

From Waste to Wardrobe: Awareness Occasional Wear Collection Crafted from Recycled Plastics, Fabric Scraps, and Leftover Materials inspired by Goddess Gaia

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Abstract— Plastic and textile waste from the fashion industry are major contributors to environmental pollution, affecting ecosystems and communities worldwide. Addressing this urgent issue, this paper presents “From waist to wardrobe: a sustainable awareness occasional wear fashion collection” created from recycled plastics, fabric scraps, and leftover threads that would otherwise contribute to the growing waste problem. Inspired by Goddess Gaia, the Greek mythological “Mother Earth” who embodies the living, interconnected nature of our planet, the collection narrates how human activities such as pollution, deforestation, and overconsumption endanger the Earth’s health. K-Pop style dress silhouettes are used to achieve fashion trend.

By merging sustainable design with cultural influence, the fashion collection shows how fashion can transcend aesthetics to become a powerful medium for raising awareness, sparking dialogue, and driving real-world action against environmental degradation.

Keywords: Plastic waste, Sustainable fashion, K-Pop Style, Celebrity advocacy, Environmental awareness

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I. INTRODUCTION

Plastic and textile waste are major contributors to environmental pollution. Synthetic fabrics, widely used in fast fashion, release microplastics during washing, which enter waterways and harm marine life (Browne et al., 2011). The fashion industry also generates large amounts of textile waste, often ending up in landfills, driven by overproduction, rapidly changing trends, and the culture of disposability (Fletcher, 2014; Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], 2023). This reality highlights the urgent need for creative solutions that reduce waste and use fashion as a platform for environmental education.

K-Pop celebrities present a unique opportunity to address this need. They are not only trendsetters in music and style but also opinion leaders with strong global fan communities. Their influence extends beyond entertainment, shaping lifestyle choices and consumer habits across cultures (Lee et al., 2019). When these public figures champion a cause, they can inspire millions to pay attention, discuss, and act. Leveraging such cultural influence for sustainability can create an impact that traditional campaigns may struggle to achieve.

From Waste to Wardrobe: Awareness Occasion Wear collection designed with this idea in mind. The garments are created using discarded plastics, leftover fabrics, and scrap threads materials that would otherwise contribute to waste. Through thoughtful design, each piece tells a visual story of environmental destruction caused by human activities such as pollution, deforestation, and overuse of resources. By contrasting representations of nature’s beauty with signs of its decline, the collection invites viewers to reflect on the urgency of environmental protection.

The conceptual inspiration for this collection is Gaia, the personification of Earth in Greek mythology. Often referred to as “Mother Earth” or “Mother of All,” Gaia embodies the planet as a living, sacred being and symbolizes the interconnectedness of all life forms. She represents balance, nurturing, and the sacred responsibility of humanity to protect and sustain the natural world. In the context of this collection, Gaia serves as both muse and message reminding audiences that environmental degradation is not only a scientific crisis but also a moral and cultural one.

The approach goes beyond creating clothing; it is about creating conversation. When K-Pop idols wear these pieces on global stage concerts, red carpets, and public events, they act as walking ambassadors for sustainability. The garments become more than fashion items; they become storytelling tools that combine aesthetics with advocacy. This aligns with the conference’s focus on Alternatives for plastics: challenges and opportunities by demonstrating

innovative reuse of waste materials, and with public awareness and educational initiatives by using celebrity influence to encourage mindful consumption.

By merging sustainable design with cultural influence, *Heal the World: K-Pop Edition* offers a replicable model for how fashion can address environmental challenges. It shows that with the right platform, even occasional wear can have a lasting purpose, turning waste into something that educates, inspires, and motivates change.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

Sustainability has become a critical focus within the fashion industry as it struggles with environmental, social, and economic challenges. A comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior and organizational practices are essential for advancing sustainable fashion, which must be viewed holistically across the entire product life cycle from sourcing and design to production and retailing (A systematic review and future research agenda, 2022).

Recent research identifies multiple streams for shaping both consumer and organizational habits towards sustainability, highlighting the importance of systemic approaches rather than isolated interventions (Mukendi et al., 2020). Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) methodologies have gained prominence as a tool for evaluating environmental impacts, guiding eco-design, eco-labeling, and promoting circular business models (Hammar et al., 2024).

The fashion industry's shift toward sustainability also involves adopting innovative eco-friendly materials and textile technologies, which contribute to carbon neutrality and SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) targets. Moreover, integrating circular economy principles such as product reuse, recycling, and waste minimization is essential for reducing the sector's environmental footprint (Fletcher, 2014; "Why Sustainable Fashion Matters," 2023).

Finally, brand managers and marketers play a vital role in driving sustainability by incorporating it into strategic decisions, thus influencing both supply chains and consumer perceptions (Pricopoaia et al., 2025). This holistic view ensures that sustainable fashion is not merely a trend but a lasting transformation.

B. Plastic and Textile Waste - Challenges and Innovations

Plastic pollution is a growing global concern, with synthetic textiles identified as a significant source of microplastic contamination in aquatic environments (Browne et al., 2011). Synthetic fibers such as polyester release microfibers during washing, which accumulate in oceans and waterways, posing threats to marine biodiversity and potentially human health.

Textile waste itself represents another major environmental challenge. Fast fashion practices, characterized by overproduction and rapid consumption cycles, generate millions of tons of discarded garments

annually (Environmental Protection Agency, 2023). The linear "take-make-dispose" model entrenched in fashion leads to resource reduction and landfill saturation.

To combat these issues, the fashion industry has increasingly explored the use of recycled materials and upcycling techniques. These approaches align with circular economy principles, focusing on turning waste into valuable inputs for new products (Thompson & Garcia, 2022). Innovative design strategies include repurposing plastic waste into yarns and embellishments, and reusing fabric scraps and threads in garment construction. Such methods not only reduce environmental impact but also open creative avenues for storytelling through fashion, enhancing consumer engagement and awareness (Smith & Moon, 2022).

C. Celebrity Influence and Public Awareness in Environmental Advocacy

Public awareness campaigns on environmental issues benefit significantly from celebrity endorsements, which can intensify messages and influence audience attitudes and behaviors (Silver & Ling, 2020). Celebrities, especially those with strong fan bases like K-Pop idols, hold cultural importance that enables them to shape trends, values, and social norms (Lee, Kim & Park, 2019).

K-Pop celebrities have gained remarkable global reach, inspiring fashion and lifestyle choices among diverse demographics. Their ability to influence consumer behavior makes them as valuable partners in sustainability advocacy, capable of promoting meaningful engagement and encouraging responsible consumption patterns (Smith & Lee, 2023).

By combining fashion with celebrity influence, environmental messages can reach wider audiences in effective ways. Wearing sustainable fashion created from recycled materials not only symbolizes commitment but also generates conversations, raising awareness about pollution and resource conservation (Williams & Patel, 2021). This strategy lines up with educational initiatives aimed at integrating sustainability into everyday cultural practices and consumer decisions.

III. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

The global fashion industry is a significant contributor to environmental degradation, with plastic and textile waste creating severe and persistent impacts on ecosystems. Synthetic fabrics, which dominate fast fashion production, release harmful microplastics into waterways during washing, contributing to marine pollution and biodiversity loss (Browne et al., 2011). At the same time, overproduction, rapidly shifting trends, and a culture of disposability have resulted in massive volumes of textile waste, much of which ends up in landfills or incinerators (Fletcher, 2014; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2023). These environmental consequences are combined by strong consumer demand for inexpensive and short-lived garments, making it more and more difficult to shift toward sustainable practices.

While many sustainability initiatives exist, many fail to engage the broader public in meaningful and lasting ways. Public awareness campaigns often fall short of reaching audiences on an emotional level or influencing everyday purchasing behavior. This is where cultural opinion leaders, particularly K-Pop celebrities, offer untapped potential. The global popularity of K-Pop has transformed its artists into powerful trendsetters whose influence extends far beyond music; shaping beauty standards, consumer behavior, and lifestyle choices worldwide (Lee, Kim, & Park, 2019). However, their potential as ambassadors for environmental sustainability remains underutilized in the fashion sector.

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IV. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

A. Aim

To design a seasonless 2026/2027 occasional wear collection, Heal the World: K-Pop Edition, inspired by Gaia, that blends artistic expression with environmental advocacy by transforming waste materials into impactful fashion for K-Pop icons.

B. Objectives

- To develop a K-Pop stylized occasional wear collection incorporating recycled plastics and textile waste into garment construction and embellishment.
- To communicate environmental advocacy through design, drawing inspiration from the concept of Gaia.
- To apply innovative textile manipulation and sustainable production techniques suitable for occasional wear.

V. METHODOLOGY

A. Inspiration Selection

The creative foundation of the research was established through the selection of God Gaia art work (Artist unknown) (Figure 1), the great goddess representing the personification of Earth in Greek mythology, as the central inspiration. Gaia was chosen for her symbolic association with nature, fertility, and life, as well as her embodiment of the connection between humans and the environment. This inspiration aligned with the project's thematic focus on environmental degradation and sustainability, allowing

the designs to carry both aesthetic and narrative depth. The storyline developed around Gaia's journey from nurturing abundance to enduring destruction, forming the conceptual support of the material exploration, colour palette, and final design outcomes.

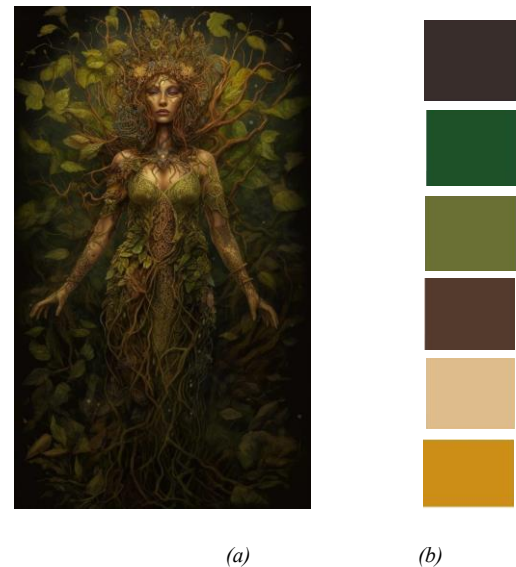


Figure 1. The inspiration: God Gaia.

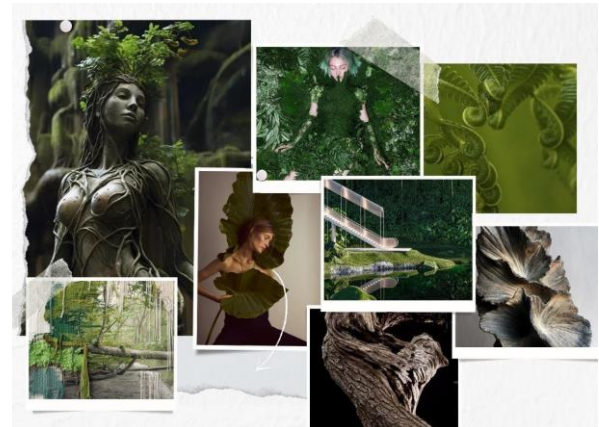


Figure 2. Concept board.

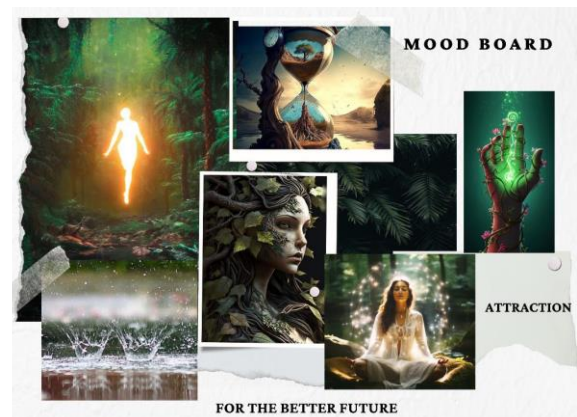


Figure 3. Mood board.

B. Material Exploration and Feasibility Testing

The initial experimental phase explored the potential of repurposing post-consumer polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles as embellishment material. PET bottles were cleaned, cut into varying shapes, and subjected to controlled melting processes to achieve a range of textures, sculptural forms, and decorative effects. The experiments aimed to evaluate the adaptability of PET for wearable applications, focusing on durability, comfort, and aesthetic quality. Throughout these tests, safety measures were strictly observed, including controlled heating and protective handling, to ensure the integrity of both the material and the research process.

C. Textile Waste Manipulation

Simultaneously, waste fabrics and discarded threads sourced from garment production were repurposed through various fabric manipulation techniques. Methods such as pleating, smocking, twisting, and layering were employed to create dimensional and tactile surfaces. Waste threads were integrated through couching, interlacing, and decorative stitching, producing intricate textural compositions. These manipulated materials were also tested in combination with PET embellishments to assess visual aesthetics, structural stability, and thematic alignment.

D. Surface Decoration Trials

The experimental materials were incorporated into surface decoration trials that explored combinations of manipulated fabrics, integrated waste-thread embellishments, and sculpted PET components. These compositions were designed to reinforce the environmental narrative while achieving a visual balance suitable for occasional wear inspired by K-Pop stage aesthetics. Variations in placement, layering, and scale were tested to ensure functionality and design coherence.

E. Concept Development and Visual Direction

Concept board (Figure 2), mood board (Figure 3), and colour palette (Figure 1(c)) were developed to guide the creative direction of the collection. The colour palette was intentionally curated to narrate Gaia's transformation from vibrant, life-affirming greens to muted, weathered, and charred tones symbolizing the destructive impact of human actions on the natural environment. These visual tools served as constant reference points throughout the process, ensuring consistency between the thematic concept, material development, and final garment prototypes.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An innovative element of the "Heal the World" collection is the use of recycled plastics to create unique embellishments. Post-consumer PET bottles were repurposed at a small, home-based scale, cut by hand and carefully shaped through simple heating techniques to achieve lightweight, sculptural forms reminiscent of natural textures (Figure 5). Despite the absence of advanced machinery, this hands-on approach allowed for experimentation with different shapes and textures,

although challenges were encountered when cutting the bottles into smaller components. This process emphasized the labor-intensive nature of sustainable innovation and reinforced the value of creativity and resourcefulness in design. The resulting embellishments not only reduced plastic waste but also transformed discarded materials into aesthetical decorative components, aligning with the collection's environmental story.

The collection follows a seasonless fashion approach to create designs relevance throughout multiple seasons. The recycled plastic embellishments, in combination with manipulated fabrics and repurposed threads, provide visual interest while incorporating the principles of sustainability and conscious material use. These elements demonstrate how fashion can simultaneously achieve aesthetic sophistication and environmental responsibility.

Fabric manipulation was main technique (Figure 6) in the development of the collection. Strips of discarded fabrics were individually prepared, gathered, and arranged in asymmetrical patterns inspired by the design concept. Each strip was pinned and hand-stitched onto the shell liner fabric, creating layered textures that reflect the complexity and fragility of natural environments. Repurposed waste threads were separated and stitched onto the garments, further enhancing tactile depth and visual storytelling. The top sections of the garments, particularly the front panels, combined multiple fabric types to achieve harmonious yet texturally varied surfaces. Interior liners were added to ensure wearer comfort, durability, and a refined finish suitable for occasional wear.



Figure 4. Embellishments created using PET bottles (a)



Figure 5. Embellishments created using PET bottles (b) &(c)

The six-garment collection narrates the journey of nature through time, inspired by Earth goddess Gaia. Each garment depicts a stage in the planet's story: the flourishing past, the current state impacted by human-induced pollution and deforestation, and a potential future shaped by ongoing environmental neglect. The combination of recycled materials, fabric manipulations, and PET embellishments visually communicates this narrative, encouraging viewers to reflect on humanity's impact on the environment.



Figure 6. Fabric and thread manipulation techniques used in the collection.



Figure 7. Live modeling of the finally developed six outfits (a-f).

Overall, the “Heal the World” collection (Figure 7) demonstrates the potential of fashion as a medium for environmental advocacy, combining small-scale material innovation, creative storytelling, and cultural

influence. By engaging K-Pop celebrities as wearers, the garments operate as wearable tools for public education, inspiring audiences to consider sustainable practices and the consequences of human actions on the natural world.

VII. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

The “Heal the World: K-Pop Edition” collection depicts how sustainable design concepts can be integrated into occasional wear to address demanding environmental concerns. By repurposing PET plastics, fabric scraps, and leftover threads into functional and visually compelling garments, the collection demonstrates practical methods for reducing fashion-related waste while maintaining the aesthetic and performance standards expected in celebrity wear. Drawing inspiration from Gaia, the collection effectively communicates the narrative of environmental degradation, from a flourishing past to a threatened future, emphasizing the tangible consequences of human activity on the planet. The hands-on, small-scale fabrication of plastic embellishments and fabric manipulations highlights both the creative potential and the practical challenges of working with repurposed materials.

Using K-Pop celebrities as wearers, reinforces the educational and advocacy potential of the collection. Their influence within global fan communities can provide an effective platform to publicize sustainability messages and encourage conscious consumption behaviors. The outcomes of this research suggest several practical considerations for future work; refining plastic embellishment techniques using accessible tools to improve consistency, exploring additional post-consumer materials to expand design possibilities, and developing display strategies, such as exhibitions or public events, to communicate the collection's environmental narrative effectively. Additionally, structured documentation of the design and fabrication process can support knowledge sharing and guide other designers in adopting small-scale sustainable practices.

The “Heal the World: K-Pop Edition” collection demonstrates that fashion can serve as both a creative medium and an educational tool. It provides a tangible example of how targeted, material-conscious design can engage audiences, inspire reflection on environmental issues, and promote sustainable practices without compromising the functional and aesthetic qualities of high-profile fashion.

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