

# WASTE TO SWAG: The Stitching of a New Narrative

*A Case Study in Sustainable Fashion Brand Architecture and Institutional Identity*

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**Abstract**—Professor Ananya Tyagi leads the Fashion Department at a top university - renowned, influential, tied tightly to elite fashion circles. Its reputation thrives on exclusivity, polished aesthetics, and perceived superiority in design culture. Then comes a student - an eager Gen Z voice - who unveils a sling bag stitched entirely from leftover fabric scraps during a routine class project. Seemingly harmless, yet it sparks tension. How does an institution uphold its luxurious image when raw creativity leans toward eco-conscious reuse? Sustainability matters; so does status. Data shows 15–25% of textile waste gets discarded after production, only 1% repurposed into new garments. This gap demands attention. One path involves launching a sub-brand under the main name - one that honors heritage but carves space for innovation. Another explores embedding sustainability deeper via structured CSR initiatives - not as charity, but commitment. A third option elevates material rescue into luxury craftsmanship, turning surplus into desirable objects worth more than their original form. Each route navigates differently between values and perception. A handful of ideas surface here - Brand Architecture appears early, followed by Porter's approach to competitive strategy. Later comes the Resource Based View, then a pivot toward broader aims like the SDGs. Curiosity lingers at the close, where questions outweigh answers.

**Index Terms**—Sustainable Fashion, Brand Architecture, Circular Economy, Upcycling, Brand Equity, Premium Positioning, Triple Bottom Line, Fashion Education, Sub-Brand Strategy, Value Addition

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## I. The Moment of Crisis

The steady drone of sewing machines below at University's modern New Building once closed every school week like clockwork. Yet on a Friday late in January 2026, the mood shifted - no longer shaped by familiar due dates, instead pulled taut by an unformed thought edging into official weight. Though ordinary sounds remained, something beneath them had changed.

Midway through the afternoon, Professor Ananya Tyagi paused inside the Master Lab, a room she often saw as a mirror held up to fashion's deepest contradiction. Creation thrives here, yet so does waste - not loud or dramatic, just present, piling quietly at the edges. Students in their last year moved between sewing stations, adjusting seams, testing fits, focused on finishing tasks they began weeks ago. From afar, the scene looked chaotic: scraps of dark leather tangled with bright pink synthetics, chunks of patterned hide scattered near bins already overflowing. Yet what struck her most wasn't messiness - it was how clearly the clutter revealed an old truth few want to name. This place trains future designers, promotes sustainability in lectures, and still

produces heaps of non-recyclable offcuts daily. The gap between teaching and doing sits heavily in the air, thick like thread dust after hours of cutting. Each torn edge, each unused swatch speaks without sound.

Later, everything changed - not slowly, but fast - when a senior boy walked up holding not just homework, but something else entirely. In his grip sat a sling bag unlike any standard model: bold in form, built completely from discarded scraps labeled "flawed" in the workshop's leftover bins. Instead of hiding imperfections, it highlighted them - layered fabric fragments into a complex pattern that felt alive under light. She touched the seams carefully, observing how contrasts worked together - one piece rough, another slick - yet formed harmony through careful placement. What stood out most was not durability or color, though both were strong - it was the sense of value created where none existed before. Not by accident, nor luck, but through sharp thinking shaping forgotten bits into high-end look. Her eyes paused longer than expected, realizing this had not emerged from limitation - but from deliberate vision turning trash logic upside down. Out of nowhere, the weight of emotion deepened when memory surfaced - Ananya remembered a text from her niece Anavika just last night. A playful ask popped up: a "Cow Sling Bag," nothing serious. Yet here it stood, identical, held by a student in front of her. As if pulled from thought into form overnight. Distance between idea and real thing. Almost gone. One girl imagined it. Another built it. Between them stretched only silence where support should have been.

Right away, excitement gave way to worry. Waiting on Ananya's desk was the next day's board meeting outline, shared with the Director of the Design Institute. At the top, bold and clear, sat the phrase: "Preserving Brand Premiumness." Years of careful effort had shaped the University's Design Faculty into a leading name in Indian fashion education. That status pulled in ambitious applicants, justified higher tuition fees, and earned respect across elite fashion circles. Hidden within the agenda's title came a sharp concern - would linking such prestige to waste undermine what they had built?

Forty-eight hours stretched between Friday's close and Saturday's gathering - time enough for Professor Ananya Tyagi to weigh what came next. Whether the idea called "Waste to Swag" would step beyond lectures depended on her reply. A decision loomed: let it become part of the school's public face, a lasting mark shaped by eco-conscious design. Or keep it confined inside syllabi, where such trials often fade without trace. One choice pushed forward into recognition; the other held back, cautious, academic.

## II. Luxury Meets Waste

### 2.1 Global Industry and the Problems with Linear Systems

Despite its size - around USD 1.5 trillion - the textile sector stands divided in today's world. While fueling economies across poorer regions, it also drives major ecological harm elsewhere. Most manufacturing still follows a straight path: resources pulled out, turned into goods, then thrown away without reclaiming worth. Little gets reused once clothing reaches the end.

Numbers tell part of the story here. In just making clothes, about one-sixth to nearly one-fourth of cloth ends up unused during cutting - data backed by India's textile ministry and IDH. Before that step, problems already exist spinning sheds fibers and discards tiny bits, whereas weaving leaves behind edge trims and leftover spool lengths. After manufacturing wraps up, around a tenth of what gets made sits unsold, piling up until burned or buried. What happens after people wear things paints a bleaker picture: barely any fabric from old garments becomes new apparel worldwide, showing how far systems fall short of closing the loop.

One person's drinking water for two and a half years equals what goes into making just one cotton item. Behind each piece lies hidden strain - not only in piles of leftover cloth, but deep within resource flows. Nearly a fifth of polluted industrial runoff comes from coloring and treating fabrics. Water use forms only part of the burden - emissions trail close behind. From field to factory, textiles generate more planet-warming gases than planes and ships put together. Numbers like these show up quietly - in soaked rivers, thick air, torn tags. What sits folded in bins at Master Lab carries weight far beyond thread count.

Change is starting to take shape beyond borders. From Brussels to UN halls, new frameworks are emerging - not only the EU's plan for a circular economy but also global targets under SDG 12, alongside fresh blueprints like those from the Ellen MacArthur group - each piece adds pressure toward accountability. How garments move from design to discard now faces sharper scrutiny. Adapting isn't just about looking good anymore. Staying in business, years ahead, may depend on it.

## 2.2 Gen Z Buys Green But Not Always

Young people today see environmental issues differently because they grew up knowing about them. Notably, those born from 1997 to 2012 show distinct buying habits shaped by long-standing exposure to climate concerns. Studies conducted by McKinsey & Company in 2021 and later confirmed by Nielsen in 2023 reveal these consumers accept higher costs for eco-friendly goods. Instead of rejecting costlier options, many agree to spend between 9.7% and 15% extra when proof of sustainability exists. Such patterns stand out most within high-end markets, where purchases often express identity more than utility alone.

What matters most here is not less luxury, instead a shift in where it comes from. Older buyers found status in rare materials and limited availability; newer ones now draw distinction from ethics and meaning behind what they buy. A piece made from reclaimed materials by a respected designer, complete with verified history

of its source, fits this mindset - not seen as lesser, rather more meaningful. It signals belief systems beyond traditional displays of affluence.

### 2.3 The Indian Design Education Context

Years ago, India began reshaping how design is taught. Notable schools like NIFT and NID, along with Pearl Academy and various university programs, started shifting focus toward stronger public recognition. These shifts came through updates aligned with global teaching models, while also building ties beyond academia - linking up with homegrown premium labels as well as multinational apparel firms. Success now favors those who can show clear results: learning that connects deeply with actual work demands. Where training meets practice, influence grows.

What sets the university's Fashion Department apart begins with more than just curriculum. Housing advanced facilities like the New Building and the well-equipped Master Lab introduces a level of expectation - this goes beyond standard training into something closer to craft immersion. High costs, strong graduate connections, and sought-after job pathways shape a reputation aimed at elite tiers. Positioned this way, tackling "Waste to Swag" becomes unavoidable - even while it risks challenging core assumptions.

### III. Professor Ananya Tyagi

Examining the key ruling means looking closely at who made it. Not fitting any common mold, Professor Ananya Tyagi stands apart. Within her role, two distinct professions pull against one another - artistic creation meets structured leadership. Usually found in separate individuals, these roles coexist oddly in a single academic figure.

### 3.1 Work History and Role

Morning routines at University find Ananya balancing urgent administrative tasks against quiet moments shaping the fashion program's future direction. What stands out about her path is how deeply split it remains - between making garments and dissecting markets. One side grew from hours sketching patterns, draping fabric, trusting gut responses to color and form; the other emerged through case studies, consumer data, models predicting buyer behavior. These two strands pull in different directions now, creating tension instead of synergy. The very mix once seen as strength begins to feel more like weight. Decisions stall where clarity should be.

From her classroom, learning unfolds through trial, repeated missteps, then adjustment - Ananya treats these not as setbacks but stepping stones. That odd-looking backpack? While others dismiss it, she spots early signs of commercial viability. Ideas take shape where tools meet thinking, often in places rules do not yet reach.

What appears chaotic reveals patterns when viewed sideways, which she does naturally. Between workshops buzzing with noise and quiet strategy meetings sits a link - one she quietly becomes.

### 3.2 Motivational Architecture Triple Bottom Line

What drives Ananya stems from the idea introduced by John Elkington back in 1994 - the Triple Bottom Line. This approach argues that performance should not just rest on money made, instead weaving together fairness for communities alongside care for nature. To her, it's more than a concept found in textbooks; it shapes real goals. Her ideal course design pushes learners beyond simply making clothing - it urges them to question every stage their choices trigger, right down to how garments impact land and labor once produced.

Sharp attention marks her grasp of industry waste figures. Through documents issued by Vastra Mantralaya alongside research compiled by IDH, she traces exact measures of fabric scraps left behind each day at the Master Lab. Insights from ACCA's guidelines on sustainable tracking shape her thinking; profit within the Triple Bottom Line holds steady only when ecological balance receives equal focus. What drives her: shaping the institute into a working example of sustainability - where skillful design grows stronger because ecosystems are protected, not weakened by creative output.

### 3.3 The Internal Conflict: Innovation vs. Institutional Conservatism

Still, her forward-looking mindset sits awkwardly beside Ananya's day-to-day management tasks. Oversight of the department's Brand Premiumness means she answers for choices affecting how key groups see the school - applicants, corporate allies, former graduates who give money, and agencies that grant approval. Where she ends up professionally ties closely to how well the university holds its position in the field.

What happens when prestige blurs? History shows luxury brands stumble once they flirt with mass appeal - even if motives are good. Easy access, casual vibes, or worse, throwaway imagery - they chip away at exclusivity. That worry shadows Ananya now. She hears the board's likely query before it's spoken: "Do we lead in elite design education - or resemble a bargain resale outlet?" Such phrasing isn't just sharp; it exposes real danger. Shift toward green practices without care might recast the school - not as dream-worthy, but merely well-meaning on a budget

What Ananya faces isn't simply a choice about balancing green values with high-end appeal. Instead, it sits deeper - between two valid ideas of what makes an institution truly outstanding: one rooted in maintaining elite status, the other built on standing firm for moral principles. To move forward, she won't only need careful planning; she'll also need a kind of bravery that those in university leadership seldom show when so much is visible to others.

## IV. The Green Thread Initiative A Timeline

### 4.1 Phase One: The Audit Identifying the Issue

Started by nothing more than growing piles of discarded materials, the "Green Thread" project took shape without official approval or strategic planning. Semester after semester, leftover scraps from the Master Lab pile up - industrial remnants left behind once class ends. When totaled annually, these wastes add up to real costs, both ecological and economic. What emerged was not policy, but response: a quiet shift driven by numbers too large to overlook.

Within the department, a systematic waste assessment uncovered these initial figures

Material Type	Avg. Waste/Semester (kg)	Value-Add Cost (₹)	Reusable Applications	No. of Products	Est. Sales Value (₹)	Net Revenue (₹)
Cotton Scraps	6	500	Curtains, Small Bags	2	2,000	1,500
Silk Remnants	0.6	50	Small Bags, Pouches	2	500	450
Synthetic/Mixed Poly	12	3,000	Laptop Bags, Sling Bags	60	54,000	51,000
Total (Annual est.)	~18.6 kg	~3,550	Multiple product lines	~64	~56,500	~52,950

Though small at first glance, these figures gain meaning when seen through a longer-term lens. Turning trash into tracked resources shifts perception - from loss to possibility. What once vanished in dumpsters now gets counted, sorted, thought about. Old cotton pieces find new life as window drapes or hand-held cases. Silk offcuts, smooth and costly by nature, fit best in compact items like coin purses or sleeves. Most plentiful of all - plastic-heavy fabric leftovers - step forward not as junk but as core inputs. From them come structured designs: portable tech carriers and shoulder straps. These products anchor what later gains recognition under the name "Waste to Swag."

*Worth considering:* the price tag on raw materials sits near nothing - they're already there, a byproduct once counted only as trash expense. Shaping scraps into workable pieces adds some charge, bringing in bits like zips, fasteners, touch-closures, or decorative inserts bumps it further, along with hands-on assembly and final touches. Turned upside down now - the math behind making things shifts entirely - since what goes in costs far less than standard methods, yet what comes out, if built well and styled sharp, can sit beside upper-mid-tier designer items in pricing.

## 4.2 Phase Two: Applying Design Thinking to Waste

Out of the audit results grew the next stage naturally. From those insights, Ananya introduced a guided design task within the course. Students faced a shift in perspective - instead of reducing discarded materials, they were to amplify them as core ingredients for invention. This pivot took shape through a hands-on approach rooted in design thinking: first sensing how the stuff behaved physically. Then outlining limits posed by uneven sizes and blended textures. Ideas bloomed around visual tension - the beauty found in inconsistency. Making early versions demanded precision. Each trial measured whether outcomes met high-end standards consumers expect.

What stood out was how students went beyond what teachers anticipated. Using the "Katzen," a name borrowed from German meaning scrap bin within the department, they started building models showing a sharpness in design usually seen in pro workshops. A problem took shape naturally - not about masking where materials came from, yet spotlighting those roots instead. That sense of mismatch shifted into an intentional look: a way of seeing difference as both distinctive and eco-conscious.

Surprising contrasts in texture and finish turned into a core idea here. Instead of balance, the emphasis fell on calculated imbalance - materials combined not to blend, but to stand apart yet work together. This approach softened a long-standing conflict in perception: the belief that high-end design must rely on uniformity. What looked mismatched at first glance began to feel intentional up close. Students showed how value isn't lost when elements differ - it can grow. Difference, handled precisely, started reading as refinement rather than disorder. A sense of cohesion emerged without needing sameness. Contradictory surfaces sat beside each other, creating their own kind of elegance. Through selection and placement, contrast itself became a marker of care.

## 4.3 Phase Three The Prototypes Moving from Studio to Market

Out of the design task came three main product types. Each one shows how trash can become something valued - just differently. One focuses on reusing materials into wearable items, while another turns scraps into useful everyday objects. A third explores transforming discarded elements into statement pieces. These directions highlight varied ways the idea lives in practice

A sudden shift came with the sling bag - an object born from chance, yet shaped by purpose. Not quite planned, it emerged when a student's early version met an unexpected market pull, sparked by Anavika's ask. Bold color pairings define its look, backed by lab-made fabrics that feel sharp, modern. What seems like flaw becomes feature: slight inconsistencies in texture or dye become part of its face. Unpredictable details ensure no two are ever identical. This difference isn't hidden - it's highlighted, making rarity a core trait. Instead of blending into uniform lines, each piece stands apart, speaking the language of exclusivity without saying it aloud.

Starting with leftover leather, this laptop bag takes sustainability into real-world use. Built tough, it pairs strong materials with bright synthetic edges - not just for look, but for lasting function. People who carry these bags expect things to work well, also to feel right in hand and eye. What stands out is how junk becomes valuable - crafted so well that cost and quality make sense together. Success here shows trash can turn into trusted tools without losing style or strength.

A shape-shifting presence among the trio, the General Purpose Bag leans into improvisation more than its peers. Instead of harmony, it courts contrast - pairing raw leather with slick plastics, soft greys against electric pinks - to become something worn like sculpture. Stories stick to it, where others stay silent; buyers notice what lies beneath the surface. Ordinary items tell flat tales, yet this one speaks in layers.

#### **4.4 The Breaking Point Where Teachers Split**

One faculty gathering changed everything - suddenly, what began quietly in lecture halls sparked serious conversation across departments. A senior dean asked it plainly: "Are we a premier design school or a thrift shop?" That moment sharpened the conflict, not with anger, yet unmistakable force. Instead of resistance, they expected proof. Approval for "Waste to Swag" now hinged on arguments strong enough to survive skepticism from those valuing prestige through traditional high-end benchmarks.

Unexpectedly, the dean's challenge proved useful. It shifted momentum, pulling the idea out of individual teaching interest and placing it within official planning. For Ananya, emotion alone would not suffice. Structure mattered more now - thinking rooted in research, backed by numbers, presented so those wary of inefficiency would take it seriously. The term "waste," after all, unsettles decision makers.

## **V. Strategic Analysis Meets Framework Conversations**

### **5.1 Waste as Resource in Business Strategy**

Starting with what firms own, rather than what markets offer, shifts the logic of strategy. Not every asset guarantees long-term strength - only those hard to copy, limited in supply, useful where it counts, resistant to replacement. Seen through that lens, leftover fabric stacks up poorly; its worth seems low, availability high. Most planners might dismiss scraps outright, failing to notice hidden potential beneath surface traits. Yet value does not always announce itself loudly or arrive polished.

Still, inside a high-end design school setting, things change in notable ways. What makes the Fashion Department's leftover materials distinct lies less in volume than in its source - a mix of course demands, fabric choices, and how students build their projects term after term. Each piece stems from habits grown over semesters, not just random output. Other schools follow different paths, so their surplus differs in nature. Knowledge held by the Design Faculty about turning these scraps into refined outcomes matters deeply - the

approach called "Match and Mis-match," precise handwork norms, the sense for visual balance - all require years to shape fully. Even if another department gained access to similar discarded fabrics, they would lack the internal rhythm that gives value to what others see as trash. From a resource-based view, uniqueness emerges not solely from the waste but from how the institution sees and reshapes it - making the pair hard to copy. This blend becomes something rare, owned only here.

## 5.2 Differentiation Focus Strategy

Unquestionably, the right fit here leans toward a distinct position - setting Waste to Swag apart through unique value in a tight, deliberate audience slice. Not chasing low prices across mass markets, but standing out by design in one chosen corner. This path emphasizes crafted distinction over volume-driven savings. A narrow lens shapes its edge; originality matters more than scale. Instead of blending into wide competition, it carves space where difference defines demand. Uniqueness becomes the anchor, narrowly held. Broad affordability takes a back seat when identity rides on being unlike others.

What makes Porter's model useful lies in its warning about sitting between two stools - where a firm fails to gain either the savings of cheapest producers or the high prices charged by unique offerings. When "Waste to Swag" items carry very low tags - as mere charity efforts - or act like cheap substitutes for regular bags, they land right into that weak zone: seen as too ordinary for status buyers yet too odd for mass appeal. Such positioning earns none of the respect linked to exclusivity, nor does it draw the crowds typical of bargain options.

So here's the approach: set prices based on perceived worth, matching what high-end buyers expect. Not just any tote - this one uses leftover ethical leather, paired with rare man-made accents. Backed by a top-tier design school, it carries weight beyond materials alone. Price too low, and the message shifts - suddenly it seems mass-market, generic. That outcome? Exactly the image the University strives to avoid. Its cost must echo smart design, scarcity, eco-accountability - and that name behind it. Undercutting risks undermining prestige, which defeats the entire purpose.

## 5.3 Aaker's Brand Equity Model Transforms Stigma Into Strength

One way to look at David Aaker's view on brand strength involves five key parts shaping how much a brand is worth in the marketplace - these include recognition among consumers, customer loyalty, perceived superiority, mental links tied to the brand, along with legal protections like patents or exclusive partnerships. For "Waste to Swag," stepping into this space means confronting an immediate obstacle: the main ingredient it uses - waste - is already loaded with unflattering meanings. From a psychological standpoint, people tend

to connect trash with decline, being thrown away, or falling short socially. Because of that baggage, shifting these automatic reactions becomes the heart of what the project must achieve if its identity is to succeed.

Aaker's model outlines a sequence of four steps guiding how brands evolve during the project. Not every path looks identical, yet patterns emerge through observation. One phase builds on what came before, though timing may shift unexpectedly. Movement forward depends on internal adjustments alongside external feedback

Hidden steps become value when seen. A journey from scrap to product gains meaning through open digital tales. Traceability begins with QR tags on goods, showing exactly which discarded fabrics were reborn there. Films made by learners reveal labor and care behind the scenes. Online posts unfold moments that would otherwise stay unseen. Meaning grows where transparency takes root. What was once overlooked now shapes reputation. Narrative turns matter into identity. Visibility does not follow formula - it builds trust slowly. The origin of a textile can speak louder than slogans ever could.

Though quality might seem obvious, it needs proof. Finishing touches on Waste to Swag items ought to match - or go beyond - those seen in high-end fashion goods. Reaching that mark means putting resources into checks during production, ways to clean and ready materials, also methods of sewing aligned with the brand's promise of consistency. A single drop in craftsmanship won't hide behind eco-friendly claims - it'll stand out more.

What makes the initiative especially strong? Tying it directly to the University's established reputation. This connection works because people tend to transfer favorable impressions from something familiar - like a respected academic name - to something newer linked with it, a pattern researchers such as Aaker describe as the "Halo Effect." Seeing a product backed by a top-tier design school brings instant trust, perceived craftsmanship, and an expectation of high standards - an advantage standalone labels struggle to gain quickly. That immediate lift isn't just helpful; it forms the core reasoning behind adopting the Endorsed Brand structure outlined further on.

What keeps people tied to brands in the sustainability space isn't just how well products work - it's whether they feel aligned with what the brand stands for. When someone sees a "Waste to Swag" item as both stylish and morally sound, their attachment grows stronger than if function were the only factor. Staying true to looks and ethics at once shapes lasting trust. Over time, reputation builds only when neither aspect slips. A steady hand on both levers makes the difference.

#### **5.4 Segmentation Targeting and Positioning Analysis For The Eco Conscious Consumer**

Starting with clear divisions among consumers marks the first move in shaping a strong place for "Waste to Swag" in the marketplace. Following these splits closely, specific groups emerge as central focuses based on their distinct traits. Shaping messages around those selected audiences then builds a unique space that stands out. Because perception matters just as much as product, how the brand is presented becomes critical. Each step feeds into where it fits alongside others - clear, deliberate, grounded.

Among those involved, a clear pattern emerges - Gen Z individuals between 18 and 28 stand out by pursuing eco-conscious options within high-end accessories. Instead of mass-produced items, they lean toward brands that reflect environmental responsibility. Meanwhile, professionals fluent in design principles - including architects and creatives - show preference for goods rooted in unique storytelling and visual originality. These users respond not just to function but also to craftsmanship seen in small-batch releases. On another track, organizations such as companies with gifting initiatives, progressive firms, and schools committed to green policies engage due to structural requirements around sustainability.

Starting with younger buyers who value quality makes sense, though creatives with an eye for detail also matter. Bulk purchasers might buy more, yet their demands often push products toward mass-market status - this clashes with exclusive releases meant to feel rare. Ending here keeps the balance between reach and reputation intact.

Found at the intersection of material truth and creative mastery, Design Studio's Swag Line frames fashion as narrative. Each item speaks through its origins, shaped by India's leading design school. Because craftsmanship meets origin, buyers encounter more than apparel - they engage legacy. Value rises when heritage walks beside innovation. Premium pricing feels natural here, not forced. Aspiration follows where identity aligns with purpose. The future worn today emerges quietly, without slogans. Sustainability becomes visible, not claimed.

## VI. Ananya Faces Three Choices

Should Ananya walk into the Saturday board session, her challenge isn't a simple either-or. Instead, three separate options await - each carrying its own mix of danger and gain. One path leans on gradual change; another bets on bold reinvention. A third questions the purpose itself. Each reflects a unique view on how elite design schools should adapt - or whether they must at all. The core issue beneath them? What such institutions truly exist to do.

### Path A: Sub Brand Strategy Endorsed Brand Architecture

Though separate in name, the new initiative draws credibility from its roots at the University's Faculty of Design. This offshoot, temporarily called "Swag by Design," fits into Aaker's model as an approved extension rather than a standalone identity. Backed by the reputation of the main institution, it gains trust while keeping its own distinct character. Instead of blending in, it pushes boundaries - focusing on daring styles rooted in environmental responsibility. Quality assurance flows down from the parent body, yet creative freedom remains firmly with the project itself.

Should the sub-brand face skepticism around its green claims, the core brand stays protected by design. When one identity stumbles, another stands firm. A win for the smaller line - a surge in press interest, customer trust - pulls perception higher across the entire portfolio. Distance between names creates safety; success bridges the gap. Strong performance there lifts reputation here. If doubts arise, isolation prevents damage spread. Achievement travels up, doubt does not.

Starting with money makes sense here. About ₹52,950 could come in each year just from what gets thrown out now - more comes if output grows or more customers join in. On another level entirely, the smaller brand name opens doors: professors can publish findings, students build work samples, teams enter global shows - the school gains value even when cash flow isn't immediate.

Execution difficulty stands out as the main drawback of Path A. Because an approved brand structure depends heavily on continuous effort across branding oversight, consistent product standards, price planning, market access, and messaging - success hinges on broad internal alignment. Without deep buy-in spreading beyond one dedicated advocate, progress slows. When support falters or attention drifts, customers may blur the lines between master brand and satellite identity. That confusion then triggers exactly the reputational threats the framework aimed to avoid.

### **Path B The Pure Sustainability Approach CSR Focus**

Outside the main brand structure, this version treats "Waste to Swag" as a low-cost or free offering tied to corporate responsibility goals. Instead of profit, its purpose leans on social impact - items move through nonprofit networks, their price covering little more than production. Metrics shift toward environmental outcomes, feeding into broader reports on governance and community performance. Value shows up not in revenue but in measurable ecological contributions.

Most institutions would struggle here, yet this approach avoids weakening the brand almost completely. Because it presents the project as civic duty instead of profit-seeking, the organization never has to defend high-end branding. Instead of linking itself to extravagant byproducts, the name stands for ethical leadership. That logic holds up under scrutiny, fits current norms in ESG disclosures, and stays true to long-term messaging.

Still, choosing Path B brings notable strategic downsides. Removing ties to profit motives means losing access to income revealed in the waste analysis along with demand from younger consumers ready to pay more for

sustainable options. At a deeper level, setting low or zero prices sends exactly the wrong impression - when something appears free or underpriced, people assume it lacks value. That perception of being cheap, after taking hold, rarely fades. While this path might protect brand image right now, it risks capping long-term growth forever.

### **Path C Luxury Upcycling With Value Based Pricing**

Starting differently this time, imagine treating "Waste to Swag" items not like eco-trials but as rare luxury pieces. These goods would carry price tags matching - or exceeding - those of top-tier fashion accessories. Instead of green messaging, they'd use the rich narrative style common in elite brands. Bold? Certainly. This route bets on allure rather than ethics. Value comes from scarcity and craft, not just recycled materials. Seen this way, waste transforms into desirable art. Pricing stays high to reinforce status. Marketing leans into mystique, not metrics. Exclusivity becomes the message. Luxury codes replace environmental claims. Some might question authenticity. Others will see a clever shift in perception. The gamble lies in making people want it for reasons beyond sustainability.

Luxury brands around the world have already shown how discarded materials can gain new value when handled with intention. Take Stella McCartney: her choice of recycled polyester shifts perception, making reuse a mark of status instead of compromise. Then there's Hermès, where scraps once bound for disposal become art pieces through its Petit h line. Even Burberry steps in here, turning leftover stock into exclusive runs that sell not despite their past life - but because of it. What ties these cases together isn't secrecy about origin; quite the opposite happens. These examples thrive by spotlighting history rather than masking it. Being open about sources turns what some see as weakness into something rare and notable. Value grows not from concealing flaws but from reframing beginnings.

A Design laptop bag under Path C uses verified leather scraps combined with unusual synthetic accents. Priced between ₹2,500 and ₹4,000, it stands far beyond the ₹900 baseline seen in waste analysis. Instead of raw material expense, worth emerges through creative insight, brand history, scarcity, and a clear ethical story. This approach mirrors how niche handcrafted goods gain status across India's specialty markets. Authentication comes via a QR-coded record tied directly to its origin. Though built from discarded elements, perception shifts - not due to makeup, rather intent, context, and traceable integrity. Limited release reinforces distinction. Positioning leans on curated meaning more than function alone. Market parallels exist, yet differentiation holds. What matters most sits beneath surface: decisions shaping outcome. Value forms not from accumulation, but layered thought.

Should Path C fail to match its high-end claims, buyers might doubt its value. Luxury image alone won't suffice - real quality has to show through. Craftsmanship needs attention, just like packaging, messaging, and

how products appear in stores. For new academic projects, funding such details could stretch budgets thin unless backing comes from higher levels.

### 6.1 Comparative Analysis of Strategic Paths

Criterion	Path A: Sub-Brand	Path B: CSR Wing	Path C: Luxury Upcycling
Brand Dilution Risk	Low (insulated)	Very Low	Medium-High
Revenue Potential	Medium-High	Minimal	High
Scalability	High (structured)	Moderate	High (if executed well)
Faculty & Student Impact	High (portfolio value)	Moderate	Very High
Alignment with SDG 12	Strong	Strong	Strong
Execution Complexity	High	Low	Very High
Long-term Brand Enhancement	High	Moderate	Very High
Recommended Pricing	₹900–₹1,500/unit	At cost	₹2,500–₹4,000/unit

## VII. The Path Beyond the Threefold Problem

### 7.1 The Recommended Approach A Step by Step Brand Structure

Looking closely at each route shows shortcomings when used alone. Instead of treating them separately, combining elements makes more sense over time. Starting with Path A's framework offers stability early on. After that, adding Path C's approach to value captures market dynamics. Alongside these moves,

keeping Path B's emphasis on societal impact supports public understanding. This blend works best when one element does not dominate. Sequence matters just as much as selection here.

Year one kicks off by launching the approved sub-brand. "Swag by Design" takes shape - complete with official branding rules and strict quality checks. A small lineup debuts, focused only on three core bag types. These sit in the upper-mid price bracket, between ₹900 and ₹1,500, aiming to signal value without overspending. Availability begins locally: sold on campus, through former students, and via handpicked outlets that prioritize design. The approach builds visibility slowly, rooted in consistency rather than reach. Each channel supports credibility just as much as access does. Early pricing balances cost against perceived worth. Product standards remain fixed from the start. Expansion waits until recognition grows. Presence matters more than volume at this stage. Recognition follows where trust is visible. Launching fully formed beats rushing into too many spaces. Foundations matter most when shaping how people see something new. Perception forms fast - first impressions stick longest.

Two years in, stories begin shaping reputation. Content appears online showing how discarded materials become goods. Every item gets a unique traceability tag via scannable codes. Findings from teaching staff enter global publications, rooted in real project data. Visibility grows through presence at eco-conscious design events across borders.

## VIII. Data Exhibits

Exabit 1: Annual Waste Audit University Fashion Department

Material	Waste/Se m (kg)	Annua l Est. (kg)	Value -Add Cost (₹)	Products Possible	Est. Sales (₹)	Net Revenu e (₹)	Env. Impact Avoide d
Cotton Scraps	3	6	500	2 (bags/curtain s)	2,000	1,500	~0.5 kg CO <sub>2e</sub>
Silk Remnants	0.3	0.6	50	2 (pouches/bag s)	500	450	~0.1 kg CO <sub>2e</sub>
Synthetic/Mix ed Poly	6	12	3,000	60 (laptop bags)	54,000	51,000	~6 kg CO <sub>2e</sub>
Total	~9.3	~18.6	~3,55 0	~64 units	~56,50 0	~52,950	~6.6 kg CO <sub>2e</sub>

Though derived from typical industry data around displaced synthetic fabric manufacturing, CO<sub>2</sub>e numbers remain approximate. Verification may follow official ecological assessment procedures. These values reflect general patterns rather than fixed outcomes.

Exhibit 2 Value Addition Costs Per Unit

Cost Component	Sling Bag (₹)	Laptop Bag (₹)	Gen. Purpose Bag (₹)
Raw Material (Waste)	0	0	0
Material Preparation (Cutting/Cleaning)	25	40	30
Hardware (Zip, Buttons, Velcro, Patches)	80	150	100
Labour (Stitching & Finishing)	150	200	175
Packaging & Branding	50	75	60
Total Value-Addition Cost	305	465	365
Proposed Market Price (Path A)	900	1,200	1,000
Gross Margin per Unit	595	735	635
Gross Margin %	66.1%	61.3%	63.5%

Exhibit 3: Brand Architecture Map

Level	Entity	Role	Market Position
Parent Brand	University – Faculty of Design	Guarantor of quality, prestige, and academic excellence	Top-Tier Premium / Luxury Education
Endorsed Sub-Brand	Swag by Design	Eco-conscious creative arm; flagship sustainable product line	Premium Sustainable Fashion Accessories
Product Line 1	The Stunning Sling Bag	Entry-level aspirational product; consumer-facing ambassador	Mid-Premium (₹800–₹1,200)

Product Line 2	The Professional Laptop Bag	Core revenue product; professional market targeting	Upper-Premium (₹1,200– ₹2,000)
Product Line 3	The General Purpose Bag	Artistic statement product; gallery/exhibition context	Premium/Collector (₹1,000– ₹1,800)

Exhibit 4: Gen Z Green Premium – Market Perception Indicators

Consumer Behaviour Indicator	Finding	Source
Willingness to pay premium for sustainability	9.7% – 15% above standard price	McKinsey & Company, 2021
Gen Z purchase driven by brand values alignment	73% of global Gen Z consumers	Nielsen, 2023
Preference for transparent provenance	67% of fashion consumers prefer brands with supply chain transparency	Fashion Transparency Index, 2023
Indian urban youth sustainability purchase intent	61% willing to pay more for eco- conscious fashion	KPMG India, 2022
Luxury + sustainability compatibility perception	78% of premium consumers see no contradiction	Bain & Company, 2023

## IX. Discussion Questions

Questions below aim to spark deeper thinking for graduate-level management students. These work best during guided case-based conversations. Each prompt encourages examination of complex decisions. Some explore consequences of strategic choices. Others highlight real-world leadership challenges. Designed to support thoughtful dialogue in classroom settings. Focus remains on practical application of concepts. Use them to guide reflective group exchanges

Ananya's situation calls for scrutiny through Aaker's Brand Equity lens. Does brand dilution truly pose a threat, or might it be more perception than reality? Under certain circumstances, the "Waste to Swag" effort may strengthen rather than weaken public regard for the University. Shifting materials into new forms of

value can shift perceptions upward - if done thoughtfully. Public reaction often hinges less on change itself but how aligned that change feels with core identity. When sustainability becomes part of legacy, initiatives like recycling fashion gain symbolic weight. Student-led innovation, framed as evolution instead of departure, adds depth to reputation. Perception shifts quietly - sometimes even reverses when authenticity leads. Could this project become proof of adaptive strength? Evidence suggests reimagining resources doesn't erode equity if mission stays visible. Even skepticism fades once impact outshines doubt. Long-term standing grows not by avoiding risks - but selecting them wisely. What seems risky today might anchor relevance tomorrow.

Starting with cost leadership, Porter's framework shows efficiency matters most when competing on price. Instead of undercutting rivals, a firm might stand apart by doing things differently - like focusing deeply on niche quality. That approach aligns closest with differentiation through unique value creation. Looking at the three options, one stands out due to harder-to-copy advantages. While low prices attract volume, they invite rivalry; uniqueness resists imitation longer. Profit potential grows where customers stay loyal without constant discounts. Under certain market shifts, even high-end recycled fashion gains traction. For example, if social norms start valuing rarity combined with sustainability, premium pricing becomes possible. Another factor helps: rising material costs make reuse economically sensible, not just ethical. Wealthy buyers who seek exclusivity may pay more for stories tied to origin and renewal. When production stays small-scale yet highly curated, margins can expand despite higher upfront effort.

Starting from the VRIN lens, does leftover fabric at the university qualify as a true strategic resource? To reach that status, could deeper integration into design research shift its value? Might partnerships with local makers add uniqueness hard to copy? If tracking systems logged every reuse, would that build rare insight others lack? Turning scraps into signature materials may demand time, yet consistency might forge something distinctive. Could student-led experiments prevent easy replacement by alternatives? Only when access is limited, effort embedded, and outcomes unpredictable does waste begin acting like an asset.

Examining the statement "Are we a premier design school or a thrift shop?" requires unpacking its underlying beliefs. Luxury here seems tied to exclusivity, while secondhand practices appear framed as lesser. This contrast assumes sustainable fashion lacks prestige - yet recent trends show growing appeal of pre-owned goods among high-end buyers. Consumer behavior increasingly blends status seeking with environmental awareness. Evidence from resale platforms expanding into designer markets challenges the idea that reuse undermines value. Perceptions shift when legacy brands embrace circular models. The original concern may rest on outdated hierarchies between new and used. Market growth in authenticated vintage suggests prestige can emerge through longevity, not just novelty.

A well-crafted survey could help Ananya gather essential feedback ahead of her presentation. To uncover genuine interest, begin by selecting participants who reflect actual user profiles - mixing age groups, shopping habits, and brand familiarity. Instead of asking broad opinions, pose concrete scenarios: "How likely are you to buy a plant-based snack priced at \$4?" or "Which matters more: packaging sustainability or flavor variety?"

Rotate question order randomly to reduce bias. Include follow-ups that dig into reasons behind choices, using open-ended prompts like “Explain why that option stands out.” Rather than relying on ratings alone, invite comparisons between product concepts. Sampling should span urban, suburban, and rural regions to capture diverse perspectives. Questions must avoid leading language, focusing instead on daily behaviors - what people do, not what they say they value. Structure responses so patterns emerge without forced interpretation. Through careful framing, the data can reveal real preferences under everyday conditions.

Starting with perceived worth, the Professional Laptop Bag gains its price foundation not from cost alone. Instead of listing features, buyers respond to how it fits their daily work rhythm. Because status matters in urban professional circles, a higher price can actually boost appeal - yet too high risks shutting out loyal customers. Setting it just above mid-tier brands creates breathing room without alienating reach. When comparing alternatives, this positioning avoids direct combat with luxury labels. It slips between gaps: serious enough for executives, sensible enough for frequent use. Over time, consistent pricing builds quiet trust better than discounts ever do. Seen this way, value emerges from balance - not excess.

Over time, how might the "Waste to Swag" project hold up under growing demand? Should leadership change, what structures could keep it running smoothly? One option involves embedding oversight into academic departments, so responsibility shifts naturally across roles. Another path: creating a rotating student team with documented processes, ensuring knowledge stays even when individuals leave. Faculty involvement may continue if incentives align with institutional goals, such as recognition in review cycles. Transition plans written early help maintain direction without relying on any single person. Sustainability often depends less on enthusiasm than on built-in routines that outlast individual commitment.

What moral issues emerge here apart from ecological concerns? Questions around who owns student ideas must be considered. Recognition for teaching staff plays a role too. The institution's claim to the project's originality needs clarification. Ownership boundaries may blur when collaboration increases. Credit allocation becomes complex in shared efforts. Fairness matters just as much as green outcomes do. Who deserves acknowledgment rests on contribution patterns. Academic norms influence how value is assigned. Hidden labor often goes unacknowledged. Transparency helps reduce friction later. Respect for creators strengthens trust across roles.

## **X. The Thread That Binds**

One might first notice the University's Fashion Department turning leftover materials into handbags. Yet beneath that observation lies something broader: an institution reshaping itself when pressured by ecological demands. Change arrives quietly - not through declarations but material choices. What counts as success here shifts slowly, folding ethics into design without announcing it. Excellence gains new weight when responsibility enters the room. A bag made from remnants carries more than belongings - it holds questions about what schools should stand for now.

What Professor Ananya Tyagi encounters isn't limited to one campus. Across elite design, business, and professional schools worldwide, similar pressures appear - shaped differently but rooted in the same tension. When prestige becomes part of an institution's identity, a reckoning follows: can exclusivity coexist with what matters now? Students expect relevance. Partners watch for integrity. Society looks for responsibility. The planet requires accountability. Each choice exposes a gap between image and impact.

Looking at how these models work together, one conclusion stands out: high quality and eco-aware thinking can coexist. What once seemed like a clash comes down to old ideas about who luxury speaks to and what it says. With most young buyers now choosing brands that match their beliefs, alongside nearly eight in ten upscale shoppers seeing green choices as part of true luxury, any organization that truly lives both ideals won't weaken its image - instead, it shapes what comes next.

Across the Master Lab floor moved a student, his bag stitched from old leather and bright synthetic scraps. Not a middle ground did he carry, but a step forward. What now faces Ananya is judgment - can her school see that gap clearly? Will it find enough resolve to move, ahead of younger design academies, before momentum shifts elsewhere?

Clear seams run through that bold shoulder bag - neat, intentional, undeniably high-end. Evidence points one way: top-tier design schools might find ignoring their waste harder than embracing it. Not linking with leftover materials isn't an option most elite institutions can justify. This project doesn't question if such schools should engage with discards. Their place in sustainability emerges not by choice, but necessity.