I J R S S I S, Issue (XII), Vol. I, Sept 2025: 137-142
A Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Journal
OPEN ACCESS
e-ISSN 2347 – 517X
Original Article

Reg. No. : MH-NGP/0000167
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCHES IN SOCIAL SCIENCE AND INFORMATION STUDIES

E-TEXTILES AND SMART GARMENTS IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

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Communicated : 26.08.2025 | Revision : 10.09.2025 Accepted : 25.09.2025 | Published: 15.10.2025

ABSTRACT:

E-textiles and smart garments integrate electronic functionality directly into fabrics, enabling sensing, actuation, communication, and adaptive behavior within apparel. This paper reviews the state of the art and emerging trajectories of e-textiles in the fashion industry, covering materials and fabrication methods; sensing and actuation modalities; power, data, and connectivity architectures; human factors and user experience; design and aesthetics; sustainability and circularity; standards and regulation; and market dynamics. We synthesize findings from academic and industry sources to identify key objectives and methodological approaches, highlight case studies in sports, health, workwear, and expressive fashion, and discuss barriers to scale, including durability, washability, safety, data privacy, and end-of-life management. The paper concludes with a roadmap emphasizing modular architectures, material innovation, interoperable standards, user-centered co-design, and lifecycle strategies to accelerate responsible adoption in mainstream fashion.

Keywords: *E-textiles, Smart garments, Wearable technology, Conductive textiles, Flexible electronics, Human-computer interaction, Sustainability, Washability, Biosensing, Internet of Things (IoT), Fashion technology, Standards, User experience.*

INTRODUCTION :

Introduction Textiles and electronics are coming together, moving from lab demos to real products in sports, healthcare, and everyday wear. Unlike regular wearables with hard gadgets strapped on, e-textiles build the tech into the yarns, coatings, and fabric. This can feel more comfortable, look better, and fit more naturally into daily life. For fashion, this mix opens new ways to create value—better performance, health insights, and interactive designs. It also brings new challenges in design, manufacturing, testing, and doing things responsibly. This paper gives a clear overview of e-textiles and smart garments, focusing on practical takeaways for fashion brands, designers, and factory partners.

OBJECTIVES:

1) To study the Map core technology building blocks for e-textiles and their relevance to fashion use cases.

2) To Compare fabrication and integration methodologies, including trade-offs among durability, washability, cost, and scalability.

3) To Assess human factors: comfort, fit, chronophysiology, skin compatibility, and usability.

4) To Analyze sustainability across the lifecycle, including material choices, repairability, and end-of-life pathways.

5) To Review regulatory, safety, and data governance considerations.

6) To identify market trends, barriers to adoption, and strategic opportunities for the fashion sector.

7) Propose a roadmap and research agenda to bridge lab-to-market gaps.

METHODOLOGY:

This study employed a multi-pronged approach. First, a literature review surveyed peer-reviewed articles on conductive textiles, flexible electronics, and wearable systems published between 2014 and 2025. In parallel, we scanned relevant standards, guidance, and regulatory documents (e.g., IEC, ISO, ASTM, FCC/CE, GDPR/CCPA). To gauge technology maturity and innovation directions, we analyzed patents and commercially available products. We then synthesized case studies across four domains—sports and fitness, healthcare and wellness, occupational safety, and expressive or interactive fashion—to contextualize technical findings. Expert perspectives were aggregated from industry reports, conference proceedings, and design practice to capture experiential insights. Finally, we evaluated approaches using a comparative framework spanning performance, comfort, aesthetics, cost, manufacturability, reliability, and sustainability.

Main Body of Research

1. Technology Building Blocks

1.1 Conductive and Functional Materials

This section outlines the conductive and functional materials used in e-textiles. Conductive yarns and fibers use metal-coated filaments like silver-plated nylon, copper, and stainless steel. Intrinsically conductive polymers include PEDOT: PSS and polyaniline. Carbon-based fillers include carbon nanotubes and graphene. Each material has trade-offs. These include conductivity, flexibility, corrosion risk, skin compatibility, and cost. Fabric structures also matter. Woven, knit, and nonwoven fabrics affect stretch, drape, and electrical stability. Knits stretch well but their resistance can change with movement. Wovens are stable and help with routing traces. Printed electronics can be added to textiles. Common methods are screen, inkjet, aerosol jet, and hybrid digital printing. These enable low-cost patterns. They can struggle with wash durability and flex fatigue. Encapsulation protects the electronics. TPU, silicone elastomers, parylene, and fluoropolymers are common choices. These balance water resistance, breathability, and hand feel. E-textiles can sense the body and the environment. Dry textile electrodes can capture ECG, EMG, and EEG. Strain and pressure can be measured with piezoresistive knits, capacitive fabrics, or optical fibers. Other sensors measure temperature, humidity, and sweat chemistry. IMUs add motion sensing through flexible interposers. E-textiles can also act on the body. Resistive heating traces provide warmth. Haptic feedback is possible with ERM or LRA motors and with electroactive polymers. Visual effects use electroluminescent elements, micro-LEDs, and thermochromic or electrochromic finishes.

1.2 Electronics, Power, and Connectivity

This section covers electronics, power, and connectivity in e-textiles. Flexible circuit boards and small modules attach to fabric using snaps, magnetic pogo pins, or sewable connectors. Power can come from coin cells for low-power clothes, thin-film lithium-ion or zinc batteries, or textile supercapacitors. Some systems harvest energy from heat, motion, or light with thermoelectric, piezoelectric, or photovoltaic yarns. For safety and washing, electronics should be well sealed and easy to remove. Power use is managed with simple tricks like duty cycling, on-device processing, and event-based sensing. Systems can use either distributed modules or one central hub. For wireless links, BLE is common for phone pairing. UWB helps with precise location. NFC is used for ID and setup. On-garment networks can route signals through conductive paths or flexible cables. Data should be processed on the node when possible to protect privacy. Firmware updates must be secure. BLE links should be encrypted. Collect only the data that is needed.

2. Fabrication and Integration Methods

This section explains how smart features are built into fabrics and how they are put together. At the yarn level, makers can spin conductive filaments or twist hybrid yarns. This gives high comfort and good durability, but it needs special supply chains. Embroidery and stitching use conductive threads for quick prototypes and can scale with automated machines. They need good strain relief and careful stitch design to prevent breakage. Weaving or knitting with functional yarns uses existing machines at high speed and can place sensors and heaters exactly where needed. These designs must respect minimum bend radius and avoid losses at crossovers. Printing or coating adds large-area features like antennas, heaters, and touch zones. Wash life improves when using stretchable binders and proper post-curing. Lamination and bonding attach flexible modules with TPU films, and sealing the edges is key for washability. Detachable electronics, such as snap-in pods for the battery and radio, make washing and repair easier, but they add mechanical limits and affect the look. Quality assurance includes mapping electrical resistance during production, optical checks, and accelerated aging for flex, abrasion, sweat, and washing, as well as biocompatibility tests.

3. Human Factors and User Experience

This section focuses on people's comfort and use. Comfort and fit come first. Fabrics should breathe, stretch, and recover without creating hot spots. Place hard parts away from pressure points like the shoulders and hips. Skin interfaces also matter. Dry electrodes work best with enough moisture and steady contact. The fabric structure and surface finish can lower impedance and reduce irritation. Heat and moisture must be managed. Heaters and insulation should keep a stable microclimate and avoid sweat build-up. Smart control can use skin and ambient sensors. Good interaction design is key. Use simple signals like small LEDs or gentle haptics. Add easy gestures or touch zones on sleeves. Keep the app clear and accessible for all users. Safety is essential. Electronics must be safe in sweat and wet conditions. Keep high-current traces isolated. Limit surface temperature to avoid burns. Ensure electromagnetic compatibility to reduce interference.

4. Washability, Reliability, and Standards

Washability, Reliability, and Standards Smart garments must survive washing and daily wear. Common failures include broken conductors from repeated bending, printed traces peeling off, corrosion from detergents and salt, and water getting into batteries. Good design helps prevent these issues. Use meander or serpentine traces to add stretch, add strain relief in stitch patterns, and protect circuits with breathable elastomers. Make power modules detachable so users can remove them before washing. Test garments against known standards. Use ISO 6330 for home washing with cycles adapted to e-textiles. Follow IEC 62368-1 for AV/ICT safety and IEC 60601-1 if the product is medical. Check durability with ASTM D4966 (Martindale abrasion), ASTM D3884 (Taber abrasion), ISO 13934 (tensile), and custom bend and flex tests. Clear labels matter. Tell users how to remove modules, use a wash bag, choose gentle cycles, and avoid harsh drying.

5. Sustainability and Circularity

Sustainable choices start with materials. Reduce precious metals where possible, and choose recyclable polymers or bio-based fibers when they meet performance needs. Design for disassembly so parts can be taken apart easily. Use screws or snaps instead of permanent glues, and use clear, identifiable connectors. Plan for the full life of the product. Allow repairs, such as replacing electrodes or batteries. Offer take-back and refurbishment programs. Watch environmental impacts. Limit nanoparticle release during washing, assess chemical finishes, and manage the energy use of heated garments. Follow trusted labels and guidance. OEKO-TEX can help with textile safety. IEC and

UL standards apply to electronics. New eco-design frameworks for e-textiles are emerging.

6. Regulatory, Privacy, and Ethics

Consumer smart garments must meet basic rules. Ensure EMC compliance (FCC/CE), electrical safety, and safe battery transport under UN 38.3. If the product measures or interprets health metrics, check medical device rules such as FDA or EU MDR and plan clinical validation. Protect user data. Follow GDPR and CCPA, get explicit consent, collect only what is needed, process data on-device when possible, and offer clear sharing and deletion options. Design ethically. Reduce bias in algorithms that read body signals. Support inclusive sizing and consider different skin tones and hair types that affect electrode contact. Ensure accessibility in hardware and apps.

7. Market Landscape and Use Cases

7.1 Sports and Fitness:

Clothes can have ECG and EMG to track training and recovery. Smart jerseys can measure heart rate, breathing, and movement. Heated jackets keep you warm outdoors. These features give real-time feedback and coaching and can help prevent injury. The hard parts are noise from motion, short battery life, and sweat changing sensor readings.

7.2 Health and Wellness

Shirts can track breathing and movement to help understand sleep. Clothes can also help with postpartum and elder monitoring and with posture correction. If the product makes health claims, it may need medical-grade tests. It also must feel good for long wear.

7.3 Occupational Safety and Workwear

Occupational Safety and Workwear Safety vests can add bright lights to improve visibility. Work clothes can sense gases and temperature, find a worker's location, and track fatigue and posture. Processing data on the garment helps protect privacy. Reliability and rule compliance are important.

7.4 Expressive and Interactive Fashion

Expressive and Interactive Fashion Clothes can change colors or patterns and add touch controls on sleeves. Costumes can sync lights and haptics for shows. Designs should look great, move well, feel comfortable, and work reliably while moving.

8. Business Models and Supply Chain

Business Models and Supply Chain Companies can sell subscriptions for analytics and firmware updates. Heated garments can be rented. Fashion brands can partner with electronics makers and work with textile mills and printers. Making at scale needs pilot lines for conductive yarns and printed fabrics and tools that link patternmaking with circuit layout. Big costs come from silver, batteries, labor to assemble, testing for quality, and handling returns.

9. Future Directions and Research Gaps

Materials need to be cheaper, tough, and resist rust, with washable stretch batteries, breathable coatings, and self-healing traces. Integration should move toward electronics built into fibers and yarns and connectors that can survive soldering and reflow. Algorithms must better remove motion noise from body signals, learn on-device, and adapt to different people and settings. Standards should define common wash and reliability tests and shared connectors and communication so parts work across brands. Sustainability should focus on recycling metals and plastics and on test methods that measure the true environmental

CONCLUSIONS:

E-textiles and smart garments are transitioning from niche prototypes to feasible commercial products across multiple fashion segments. The technology stack—conductive materials, textile architectures, flexible electronics, and software—has matured sufficiently to deliver compelling user experiences when combined with careful human-centered design. However, widespread adoption hinges on solving durability and washability, ensuring safety and privacy, achieving scalable manufacturing with consistent quality, and addressing sustainability at every lifecycle stage. Strategic priorities for the fashion industry include modular, detachable electronics; robust material and protective systems; interoperable standards; transparent data practices; and circular business models. Cross-disciplinary collaboration among designers, textile engineers, materials scientists, and regulators will be essential to unlock the full potential of e-textiles in fashion.

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