

Addie Martindale, Georgia Southern University, USA
Ellen McKinney, Iowa State University, USA

Key words: home sewing, consumption, ready-to-wear dissatisfaction, decision-making

Significance and purpose. There is a resurgence in interest by women in personal clothing sewing (Haider, 2015). By sewing some of their own clothing, women are opting out of purchasing some ready-to-wear (RTW) clothing. Understanding this choice holds significance both for retailers of RTW clothing and clothing-making suppliers. The purpose of this study was to explore home sewers' decision processes when sewing or buying clothing.

Related literature and relevant theory. A sewer's decision to make or buy clothing is part of the Consumer Decision Process (CDP) (Engel, Blackwell, & Minard, 1995). The CPD model consists of the following stages: (a) need recognition, (b) search for information, (c) pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives, (d) purchase, (e) consumption, (f) post-consumption evaluation, and (g) divestment (Engel, Blackwell, & Minard, 1995). The home sewer's choice between making or buying clothing may correspond to the *pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives* stage. Most home sewing research has focused on the factors that influenced women's sewing participation without consideration of their having the choice to sew or buy clothing. The concept of a choice began to emerge in Kean and Levin's (1989) research that explored sewing consumer segments. Clothing is integral to the process of self-presentation, where an individual seeks to control the perceptions of others through clothing selection (Guy & Banim, 2000). Sewer's make or buy decisions may be influenced by a desire to control self-presentation.

Methods. This research was part of a larger grounded theory study that used qualitative methods (Saldana, 2016) to explore the reasons why women choose to sew clothing for themselves. Fifteen female home sewers participated in in-depth interviews regarding the reasons they choose to sew, their sewing-related consumer behavior and clothing sewing decision-making process. The interviews were recorded and audio transcribed. The data was coded independently by each researcher with an agreement rate of 96.38% surpassing the recommended agreement threshold (Saldana, 2016). This research explores the findings from the subtheme of *Control over Ready-to-Wear Consumption* within the larger study's emergent theme of *Control*.

Results. Sewing provided the women with appearance self-presentation control (Guy & Banim, 2000) through sewing of clothing that was tailored to their individual personality and sense of style. It provided them control over clothing selection, fit, and quality. Sewing also provided them control over their RTW consumption, as they had the option to sew or buy their clothing. This resulted in a unique CPD in regards to clothing purchases.

The proposed Home Sewer's Clothing Consumer Decision Process (Figure 1) is similar to the traditional CDP (Engel et al., 1995). Differences begin at stage 3—*pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives*. Home sewers have guidelines regarding their clothing acquisition, which guide their evaluation of the alternatives to buy materials to sew clothing or to buy ready-made clothing. Factors considered in a sew-or-buy evaluation include: time, skills, cost, and product availability. Depending on the choice to sew or buy, these consumers follow one of two *purchase* and *consumption* paths. For the sewing path, the *purchase* stage includes the purchase of patterns, fabrics, and notions. The *consumption* stage was expanded to include consumption of sewing materials preceding the consumption of the sewn clothing. The two paths re-join at the *post-consumption evaluation* stage. Finally, at the *divestment* stage, the path again diverges, considering the outcomes generated from both sew and buy decisions. Differences in the individual's investment are experienced when a clothing is made instead of bought. Also considered are the increased satisfaction factors and psychological benefits that occur when sewing versus buying.

Implications: The developed model provides an understanding of the importance of control over self-presentation and the evaluative factors sewers use when deciding to sew or buy clothing. Retailers of RTW clothing and clothing-making supplies may use this information to tailor their marketing strategies to consumers who have the option to sew their own clothing. The investment made when garments are sewn instead of purchased has the potential to increase wardrobe sustainability by extending the time period a garment is worn. The model also provides a starting point for further exploration into other craft-related consumer decision behaviors.

References

- Engel, J., Blackwell, R., & Miniard, Paul W. (1995). *Consumer behavior* (7th ed.). Fort Worth, TX: Dryden Press.
- Guy, A., & Banim, M. (2000). Personal collections: Women's clothing use and identity. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 9(3), 313.
- Haider, Z. (2015, July). Loose thread: Competition from e-commerce and online auctions will stunt growth. *IBISWorld Industry Report No. 45113*. Los Angeles, CA: IBISWorld.
- Kean, R. C., & Levin, C. O. (1989). Orientation towards home sewing. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 8, 28–34

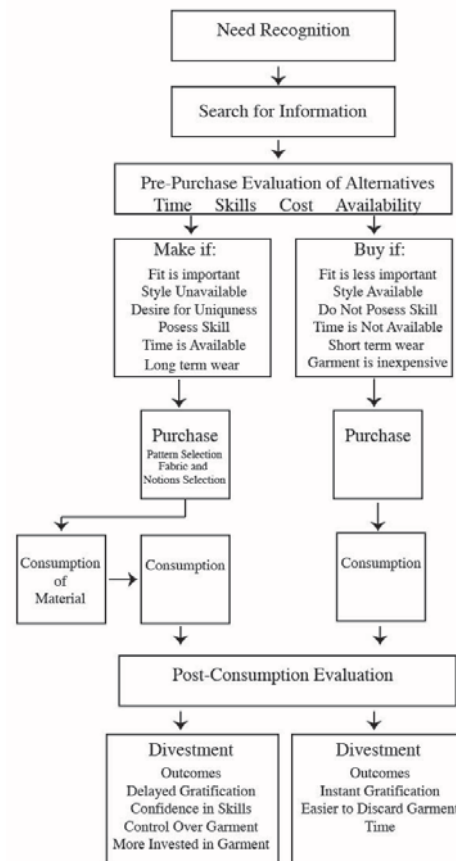


Figure 1 Home Sewer's Clothing Consumer Decision Process Model