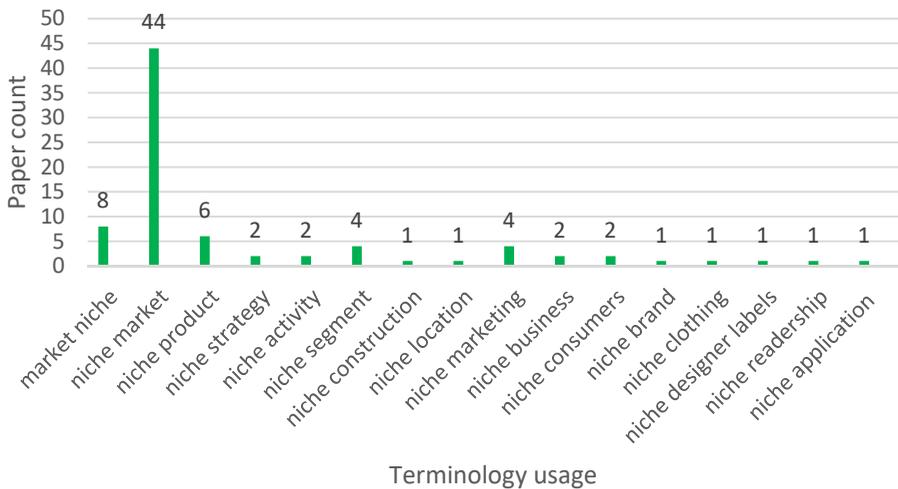


Figure 9.
Niche terminology

Source(s): Authors' own creation

comparatively less research on the supplier engagement and consumer usage stages. [Figure 11](#) shows the distribution of fashion niche strategy usage within product life cycle stages.

3.10 Fashion niche strategy marketing approaches distribution

Push and pull marketing approaches are frequently employed within niche strategies. [Figure 12](#) shows the distribution of niche strategy marketing approaches within different fashion industry sectors. A total of 29 pull marketing approaches and 33 push marketing approaches were identified through analysis. Pull marketing predominates in the clothing manufacturing sector, while push marketing finds more traction within the sustainable fashion industry. At some point, textile and apparel firms used both push and pull marketing approaches.

This review reveals a notable concentration of studies on niche strategy practices within the fashion industry, particularly evident in research published in 2020 across diverse subject areas,

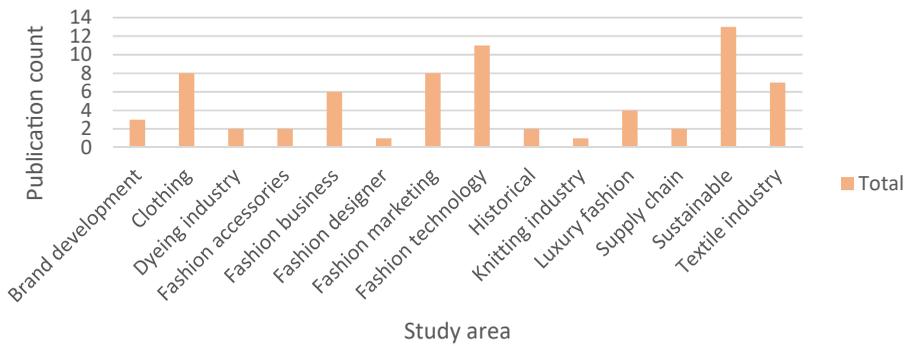


Figure 10. Niche market strategy usage within fashion industry

Source(s): Authors' own creation

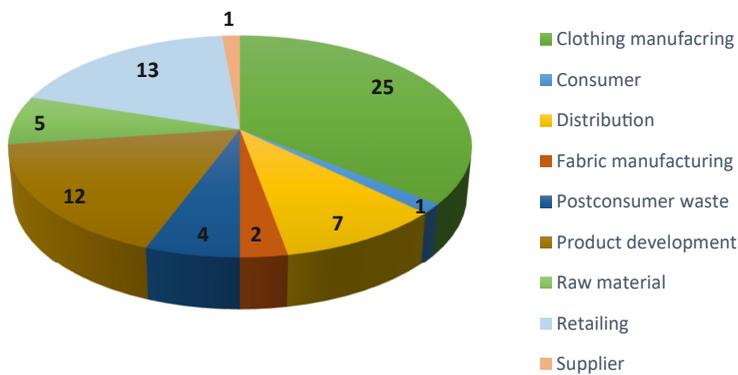


Figure 11. Fashion niche strategy usage within the product life cycle stages

Source(s): Authors' own creation

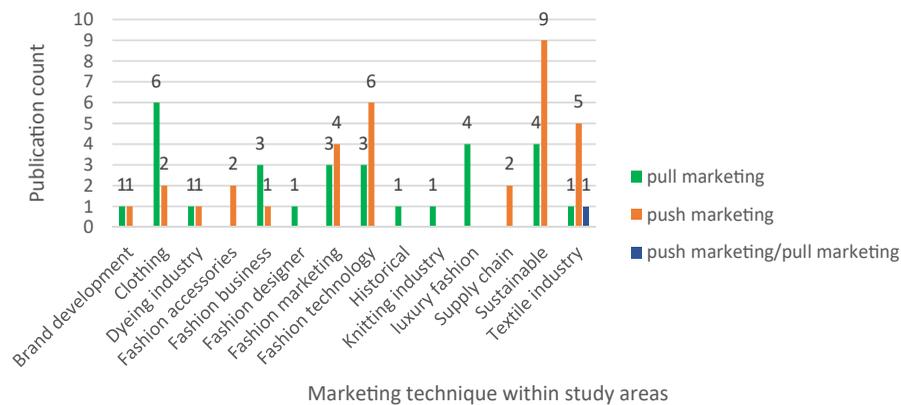


Figure 12. Fashion niche strategy marketing approach distribution

Source(s): Authors' own creation

including Arts and Humanities, Business and Economics, General and Internal Medicine, Science and Technology, Engineering, and Environmental Sciences and Ecology. Predominantly, research in this domain is concentrated within the Business and Economics subject area, with the majority of publications being journal articles (Ling *et al.*, 2009; Childs and Jin, 2014). Geographically, the UK and the USA emerge as primary contributors to this body of literature, indicating a significant focus on fashion niche strategy within these regions compared to developing countries (Ryu, 2011; Choi and Lodish, 2012). The identified studies shed light on various fashion sectors employing niche strategies, notably sustainable fashion, fashion technology, fashion business, and clothing manufacturing (Guercini and Milanesi, 2017; Orzan *et al.*, 2020; Hong Lan and Watkins, 2023). Moreover, these investigations reveal the application of push and pull marketing methods within these sectors. Significantly, niche strategies are integral across different product life cycle stages, notably in clothing manufacturing, retailing, product development, and distribution (Khan, 2015; Dickenbrok and Martinez, 2018).

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Characteristics of a fashion niche strategy

Parris *et al.* (2006), Parrish (2010), Amubode (2009), Popescu (2013), Maciejewski (2020), and O'Hare *et al.* (2018) assert that a niche market has several characteristics, such as a strong loyal consumer base, specialized segment of the market, a higher price point, and a unique product. Operating in a niche market allows companies to capture significant market share, leading to market expansion. In the fashion industry niche strategy aims to fully meet the specific needs of consumers, who are willing to pay higher prices and exhibit greater loyalty. Splitting traditional markets into smaller segments and specializing in each enables firms to gain economies through specialization and creating unique products utilizing innovations (Parrish *et al.*, 2006; Amubode, 2009; Popescu, 2013; Maciejewski, 2020). Niche segments often have limited competition, allowing specialized firms to benefit from economies of scale. Despite their niche focus, these markets offer significant potential in terms of size, profitability, and growth (Parrish *et al.*, 2006; Popescu, 2013).

Parrish (2010) mentions that niche strategy combines push and pull marketing methods. Push marketing involves developing a product first and then seeking a market through focused advertising campaigns (product). Pull marketing, favored by apparel companies, begins by identifying market needs and tailoring products accordingly (market) (Parrish *et al.*, 2006). Upstream firms prioritize product characteristics for niche strategies, while downstream companies focus on branding to build consumer loyalty and differentiation (Parrish *et al.*, 2006; O'Hare *et al.*, 2018).

4.2 Success factors of a fashion niche strategy

Understanding the consumer is the most important success factor in the fashion niche market (Parrish *et al.*, 2006; Parrish, 2010; Popescu, 2013; Choi *et al.*, 2022; Feng and Hui, 2023). Understanding consumer measures involves meeting market needs, pricing products appropriately, delivering perceived value, outperforming competitors in market understanding, providing necessary services, and offering innovative products (Amubode, 2009; Popescu, 2013; Maciejewski, 2020).

Other success factors are the company's skills match with the market's needs and identifying the right market at the right time. The retail marketing mix works as a controllable variable to develop the right product for the specific segment at the optimal time at the right price and place (Parrish *et al.*, 2006; O'Hare *et al.*, 2018). The company should invest time and resources to understand consumer needs effectively (Parrish *et al.*, 2006; O'Hare *et al.*, 2018). Effective communication is crucial for success in niche strategy, involving

conveying the company’s message to consumers and engaging with the marketplace to understand and meet its needs effectively (Parrish *et al.*, 2006; Tymoshenko *et al.*, 2022).

The market size should not be too small or too large, as small markets can impact profitability, while large markets may attract competitors and reduce overall success (Popescu, 2010; Popescu, 2013). Brand image is also an important success factor for fashion niche strategy (Amubode, 2009). Using a brand image to attract a specific consumer base offers a key advantage: it establishes intrinsic differentiation. Branding fosters an emotional bond with consumers, which can differentiate a product more effectively than its price (Parrish *et al.*, 2006; Childs and Jin, 2014). Successful fashion niche strategies require understanding strengths, weaknesses, unique attributes, and regional characteristics (O’Hare *et al.*, 2018).

Niche success factors differ according to market (pull marketing) and product (push marketing). Market success variables are barriers to entry, consumer service, market share, communication, loyal consumer base, and subjective perceived value. Subjective values are undefined attributes that can enhance value (Parrish *et al.*, 2006). Product success relies on quality, brand image, the four P’s of marketing, product differentiation, and objective perceived value. Objective values are measurable product attributes, like quality and less shrinkage (Parrish *et al.*, 2006). Figure 13 shows niche strategy characteristics and success factors.

4.3 Benefits of a fashion niche strategy

A niche strategy is beneficial for increasing profits and market shares in the fashion business (Amubode, 2009; Popescu, 2013; Maciejewski, 2020). It protects from price-based competition (Parrish *et al.*, 2006; Popescu, 2013; O’Hare *et al.*, 2018). A niche strategy enables brands to collaborate closely with their established consumer base (De Massis *et al.*, 2018). Focusing on consumer niche strategy enhances competitiveness by identifying profitable market segments, effectively competing against lower-priced imports, and filling unmet needs by addressing gaps overlooked by mainstream providers (Amubode, 2009; Popescu, 2013). If

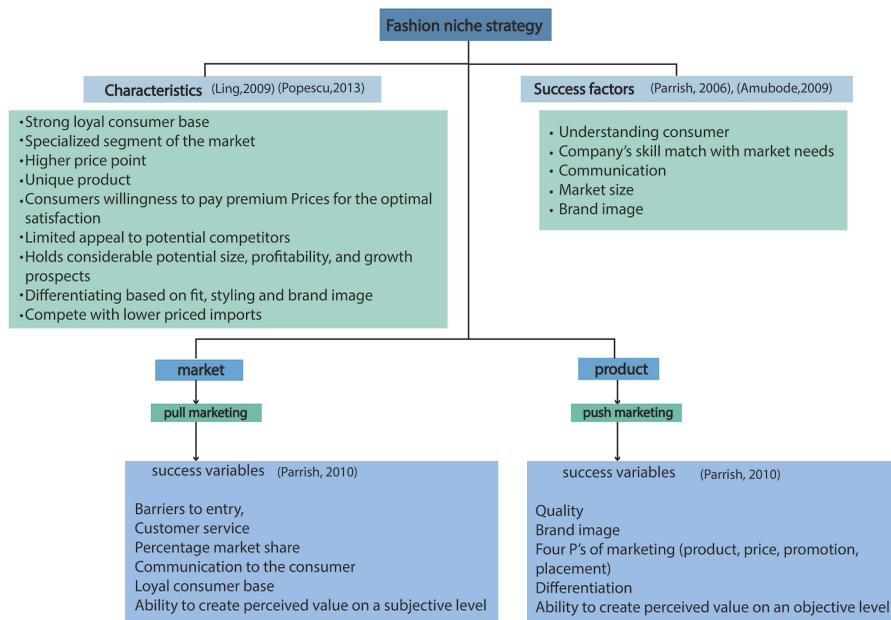


Figure 13.
Summary of fashion
niche strategy
characteristics and
success factors

Source(s): Authors’ own creation

firms leverage their strengths to meet consumer needs more effectively than competitors, they can capitalize on market opportunities and achieve profitability (Amubode, 2009).

A niche strategy allows the positioning of a product in a market segment without the need for aggressive competition (Popescu, 2013). Fashion firms that target global niche markets can standardize their product offerings across all countries they penetrate (Childs and Jin, 2014). Niche can satisfy consumer's needs better than other firms which target the same product (Popescu, 2013). Niche markets offer solutions for maintaining success during global economic crises and for developing personal fashion brands (Popescu, 2013). Creating a niche strategy increases a company's chances of survival and sustainability (O'Hare *et al.*, 2018).

4.4 Fashion niche strategy marketing approaches supply chain and potential marketing strategies

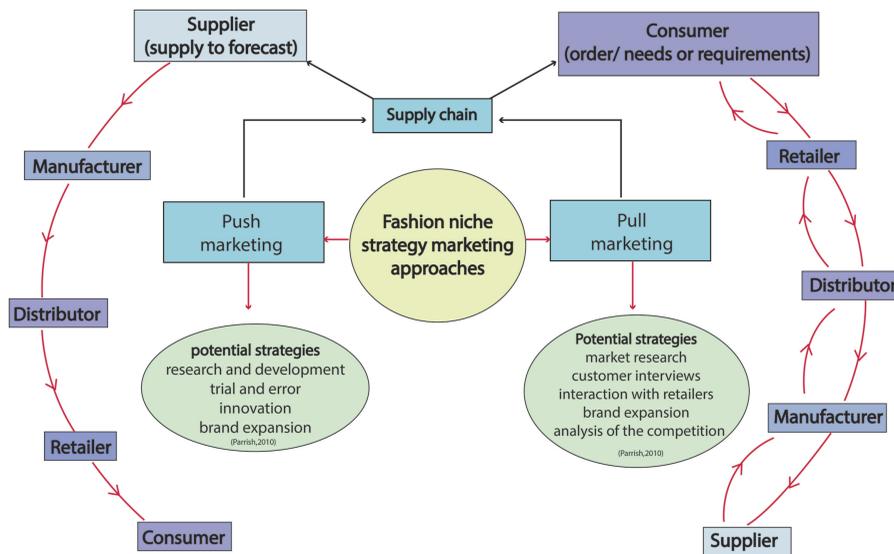
Textile and clothing companies utilize both pull marketing (market) and push marketing (product) approaches. However, they may need to adjust their supply chain setups and market expansion strategies in response to changing market conditions and strategic priorities (Parrish, 2010). Niche market (pull marketing), prioritize market research, supplemented by consumer interviews, retailer interaction, brand expansion, and competitor analysis (Parrish, 2010). Pull marketing fashion supply chain begins with the consumer's order, which the retailer forwards to the supplier. The supplier, manufacturer, and distributor then fulfill the order, ensuring delivery via the retailer to meet the consumer's requirements.

Niche products (push marketing) focus on research and development, trial and error, innovation, and brand expansion (Parrish, 2010). The push marketing approach in the fashion supply chain starts with the supplier and manufacturer producing products as per retailers' demands and gradually promoting them to consumers through retailers. Figure 14 shows Fashion niche strategy marketing approaches supply chain and potential marketing strategies.

4.5 Niche strategy usage within fashion industry sectors

A niche strategy within the fashion industry is employed in the textile and apparel industry, fashion technology, fashion retail business, fashion media and communication, luxury fashion, sustainable fashion, adaptive clothing, and transgender fashion showcasing its adaptability and relevance beyond conventional approaches. Many papers show that the development of the creative economy is identified in various fields, including music, dance, visual arts, cinema, digital games, fashion design, animation, graphic design, and architecture, where innovation and creativity are key drivers for carving out new niches (Evans and Smith, 2006; Lima Guilherme and Gondim, 2018). In the textile and apparel sector, niche strategies are utilized in various aspects such as yarn manufacturing, fabric manufacturing, and garment manufacturing (Amubode, 2009; Tarlo, 2010; Crini *et al.*, 2020). Fashion retail businesses employ niche strategies for brand development and marketing (O'Hare *et al.*, 2018; Choi *et al.*, 2022). Sustainable fashion encompasses various dimensions, including green consumers, eco-tourism, pre-owned fashion, fashion rental, adaptive clothing, and transgender fashion concepts (Mukendi and Henninger, 2020; Feng and Hui, 2023; Hong Lan and Watkins, 2023).

4.5.1 Niche usage within the textile and apparel sector. Customized strategies are key for global competitiveness in the textile and clothing sector. Retailers can focus on specific products or markets to discover a niche and succeed worldwide (Parrish *et al.*, 2006). Exploring niches emphasizes organic materials, social inclusivity, and innovative designs (Gomes *et al.*, 2023). According to Chitrakorn (2014), Crini *et al.* (2020), Finn and Smith (2013), and Patichol *et al.* (2014) wool, hemp, knitted fabric, and Thai silk fabric markets employ a niche approach. Patichol *et al.* (2014) state that the industrial production of Thai silk led to the transformation of the Thai silk market into a niche market by utilizing locally hand-spun materials. Popescu (2013) mentions that market niche is crucial for sustaining success amidst global economic



Source(s): Authors' own creation

Figure 14.
Fashion niche strategy
marketing approaches
supply chain and
potential marketing
strategies

challenges. India specializes in the low-value market, particularly in cotton fabric and seasonal fashion garments (Ramaswamy and Gereffi, 2000). Nigeria implemented a niche market strategy in resist dyeing industries by incorporating the “EVIPI” (examine, vision, ideas, prioritize, implementation) innovation motivation acronym (Amubode, 2009). Niche is utilized in military uniforms, sportswear, swimwear, lace products, special occasion garments, embroidered clothing, and Muslim fashion “Hijab” (Tarlo, 2010; Popescu, 2013).

According to Arora and Aggarwal (2020) and Das and Mukherjee (2019), cosmopolitanism helps marketers target their niche consumers by promoting clothing through global values. Moreover, India has strategically embraced niche markets within its apparel sector, demonstrating a focused and targeted approach to cater to specific consumer preferences (Zeba and Ganguli, 2019; Arora and Aggarwal, 2020). For example, Patvardhan and Ramachandran (2020) mentions that handloom and handcrafted products in the Indian domestic market as niche.

According to Faust *et al.* (2012), Lewis (2019), Townsend *et al.* (2017), Park (2013), and Seram and Kumarasiri (2020), Asian mothers-to-be maternity wear, Modest Muslim fashions, older-generation fashion clothing, plus-size women’s clothing, and plus-size footwear markets are important and growing niches for fashion merchandisers and marketers to consider. These markets consider body shape, size, fit, and aesthetic characteristics (Faust *et al.*, 2012; Townsend *et al.*, 2017; Seram and Kumarasiri, 2020). Size charts are a crucial marketing tool in the apparel business for developing niche markets (Otieno, 2008).

4.5.2 Niche strategy usage within the fashion technology sector. Fashion brands are incorporating advanced technologies into their new collections to boost growth and stay ahead in the industry (Orzan *et al.*, 2020). Smart textiles are another advanced technology used in the apparel industry as a niche market (Sankaralingam and Gupta, 2012). There are three subcategories of smart textiles: Passive, active, and ultra smart textiles (Orzan *et al.*, 2020). Smart textiles are applied in sports, human performance, healthcare, military and security, and fashion and lifestyle industries (Orzan *et al.*, 2020; Vorobiova *et al.*, 2021). Using smart textiles provides an innovative strategy for attracting new and retaining consumers

through entertainment and promotional initiatives, offering long-term benefits (Orzan *et al.*, 2020). Cho *et al.* (2019) tried to understand the relationship between consumers' perceptions (stimuli), internal experiences (organisms), and beliefs (responses) about smart wearable devices. Direct-to-garment printing technology is a growing niche market in the apparel and fashion industry. Direct-to-garment printing is recognized for its sustainability advantages, including print-on-demand capabilities, rapid response times, customization options, and significant reductions in inventory (Yu *et al.*, 2021).

4.5.3 Niche usage within the fashion retail business. Merlo (2011) defines the fashion industry as a fusion of well-managed brands and top-tier manufacturing supported by a reliable network of regular partners. Italian fashion businesses embrace the concept of a niche. Giorgio Armani pioneered niche marketing with lower-priced diffusion collections, creating the "white label" concept later rebranded as Armani Collezioni. Armani's collections feature luxurious elements like natural fibers and handmade details (John, 2011). Both low-volume designers and high-volume firms emphasize authenticity, originality, and uniqueness through single pieces or limited editions (Tremblay and Yagoubi, 2017). Parrish (2010), Tymoshenko *et al.* (2022) and John (2011) highlight retailers use of niche marketing for private labels, exclusive designs available only in particular stores. Private label strategies offer benefits like increased consumer dependence, sales, differentiation, variety, loyalty, positive image, flexible pricing, and inventory control.

Our review shows that the fashion industry uniquely employs a niche strategy to cultivate a brand image by developing private labels and establishing small to medium-sized enterprises. Smaller fashion retailers often target niche markets to cultivate a strong brand image and secure a unique market position (Park and Kincade, 2010; Childs and Jin, 2014; O'Hare *et al.*, 2018). Within the domain of fashion products, brand salience is intimately linked to the brand image, encompassing elements such as fashion image and style (Kim and Ko, 2010). For example, Fast fashion retailers like Zara, H&M, and New Look effectively target global niche markets through distinctive business strategies (Childs and Jin, 2014). Fashion niche retailers use word-of-mouth communication, online activities to build brand reputation (O'Hare *et al.*, 2018). This strategy boosts competitiveness by prioritizing consumer needs, helping companies compete even against lower-priced imports (Amubode, 2009). Using this customized niche strategy, the business gains a competitive advantage in the market by presenting unique value propositions (O'Hare *et al.*, 2018).

Fashion retailers target specific consumer segments based on demographics, sizes, colors, and lifestyles, focusing on fit, styling, and brand image (Parrish, 2010; Childs and Jin, 2014). Prestige pricing is often implemented to establish niche markets within the apparel industry (Parrish, 2010; Popescu, 2013). O'Hare *et al.* (2018) and Amubode (2009) mention that innovation and identifying a specific niche is an important strategy impacting small business success. There are three responsibilities that niches may do to prevent weakening: creating new niches, expanding niches, and protecting niches (O'Hare *et al.*, 2018). Identifying a niche segment is crucial for new market entrants. According to disruptive innovation theory, starting in a low-end market and expanding into mainstream markets can be effective. Startups should begin with a narrow product line tailored to a specific niche for success (Choi *et al.*, 2022).

4.5.3.1 Niche strategy usage within fashion media and communication. Fashion magazines serve as communication methods for niche audiences by curating global fashion content to craft personalized style narratives (Beard, 2008; Tay, 2009). They include product lists, trend articles, designer profiles, and advertisements for promotions in the retail business (Tay, 2009). Identifies teenage girls and middle-aged women as key niche readers (Tay, 2009). Digital marketing tools are important to the process of forming the brand image when determining a niche (Tymoshenko *et al.*, 2022). Brands leverage influencers across various niches like beauty, family, fashion, fitness, food, interior, pet, and travel to reach niche markets (Kim *et al.*, 2020). For example, the famous sportswear brand "Lululemon" mentions fashion and fitness as prominent niches for influencer marketing. When an influencer's

extroversion is visually presented, it boosts the influencer’s perceived credibility and subsequently buying intention (Argyris *et al.*, 2021).

Brydges (2018) notes that independent fashion designers strategically leverage niches in three primary distribution channels: designer studios, independent fashion retailers, and online retail platforms. Online retailers must recognize the value of niche locations, as these can become significant sources of revenue (Choi and Lodish, 2012). Retailers increasingly use pop-up shops to reach consumers, launch new products, and explore niche markets. These temporary retail spaces are short-term and often unannounced locations (Ryu, 2011). Figure 15 shows the summary of niche strategy usage within the fashion retail business area.

4.5.4 *Niche strategy usage within the luxury fashion market.* Niche is utilized in luxury fashion goods, including apparel, accessories, handbags, shoes, watches, jewelry, and perfume (Ling *et al.*, 2009; Guercini and Milanese, 2017). According to Ling *et al.* (2009), individuals buy luxury products for self-serving purposes, such as utilitarian, symbolic, and emotive ones. Marketing, licensing, brand building, and identification, communication, technology, and retailing should all be considered when creating a business plan for luxury fashion (Ling *et al.*, 2009; Khan, 2015). Exotic materials selection would fulfill the desires of a niche market by creating luxurious high-end fashion (Park, 2014). Growing Canadian luxury market designers cater to a niche market with high-quality and expensive products (Brydges, 2018). Dandyism is a luxury fashion niche market (Maciejewski, 2020). The lingerie market, also considered a luxury market, attracts consumers willing to purchase even during an economic crisis (Popescu, 2013).

4.5.5 *Niche strategy usage within the sustainable fashion concept.* Sustainability is the wide range of behaviors and elements necessary for current and future progress in the social, economic, and environmental sectors (Brătianu *et al.*, 2019). The ethical fashion niche market represents one percent of the global fashion industry (Crane, 2016). Modern market niches emphasize aligning production with sustainable principles and integrating socially acceptable values into their brands. Sustainability has become a significant competitive advantage, reshaping the luxury market landscape (Brătianu *et al.*, 2019). Niche green brands and emerging eco-friendly startups are more prominent in developed countries compared to emerging countries (Beard, 2008; Dickenbrok and Martinez, 2018). Eco-friendly natural dye is referred to as a niche market (Cunningham *et al.*, 2021).

Cosmopolitanism benefits designers, manufacturers, marketers, and advertisers by helping them tap into the “green consumer” market. Through purposeful advertisements and



Source(s): Authors’ own creation

Figure 15.
Niche strategy usage
within the fashion
retail business

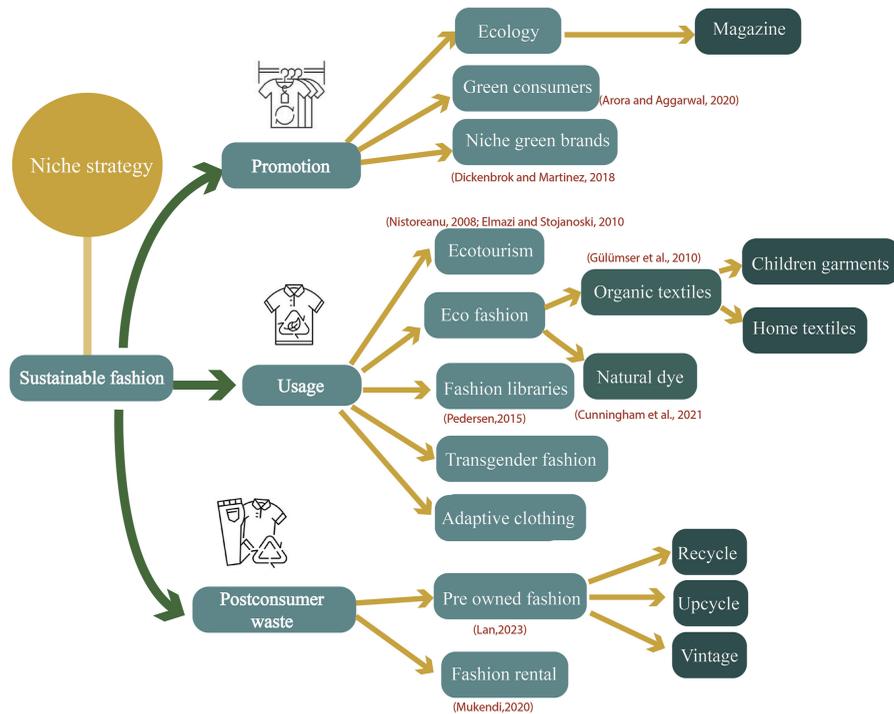
promotions addressing global issues, it encourages sustainable fashion choices (Arora and Aggarwal, 2020). Organic textiles carve out a niche market in children's wear and home textiles, offering higher profit margins due to lower competition (Gülümser *et al.*, 2010). Organic Life, New Consumer, and The Ecologist are essential magazines for promoting eco-fashion among a niche consumer group (Beard, 2008). According to Hong Lan and Watkins (2023), pre-owned fashion is a growing high-end niche market, including vintage, upcycled, and recycled categories. Upcycling survives as a niche activity characterized by customization, higher cost, and a craft-based approach (Jain *et al.*, 2021).

Pedersen and Netter (2015) mentions fashion libraries (clothing sharing concept), a niche concept in collaborative consumption, are emerging in the fashion industry. Examples like Resecond, Lanegarderoben, Malmo, and Helsinki fashion library cater to memberships of 100–300 individuals, to ensure commercial sustainability; they prioritize consumer relationships and strategic partnerships (Pedersen and Netter, 2015). Ashworth *et al.* (2006) identifies factors contributing to online success for small-sized online retailers in the fashion sector, emphasizing a “multi-niche strategy” and utilizing an “e-portfolio” with fashion-related cyber stores. Sustainability and global recognition help niche brands save money and access knowledge worldwide more easily (Tunisini *et al.*, 2011). Fashion rental continues to be a niche market by prioritizing sustainability in their design and implementation to maximize benefits (Mukendi and Henninger, 2020). Mukendi and Henninger (2020) assert that fashion rental trends favor occasional wear over activewear, swimwear, and undergarments due to hygienic considerations.

Ecotourism aligns with a niche market strategy, catering to environmentally conscious travelers (Nistoreanu, 2008; Elmazi and Stojanoski, 2010). Elmazi and Stojanoski (2010) mention components of ecotourism as conserving biodiversity, supporting local well-being, offering educational experiences, promoting responsible tourism actions, engaging small-scale businesses, minimizing resource consumption, emphasizing local ownership, and creating rural business opportunities. Formulating a strategic plan for ecotourism involves analyzing tourism demand and targeting specific niche markets or specialized groups (Elmazi and Stojanoski, 2010).

4.5.5.1 Niche strategy usage within the adaptive clothing market. Adaptive clothing targets individuals with physical limitations, incorporating functional elements to support daily activities. This niche market requires strategic development, either market-oriented or product-focused (Feng and Hui, 2023). Attracting diverse consumers to the adapted clothing niche market, focus on consumer communication, technological investment, and product complexity in supply chain management. Utilize functional performance and advanced technologies like 3D body scanning, virtual design systems, and advanced manufacturing techniques to cater to disabled consumers' needs effectively (Feng and Hui, 2023). For example, Tommy Hilfiger, NBL, and Target brands successfully integrated models to promote adaptive clothing (Feng and Hui, 2023).

4.5.5.2 Niche strategy usage within the transgender fashion market. Some brands leverage gender differences to target niche markets effectively. Even in supposedly gender-neutral categories, like cosmetics and fashion, gender-specific marketing approaches are used to stand out and appeal to consumers (Mcallister and Decarvalho, 2014). Transgender fashion is a growing niche market focusing on the importance of stylish, well-fitting clothing (Tullio-Pow *et al.*, 2021). Over 1.4 million American adults identify as transgender (Tullio-Pow *et al.*, 2021). Despite the increased societal acceptance of LGBTQ + couples undergoing fertility treatments, ready-to-wear clothing options for this niche market remain limited, and maternity wear for trans men is virtually non-existent (Tullio-Pow *et al.*, 2021). Clothing for transgender should be designed based on patterns that fit their birth-assigned bodies while reflecting their gender identity. Utilizing 3D body scanning and personalized dress forms is an effective approach for developing collections, particularly for those undergoing HRT and surgery (Tullio-Pow *et al.*, 2021). Figure 16 shows the utilization of niche strategies within the sustainable fashion market.



Source(s): Authors' own creation

Figure 16. Niche strategy usage within sustainable fashion

5. Discussion

The major contribution of this paper is to provide a systematic literature review of the collates data on niche market strategy usage within the fashion industry. This investigation yields several observations. The niche concept is primarily used in UK and USA countries (Ashworth *et al.*, 2006; Ryu, 2011). Many Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand demonstrate a lack of research effort in the fashion niche market strategy (Patichol *et al.*, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2020; Feng and Hui, 2023; Hong Lan and Watkins, 2023). Sri Lanka demonstrates a significant gap in the utilization of niche strategies within the fashion industry. However, our review shows that the global niche market strategy focuses on many areas related to the fashion industry. Especially the textile and apparel industry, fashion technology, fashion retail business, fashion media and communication, luxury fashion, sustainable fashion, adaptive clothing, and transgender fashion within the fashion supply chain.

Niche market usage in the fashion industry has several dimensions. The fashion industry systematically addresses three pivotal components of niche: strategy, market, and product. Niche strategy includes overall business strategy. Niche strategy in business involves two main approaches: push marketing, where a product is created before identifying a market, and pull marketing, which involves conducting market research before product development to meet specific market needs. Scholarly discourse consistently underscores the understanding consumer as the focal point in niche strategy. Prior studies mainly examine retailers' views on niche markets. It is essential to study consumer perceptions of niche strategy for a comprehensive understanding. Previous studies recognize niche strategy as

beneficial for new entrants to establish themselves in the market. Trial and error are found to be significant in implementing niche strategies effectively.

Most previous research endeavors employ case studies to scrutinize the application of niche strategy across these varied sectors, shedding light on its efficacy and adaptability. Within the textile garment industry, the concept of niche manifests diversely, encompassing sectors such as sportswear, lingerie, swimwear, lace goods, embroidered clothing, military uniforms, eco-friendly apparel, occasional wear, maternity wear, plus size clothing, transgender fashion, Muslim “Hijab” fashion and smart textiles. The industry’s diverse niches allow it to target specific market segments with unique needs. Many firms use niches to boost competitiveness and profitability, prioritizing product fit, price, quality, and style. Modern research focuses on sustainable fashion, particularly through the lens of niche strategy. Specialized tactics, such as eco-fashion, vintage, and recycling, play a crucial role. Analyzing these sustainable markets reveals how strategic maneuvers contribute to their growth and resilience within the broader fashion industry. Significantly, niche strategy holds considerable importance at multiple stages in the product lifecycle, particularly in raw material selection, fabric manufacturing, supplier engagement, product development, clothing manufacturing, retailing, distribution, consumer usage, and post-consumer waste management. While scholars extensively research various facets of the fashion niche market, there is a limited emphasis on other domains such as supplier engagement, the knitting industry, the dyeing industry, the craft industry, historical costume, and designers. Furthermore, there is a notable absence of specific steps to develop niche strategies within fashion firms.

6. Conclusion and future research

Niche market practice in the fashion industry reveals a diverse and complex field. This study established the range and scope of academic studies on niche strategy practices in the fashion industry. Mapping niche strategy practices help industry practitioners understand how to blend operational and organizational aspects, enabling a strategic combination of reactive and proactive approaches. This study summarizes the insights of 70 studies comprehensively and analytically to find the usage of niche strategy within the fashion industry. This study identifies key niche practices that will shape the fashion industry future, including the textile and apparel industry, fashion technology, fashion retail business, fashion media and communication, luxury fashion, sustainable fashion, adaptive clothing, and transgender fashion within the fashion supply chain. This overview of current studies facilitates a grasp of the latest research trends and guides future efforts toward unexplored areas. This review offers a comprehensive overview of fashion niche market strategy practices, aiming to inspire more academic research.

Previous studies show that niche strategy in the fashion industry is characterized by a loyal consumer base, specialized market segments, higher prices, and unique products. While retailer perception is crucial, analyzing consumer perceptions could offer a more comprehensive understanding. Despite this, most researchers emphasize consumers as the most important factor in developing niche strategies. The niche strategy serves as a well-defined and effective approach for newcomers entering the fashion industry. This strategic framework is characterized by the integration of both pull and push marketing techniques, emphasizing a dual focus on both product and market considerations.

In conclusion, this study presents a comprehensive summary of niche market strategies utilized within the fashion industry, as illustrated in [Figure 17](#). This synthesis offers a cohesive representation of niche market strategy practices across different fashion industry sectors, serving as a valuable resource for future studies, by highlighting relatively unexplored areas. Recognizing gaps in previous studies, we propose to explore the historical

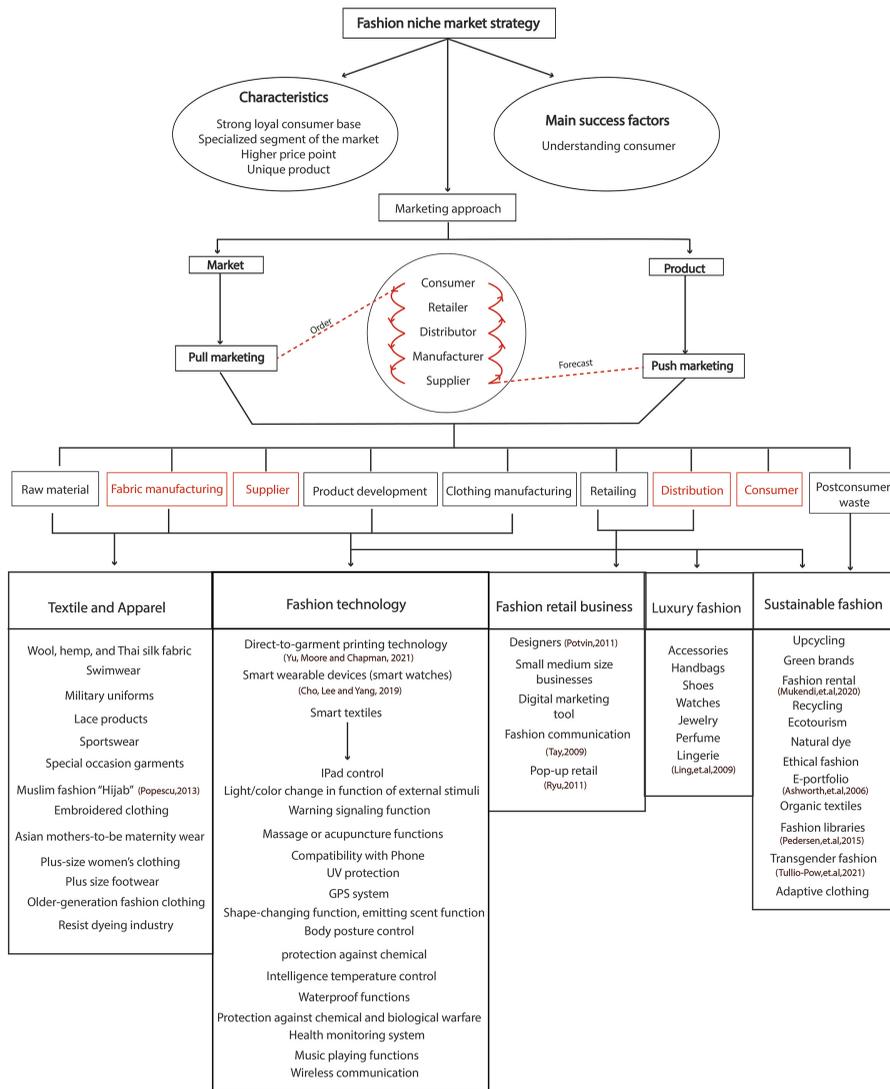


Figure 17. Summary of the niche market strategy usage within the fashion industry

Source(s): Authors' own creation

costumes, craft industry niche market across various countries by investigating various behaviors that can be fostered and compare small and medium-sized firms with larger firms that use niche marketing strategies to identify the presence and accommodating diverse sizes of niche firms within this market context.

The study proposed direction for future studies as follows (Table 3).

This study has limitations even if it makes valuable contributions. The research relies on the Web of science database, which may pose a limitation. It is limited to the fashion niche sector and is based on English language journal papers, conference papers, and review articles published between June 2000 and January 2023. Future research could consider a

Topic	Future research direction
Niche usage within the textile and apparel sector	1. What components comprise the conceptual framework for the fashion niche market design process? 2. How niche strategy is employed in the historical costume market? 3. How a niche strategy is implemented within the knitting industry? 4. How to develop a niche strategy within fashion craft products?
Niche usage within the fashion retail business	5. What are the consumer perspectives towards a niche strategy in the fashion industry? 6. How is a niche strategy employed within the fashion retail sector to develop private labels in countries beyond the United States? 7. How niche market strategy can be utilized to develop a designer collection?
Niche strategy usage within sustainable fashion concept	8. How is the niche market for natural dyes being utilized within the fashion industry? 9. How is zero wastage or minimum wastage design utilized within the fashion niche? 10. How to elaborate on re-designing concept usage within the fashion niche? 11. How eco-friendly packaging is implemented in the fashion niche market?
Niche strategy usage within the adaptive clothing market	12. How niche strategies and management approaches are utilized to develop a sustainable adaptive clothing market?
Niche strategy usage within the transgender fashion market	13. What considerations and strategies are involved in developing a trans-men maternity wear niche market?
Source(s): Authors' own creation	

Table 3.
Future research
direction

wider range of materials, including books and industry reports, to enhance insights. Deepening the knowledge might be improved by expanding research to encompass more material samples and various databases. It is also crucial to remember that using PRISMA and systematic reviews may result in bias because an author's viewpoint may impact publication selection, thereby endorsing particular concepts.

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