

Sustainable Fashion Consumption

Subjects: Environmental Studies

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The fast-fashion market is becoming popular, escalating, and aggravating the throwaway culture phenomenon. Thus, it is valuable to understand the factors that influence sustainable fashion consumption and the clothing disposal pattern among young consumers in developing countries like Malaysia. Personal norms, social norms, and environmental awareness were the key influencing factors of sustainable fashion consumption. Philanthropic clothing disposal approaches such as donating clothes to charity or giving them away to family and friends, and selling old clothing for economic reasons are popular among young adults in Malaysia. Facilitating conditions to dispose of unwanted clothing is not as crucial as in developing countries. Many areas in developing countries still lack or are unable to locate facilities that collect unwanted clothing.

Keywords: sustainable fashion consumption ; personal norms ; social norms ; environmental awareness

1. Clothing Disposal Behaviour

The retail–consumer interface consumption process involves acquisition, consumption, and disposition ^[1]. Past studies have mainly focused on the decision-making process relating to the product acquisition and consumption stages. Little research has been focused on the clothing disposition stage ^[2], especially in Malaysia or other developing countries ^[3]. Therefore, here mainly focuses on consumers' clothing disposition stage. Disposal is defined as the act of getting rid of something, whether it is discarded as waste or delivered for recycling or reuse ^[4]. In terms of clothing disposal, it is about why the individual disposes of their clothing, such as poor fit, outdated style, worn out, or boredom. Clothing disposal involves a behavioural action by reusing used clothing, recycling, donating to charities, giving it to a second-hand store, or eliminating it completely, and so on ^[5].

1.1. Philanthropic Disposal Behaviour

Philanthropy is a social relationship defined by a moral responsibility that links a supply of private resources with a demand for unfulfilled needs and desires conveyed through entreaty or other means of solicitation ^[6]. Consumers with higher educational levels, environmental knowledge, social status, and who are married usually have a greater tendency to display philanthropic dispositions ^[7]. The consumers will most likely donate and give away the clothes they paid a high price to obtain ^{[8][9]}.

According to Wai Yee, Hassan ^[3], consumers who have a philanthropic conscience and wish to make a positive contribution to society would give their unwanted clothing to charity organisations. Some charity facilities provide used clothes recycling services. Some charitable organisations provide a door-to-door collection service for the goods they collect. On the other hand, other charitable organisations place collection boxes in strategic areas, such as neighbouring housing developments or shopping malls, to dispose of or recycle unwanted items. Thus, philanthropic disposal behaviour is associated with individual clothing disposal activities conducted to assist those who are less fortunate.

Another philanthropic clothing behaviour is giving away the clothing to family and friends to swap or donate for the valuable, unfit, or unused clothes ^{[2][5][10]}. However, not all individuals are willing to give away or dispose of their valuable unused clothing ^[5]. Some people retain their clothing even though they have not worn it in a long time because of the value, the fit, the attachment, the aesthetic items, and the guilt of discarding it ^[2].

1.2. Economic Disposal Behaviour

Economic disposal behaviour concerns the reselling of unwanted clothing. This is due to the reason that consumers feel guilty about throwing away clothes. Therefore, they sell unwanted clothes to the merchants, which could also help them generate some returning revenue while protecting the environment. In other words, economic concerns have driven people to resell and reuse clothing ^[11]. Past studies also discovered that consumers, regardless of educational level,

displayed the economic dispositions in their disposal behaviours, such as reselling the high-value clothes they acquired to earn some returning revenue ^{[3][1][8][9]}. In addition, a financial crisis might trigger the economic reasons for the disposal behaviours of the consumers.

2. Personal Norms

Personal norms can be defined as the feelings of strong moral obligation to engage in altruistic or green behaviour ^[12]. An individual's altruistic behaviour is derived from a moral obligation and an internal structure of values ^[13]. Therefore, personal norms can be highly related to moral obligation. A person with high personal norms may be motivated by an inner desire to act pro-environmentally, whereas those with low personal norms might hinder the behaviour. Past studies have examined the correlation between personal norms and various pro-environmental behaviours ^{[14][15][16]}. A study revealed that moral obligation had favourable and substantial effects on purchase intentions of organic, fair-trade, and recycled clothing products ^[16]. Young consumers' personal values have shifted from being self-centred to being more society-centred due to the growing concerns about environmental damage and social inequality in the fashion industry ^[17]. Joanes ^[15] also discovered a positive and substantial relationship between personal norms and the intention to minimise personal clothing consumption.

3. Social Norms

Social norms are shared beliefs about proper behaviour within a community regarding how respond to a situation ^[18]. Injunctive and descriptive social norms are the information about effective behaviour based on the perception of what others do ^[19]. Marketers need to understand how to adjust social norms to the specific contexts to motivate sustainable consumption to make products more ethical and environmentally friendly for future generations. Social norms have been shown to positively impact various behavioural domains in sustainable behaviour ^{[18][20][21]}. Doran and Larsen ^[20] found that people were more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviour when they receive messages, including information indicating that people around them are also doing the same things. Borusiak, Szymkowiak ^[14] also explained that individuals usually feel pressured to engage in a specific behaviour from the people around them. Moreover, observing other people contribute to a common cause, such as environmental preservation, might enhance the trust in cooperative intentions of other people, strengthen beliefs in achieving the desired outcome, and improve people's willingness to contribute their share in environmental preservation ^[21].

4. Environmental Awareness

In recent years, sustainability issues, such as the ineffective disposal of textiles in the apparel industry, have received heightened attention from scholars in developed and developing countries ^{[22][23][24][25]}. There is a concern that a huge amount of textile waste is disposed of in landfills each year, causing pollution and chemical hazards, including pesticides, dye waste, and emissions. Textile manufacturers have started to implement various environmentally and socially responsible initiatives throughout their supply chains to reduce the environmental impact of the fast fashion trend.

Past scholars have agreed that environmental awareness and attitudes better predict sustainable behaviours ^{[5][25][26]}. Consumers that place a high value on environmental stewardship tend to be more environmentally conscious and recycle unwanted clothing more willingly than those who are not. Ho, Vu ^[25] discovered a positive and significant relationship between environmental knowledge and purchase intention of sustainable fashion. The positive relationship comes from the consumers who have better environmental knowledge. They are more likely to contribute to solving environmental issues than those less concerned about the impact of fast fashion on the environment ^[27]. Puspita and Chae ^[28] found a cultural difference in environmental awareness between Western and Asian countries. Western consumers are often more environmentally conscientious and willing to pay a premium for fashion products than Asian consumers, who remain price-sensitive ^[28].

5. Sustainable Fashion Consumption

The sustainable fashion issue has received a lot of attention in marketing studies. Various concepts or terms connected to sustainable fashion, such as ethical fashion, green fashion, and eco-fashion, are reflected in the literature. Sustainable consumption is defined as "consumption that supports the ability of current and future generations to meet their material and other needs, without causing irreversible damage to the environment or loss of function in natural systems" ^[29]. It also refers to products that benefit society and the environment in manufacturing and consumption processes and contribute to forming a sustainable future for humankind ^[30].

There are three stages in sustainable fashion consumption: production, purchase, and post-purchase stages. In post-purchase sustainable fashion, consumption has been linked to the disposal stage, such as reusability, reconditioning, and reselling unwanted clothes [5][24]. Cho, Gupta [31] reported the association among style-conscious, sustainable purchase, and disposal behaviours. Environmentally conscious consumers are more likely to recycle or dispose of their clothes not to harm the environment or cause pollution. Pro-environmental consumers tend to dispose of their unwanted clothing in sustainable ways, such as recycling or redesigning the clothes to reduce the environmental damage caused by inefficient clothing disposal [1]. In addition, consumers usually will also dispose of their clothing by donating them to charities, passing them to family and friends, reselling them to a second-hand store, or eliminating them, and so on [2][5][10].

6. Facilitating Conditions

An individual may intend to execute specific conduct but might be prevented from doing so by their environment—these externally favourable environmental factors, often known as facilitating conditions. Thus, facilitating conditions include an individual's capability to perform the act, their level of interest in the act, the difficulty of completing the act, the knowledge on the need to perform the act, and the surrounding setting that increase the intention to perform the act. The Theory of Interpersonal Behaviour (TIB) explains that behaviour is shaped by an individual's intention to engage in action and the facilitating conditions of present situational constraints and conditions [32]. According to the theory, facilitating conditions may favourably or adversely impact behaviour. Moreover, behaviour is moderated by the facilitating conditions that significantly impact the final behaviour performed.

A study has shown that the more favourable the facilitating conditions, the higher the participation rate, whereas insufficient accessibility resulted in a low participation rate, regardless of the consumers' pro-environmental consumption behaviour of fashion products [33]. Regardless of the levels of habit or intention, facilitating conditions play a critical role in their presence or their absence. The facilitating conditions function as a moderator towards clothing disposal behaviour. The facilitating condition will moderate a philanthropic behaviour either to give the clothing to charity, family, and friends or to dispose of the clothing for economic reasons.

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