

Why Buy Used Clothing during the Pandemic? Examining the Impact of COVID-19 on Consumers' Secondhand Fashion Consumption Motivations

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Introduction While the retail industry has been hit hard by COVID-19, the resale market around the world is weathering well in the storm of the pandemic. The resale sector is expected to grow five times over the next five years with over \$64 billion in sales and to surpass the size of the fast fashion industry by 2029 (Weinswig, 2017; Marino, 2020). Nonetheless, during the global pandemic, consumers were confined to homes, lost jobs, and had to increase spending on essential goods. As COVID-19 brought such an abrupt shift in consumer behavior, it is worth examining how the pandemic affected consumers' secondhand fashion consumption (SFC) behavior. The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of COVID-19 on consumers' motivations behind SFC intentions between high vs. low COVID-19 impact groups.

Theoretical Background & Hypothesis Development The theory of reasoned action (TRA) predicts how individuals behave based on their pre-existing attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Applying this framework, researchers have uncovered that certain consumer motivations are powerful drivers behind their intentions to engage in secondhand consumption. Studies found that the concern for sustainability, linked with waste reduction and greener consumption, is one of the most common motivations to purchase used products (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Hamari et al., 2016). The second motivation is economic gains since consumers may purchase items at cheaper prices than what they are offered by the regular market (Hamari et al., 2016). Social motivation as one's desire to become part of the greater sharing community has also been identified (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Hamari et al., 2016). Additionally, the variety-seeking motivation to gain access to an abundant selection of products and brands and the fun-seeking motivation have newly emerged as dimensions of secondhand consumption (Kim & Jin, 2020).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic has led household savings and consumption to drop significantly, consumers have been forced to adopt alternative options (e.g., purchasing cheaper items) given the socio-economic constraints (Sheth, 2020), and physical distancing necessitated by the pandemic increased the use of mediating services (e.g., virtual gathering) to satisfy their needs for social connectedness (Kirk & Rifkin, 2020). Such consumption changes are likely to be more severe for individuals who lost employment, faced physical and mental challenges, and remained isolated from the community. Thus, consumers' motivations for SFC may differ according to the impact of COVID-19. Taken together, we hypothesize that:

H1a-H1e Sustainability (H1a), social (H1b), variety-seeking (H1c), fun-seeking (H1d), and cost-saving (H1e) motivations are positively related to attitude towards SFC.

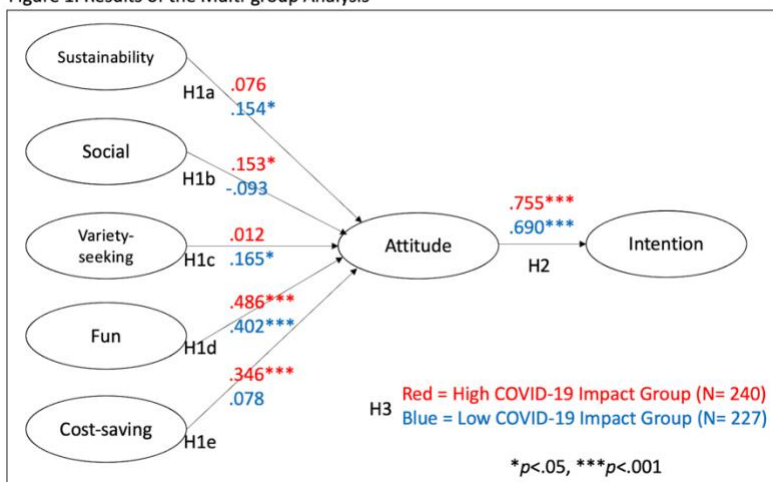
H2 Attitudes toward SFC are positively related to purchase intentions.

H3 Impact of COVID-19 on daily life will moderate the relationships between motivations and attitudes towards SFC.

Methods A total of 467 participants from S. Korea were recruited by an online market research company. The measurement scales for SFC motivations were adapted from Kim and Jin's (2020) study, and the COVID-19 impact scale was adapted from Yoon and Kim (2020) and Park and Kim (2010). Psychometric properties (e.g., reliability, discriminant validity, etc.) of the measurement scales were ensured. Data were analyzed through the PLS path modeling technique using SmartPLS software. To test the moderation effect of COVID-19 impact, a multi-group PLS analysis was conducted with a median split method (i.e., low impact group = 227, high impact group = 240).

Results & Discussion Results demonstrated that sustainability ($\beta=.118^*$), fun ($\beta=.451^{***}$), and cost-saving ($\beta=.207^{***}$) motivations positively affected attitudes, while social and variety-seeking motivations did not (H1a, H1d, and H1e supported). Attitude also positively affected purchase intentions, supporting H2. The moderation result revealed that for the low impact group, the paths between the following motivations and attitudes were significant: sustainability ($\beta=.154^*$), variety-seeking ($\beta=.165^*$), and fun ($\beta=.402^{***}$). For the high impact group, the motivations of social ($\beta=.153^*$), fun ($\beta=.486^{***}$), and cost-saving ($\beta=.346^{***}$) had a significant influence on attitudes. Based on such group differences, H3 was partially supported (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Results of the Multi-group Analysis



The findings highlight that consumers are motivated to engage in SFC for different reasons depending on the impact of COVID-19 on their daily lives. Notably, the cost-saving and social motivations--mostly extrinsic in nature--were significant drivers for the high impact group only, which is likely to be the result of a pandemic-driven economic recession and reduction in social interaction. Conversely, the attitudes of the low-impact group are influenced

by sustainability and variety-seeking motivations, which are considered to be more intrinsic. For both groups, fun was the most salient motivation in increasing attitudes. This research provides insights for marketers in the resale market on consumer segmentation and targeting strategies during- and post-pandemic. As one of the first studies to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the resale market, our findings advance the existing literature on secondhand consumption.

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