Determinants of Consumers' Sustainable Disposal Behavior of Clothing Items

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Introduction

Consumer behavior research, mainly regarding clothing, is primarily focused on buying behavior (Mugge et al., 2010). However, it is critical to investigate all phases of the consumption cycle (i.e., from purchase through usage and to the disposal) of purchased items (Mugge et al., 2010). The disposal stage of consumer behavior has gained attention in the arena of contemporary consumer behavior research due to the rise of a throwaway culture stemming from excessive consumption of clothing items (Yee et al., 2016). Past studies regarding consumers' clothing disposal behavior have focused on the role of knowledge and attitudinal variables in encouraging such practices (Connell & Kozar, 2014). Other research has investigated the impact of situational factors, such as convenience and accessibility (i.e., the proximity of textile recycling stations and donation depots) on clothing disposal behavior (Domina & Koch, 2001; Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009; Laitala, 2014; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009; Webner et al., 2016). However, most of the past research has focused on these personal and situational factors separately. Present study fills this research gap by considering both internal subjective factors (e.g., attitude, habit) and external contextual factors (e.g., convenience, institutional constraints, and social practices) as predictors of consumers' sustainable clothing disposal behavior.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

The conceptual research framework for this study was developed by adopting theoretical elements from the Theory of Interpersonal Behavior (TIB) proposed by Triandis (1977). Triandis (1977) recognized the key role played by social factors, emotions, cognition, habits, and situational condition in forming intentions and behaviors. As in many other models (e.g., Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)), intentions are immediate antecedent of behavior. But crucially, habits also mediate behavior, and both these influences are moderated by facilitating conditions. Behavior in any situation is a function partly of intention, partly of habitual responses, and partly of the situational constraints and conditions (Triandis, 1977). Furthermore, intention is influenced by social, affective, and cognitive factors. TIB (1977) appears to have an additional explanatory value over TRA and TPB. Based on Triandis's (1977) TIB, present study considers three factors that determine environmentally sustainable

clothing disposal behavior: sustainable disposal intention of clothing items, recycling habit, and perceived convenience. Furthermore, sustainable disposal intention of clothing items is considered as a function of environmental attitude towards green clothing, perceived social pressure, and affect towards sustainable clothing disposal behavior.

Based on the extant literature, this study proposed following seven hypotheses. Consumers' environmental attitude toward green clothing (*H1*), Perceived social pressure (*H2*), and affect towards sustainable clothing disposal behavior (*H3*) positively influences their sustainable disposal intention of clothing items. Consumers' sustainable disposal intention of clothing (*H4*) and recycling habits (*H5*) positively influences their environmentally sustainable clothing disposal behavior. The sixth and seventh hypothesis predicted a moderating effect of perceived convenience: (*H6*) the higher the consumers' perceived convenience, the stronger the positive relationship is between their sustainable disposal intention of clothing items and environmentally sustainable clothing disposal behavior; (*H7*) the higher the consumers' perceived convenience, the stronger the positive relationship is between their recycling habits and environmentally sustainable clothing disposal behavior.

Methods and Data Analysis

Data were collected through an online survey with a national convenience sample ($n = 304$) of participants living in the U.S. The survey was distributed through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The research variables were measured by five-point Likert-type scales containing items adapted from existing valid scales. Demographic information was also collected. IBM's Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to run reliability analysis, correlations, simple and multiple regressions, and descriptive statistics.

Results

The useable sample consisted of 168 men (55.3%) and 136 women (44.7%). Most of the respondents reported having completed a college degree (47.0%). Respondents with annual household income of $50,000 - $74,999 (30.5%) formed the largest group. Most of the participants were employed (73.0%). Cronbach's α values of all the scales were greater than .70 indicating the scales were reliable. The hypothesized relationships among variables were tested through a series of simple and multiple regression analysis. The results revealed that environmental attitude toward green clothing (Std. β = .107, $p < .05$) and affect towards sustainable clothing disposal behavior (Std. β = .671, $p < .001$) positively influenced consumers' sustainable disposal intention of clothing items, while perceived social pressure had no significant influence on sustainable disposal intention of clothing items (Std. β = .070, $p = .116$). Sustainable disposal intention of clothing significantly predicted environmentally sustainable

clothing disposal behavior (Std. β = .211, *p* < .001). Recycling habits also significantly predicted environmentally sustainable clothing disposal behavior (Std. β = .340, *p* < .001). Perceived convenience had a significant main effect on sustainable clothing disposal behavior (Std. β = .580, *p* < .05). However, it was not a significant moderator of the relationship between sustainable disposal intention of clothing and environmentally sustainable clothing disposal behavior. The significant relationship between recycling habit and clothing disposal behavior becomes insignificant when the moderator is added in the model (Std. β = .219, *p* = .293). In conclusion, H1, H3, H4, and H5 were supported and there was no support for H2, H6, and H7.

Conclusion and Implications

The present study applied Triandis's (1977) TIB as a theoretical framework which revealed that both the internal (e.g., attitude, emotion) and contextual (e.g., convenience) factors act as important determinants of environmentally sustainable clothing disposal behavior. The study also established the importance of recycling habits' influence on clothing disposal behavior and identified the influential role of emotion in predicting sustainable clothing consumption behavior. In future, predictive models may include other situational conditions (e.g., access to recycling services, frequency of doorstep collection, and availability of drop-off facilities) in the environment which may influence an individual's ability to perform sustainable clothing disposal behavior. Future research may also evaluate demographic characteristic influences on sustainable clothing disposal behavior.

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