Generational Cohort Comparisons of Clothing Disposal and Hoarding Behaviors

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Key words: Clothing, cohort, disposal, hoarding

After purchase and subsequent wear/use, consumers may no longer want their old fashion products (apparel/shoes/accessories) due to wear out, taste change, out of fashion, size problems, and so on. Little attention is paid to how consumers get rid of unwanted fashion items. Though almost of 100% textile wastes are recyclable, the average U.S. consumer throws away about 80 pounds of clothing and other textiles annually (Council for Textile Recycling, 2018). In the study of textile recycling, Koch and Domina (2002) reported that consumers threw away unwanted clothing, because it was convenient and there was no recycling information available.

Consumers keep apparel products, even though they do not wear/use due to hoarding tendencies. Hoarding is defined as the "acquisition of, and failure to discard, possessions which appear to be useless or of limited value" (Frost & Gross, 1993, p. 367). It has been noted that on average, women wear 20-30% of their wardrobes, while the remaining is left unused or dispose of. Researchers have found that consumers hoard unwanted clothing that has perceived values even if they no longer wear them (Joung, 2013).

Consumers get rid of unwanted fashion products through participation in recycling; such as, swapping, donation, passing-on, resale, reuse, and others. Research in consumer behavior has focused on clothing recycling behaviors from diverse perspectives including environmentalism and motivations. For example, college students who actively participated in recycling were more likely to be concerned about the environment and showed positive attitudes toward the environment (Joung & Park-Poaps, 2013). They (2013) found that consumers resold unwanted clothing for economic gains and donated for protecting the environment and for helping others. Materialistic and fashion-oriented consumers were indifferent about the environment and did not participate in clothing recycling (Joung 2013).

This study employs generational cohort theory to better understand consumers' post-purchase behaviors. Generational cohorts encompass a groups of people who have similar life experiences due to growing up within a specific period of time (Rahulan et al, 2015). A generational cohort indicates similar attitudes, values, and shopping behaviors. It is believed that consumers in different generations would show different post-purchase behaviors. This study includes three different generations: Millennials (born between 1980 and 1996), Generation Xers (born between 1965 and 1980), and Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964). The purpose of this research was to compare clothing hoarding tendencies, participation in recycling, amount of clothing discarding, and proportion of unworn items kept in the closet, among the three generational groups.

A self-administered online survey questionnaire was developed and contained four constructs of post-purchase behaviors; hoarding, keeping unworn items, discarding, and participation in textile recycling (e.g., resales, donation). For hoarding, seven items were adopted

(Frost and Gross, 1993) and measured using a seven-point Likert type scale (*1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree*). An example of the item is that "I have a great deal of distress regarding fashion items I have." For participation in textile recycling, six different options were adopted from Joung and Park-Poaps (2013) and measured using a seven-point Likert type scale (*1=never, 7=always*). Two questions were asked to indicate percentage of unworn fashion items in the closet and number of discarding in a year.

A nationwide representative sample was purchased and a total of 443 (199 males and 244 females) completed the online survey. The majority of the respondents were Caucasian (81.9%), married (79%), and had Bachelor's or graduate degrees (80%). Factor analyses were conducted on multi-items measuring hoarding (7 items, α=.92) and participation in recycling (5 items, α=.86) to extract domains. Descriptive statistics showed that, overall, lower mean scores on hoarding (M=3.12) and participation in textile recycling (M=3.10) on a 7-point scale. On average, the respondents discarded about 10 items per year and kept 20%-30% of unworn fashion items in their closet.

The sample was divided into 3 groups for further analyses: Millennials ($n = 112$), generation Xers ($n = 115$), and baby boomers ($n = 214$). Multivariate Analysis of Variance was employed to compare generational group differences in the post-purchase behaviors. Results indicated statistically significant mean differences on hoarding ($F = 50.62$, $p < .001$) and participation in recycling ($F = 64.49$, $p < .001$), whereas no differences were found in numbers of discarding and percent of unworn items in the closet among the three groups. Post-hoc analyses using *Scheffe* test revealed that baby boomers exhibited statistically lower mean scores on hoarding than millennials ($\Delta X_{BB\text{-}millennials} = -1.58$, $p < .001$) and generation Xers ($\Delta X X_{BB\text{-}GenXers} = -.60$, $p < .001$) did. Generation Xers had a lower mean score on hoarding than millennials ($\Delta X_{GenXers\text{-}Millennials} = -.98$, $p < .001$). For participation in recycling, baby boomers showed statistically lower mean scores than millennials ($\Delta X_{BB\text{-}millennials} = -1.74$, $p < .001$) and generation Xers ($\Delta X = -.77$, $p < .001$). Generation Xers had a lower score on participation in recycling than millennials ($\Delta X_{GenXers\text{-}Millennials} = -.97$, $p < .001$).

One of interesting findings was that baby boomers were significantly less likely to participate in recycling than both generation Xers and millennials. This result was inconsistent with previous research that older consumers were more likely to participate in recycling than younger ones (Joung 2013). An additional study focusing on baby boomers' recycling behavior may be warranted. A future study should examine disposal behaviors in conjunction with fashion purchases. Note that regardless of generations, overall, the respondent showed a high level of discarding behavior; throwing away about 10 fashion items per year. The fashion industry and public media should actively promote consumers participation in recycling by featuring the recycling process and the benefits of textile recycling, such as, helping others, saving materials/energy, and preventing pollution.

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