The development of a scale for measuring voluntary simplistic clothing consumption in the South African emerging market context

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Due to ever-increasing population figures and continuous degradation of natural resources by various industries, including the textile and apparel supply chain, it is imperative to sensitize consumers regarding the environmental impact of their lifestyles and consumption (Buenstorf & Cordes, 2007). Clothing consumption, in particular, has severe environmental consequences. Sustainable, simplistic ways of consuming and living should thus be encouraged to counter further environmental deterioration (Ruppert-Stroescu, Armstrong, LeHew, & Connell, 2015). This may include efforts to reduce the amount of clothing that is consumed and to embrace options such as repairing, recycling and/ or reusing clothing. It may also involve endeavors to support locally produced clothing and to refuse/ boycott brands that are guilty of unethical conduct (Wu, Boyd Thomas, Moore, & Carroll, 2013; Zamwel, Sasson-Levy, & Ben-Porat, 2014). Collectively, such efforts may demonstrate voluntary simplistic lifestyles with underlying dimensions of material simplicity, self-determination, ecological awareness and human scale as proposed by Leonard-Barton (1981). Although numerous studies have since the 1980's explored voluntary simplicity in more developed economies, the topic remains understudied in the local South African context, especially in terms of clothing consumption behavior. This study's purpose was to develop and validate a scale to enable further investigation of voluntary simplistic clothing consumption in the local context. Scale development guidelines originally prescribed by Churchill (1979) and later applied by others (e.g. Kang & Johnson, 2011) was followed, which included initial scale generation, scale purification and subsequent validation (Kang & Johnson, 2011).

During initial scale generation, a firm conceptual foundation was used to generate a potential pool of items for measuring voluntary simplistic clothing consumption practices in the local context. These items were patterned after general items and dimensions in Leonard-Barton's (1981) voluntary simplicity behavioral index. However, clothing experts employed rigorous criteria to ensure content validity and reduced the pool to 22 items that were specifically focused on clothing consumption behavior. During scale purification, these items were incorporated into a structured, self-administered paper-based questionnaire that was distributed by means of non-probability sampling among approximately equal amounts of male and female respondents belonging to various ethnic groups, aged 19 to 78, and residing in various suburbs of Gauteng. Following the example of Kang and Johnson (2011), the resulting data was split randomly into two data sets with one half used for scale purification (*n = 501)* and the other half for scale validation *(n = 501).*

The first scale purification procedure involved the elimination of two items that exhibited corrected item-total correlations lower than .30. The remaining twenty items were subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA), whereby four factors with eigenvalues ≥ 1 were retained and criteria for further elimination of six items included high cross-loadings (>.40) or low factor loadings (<.40) to retained factors. The resulting four factor solution accounted for 47,88% of the total variance. Further confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) however led to the pursuit of a three-factor solution with the elimination of two additional items due to low factor loadings. The final confirmatory model (NFI = 0.91; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.079) was thus estimated on 12 items that parsimoniously represented three dimensions of voluntary simplistic consumption practices namely, (1) supporting local and ethically responsible clothing brands, (2) demonstrating preference for unique handcrafted clothing and (3) reducing clothing consumption by (among other) extending the lifespan of existing products. This factor solution was re-confirmed through subsequent CFA procedures that was performed on the separate sample (*n = 501)*. The final confirmatory model achieved acceptable fit (NFI = 0.90; CFI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.080) with factor loadings ranging from 0.48 to 0.86. It is envisaged that this scale may serve as an important foundation for much needed future empirical research into voluntary simplistic clothing consumption behavior in emerging market contexts such as South Africa.

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