

What motivates people to repurpose their garments?: Emerging versus developed perspectives

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Introduction: Sustainability issues become more pronounced in emerging markets (vs. developed markets) due to rapidly expanding markets, rising consumption levels, increased textile manufacturing, and the customer's need for the latest and greatest fashion products (Kumar & Srivastava, 2020). This is increasingly apparent by the most recent Sustainable Development rankings of the 193 United Nations member states. Member states are ranked on overall progress towards achieving each of the 17 sustainable development goals with a max score of 100 indicating all have been achieved. As an example, the United Kingdom, a developed market, scored 81% and is ranked #11 out of 163 in 2021. Conversely, South Africa, an emerging market, ranks 108 with a score of 64%. Both countries have seen mild improvements of 5-6% since 2000 (United Nations, 2022). The variance in scoring and ranking of sustainability development between emerging and developed markets motivated researchers to conduct additional research studies on the differences between consumer repurposing practices in two different countries, South Africa and the United Kingdom. Additionally, self-construal concepts were used as a theoretical foundation for the study.

Purpose/Originality: Previous studies found craft-making enables makers to gain self-actualization and achieve personal goals and needs. However, there are not enough studies conducted to find out what motivates people to repurpose their clothing in developed and emerging countries based on self-construals and sustainable behavior. Therefore, the following research questions are examined in this study: 1) How are self-construals of those who repurpose their garments different among people from other countries?, 2) How are motivations of those who repurpose their garments different among people from other countries?, and 3) How are social engagements of those who repurpose their garments different among people from other countries?

Design Methodology/Approach: Participants were recruited by market-based research firm (Qualtrics) to complete an online survey in December 2022 and distributed to participants who resided in one of two countries: the United Kingdom (n = 185) and South Africa (n = 185). Reasons for repurposing were measured using fifteen items, on a 5-point rating scale, adapted from Collier's (2011) study on reasons for making textile handcrafts. Various questions related to participants' experience with repurposing their apparel items were measured. Questions related to repurposing communities such as what type of individuals/repurposing communities they interact with, what motivates participants to engage with those repurposing communities,

and what type of activities they do to engage others were asked. Self-construal was measured using 23 items (Singelis, 1994) on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Finally, sustainability behavior was measured using nine items on a 5-point Likert type scale.

Results: To answer the first research question, an ANOVA test was conducted but found no significant differences in interdependent ($F [1, 368] = 3.567, p < 0.060$) self-construal, but significant differences were found in independent ($F [1, 368] = 69.08, p < 0.001$) self-construal between two countries. Independent self-construal was higher for South African participants (mean = 5.59, S.D. = 0.82) compared to the U.K participants (mean = 4.87, S.D. = 1.05). To answer the second research question an ANOVA test was conducted and results indicated most of the motivations were significantly different between two countries with South African participants scoring higher than U.K. participants except for one item, “I can’t afford to buy new”, U.K. participants (mean= 3.16, S.D =1.19) scored higher than South African participants (mean= 2.83, S.D =1.18) but it wasn’t significantly different ($p=0.009$). To answer the third research question, we analyzed what type of individuals/repurposing communities’ participants interacted with those who practice repurposing apparel items, participants’ motivations to engage with other communities or individuals, and what type of activities they engage in with others. Most of our participants (N= 291, 78.64%) interacted with friends/family, but there were some significant differences between the two groups. More than one-third of U.K. participants mainly interacted with friends/family (N=72, 38.92%) not indicating other online communities. However, many South African participants indicated that they interacted not only with friends/family but also, with online communities such as TikTok (N= 109, 58.9%) and YouTube (N= 105, 56.8 %) compared to the U.K participants who indicated TikTok (N= 69, 37.3% %) and YouTube (N=58, 31.4%). Motivations for engaging with repurposing communities/ individuals was also significantly different between the two groups. Overall, both groups engaged with others mainly to “Learn new skills” (N= 281, 75.7%) as well as “Gain Inspiration” (N=215, 58.1%). However, significantly more South African participants “Share personal repurposing projects or other related thoughts/ideas” (S.A.: N=146, 79.3%, U.K.:N= 120, 64.9%), “Teach others how to sew or sewing related techniques in a formal or informal setting” (S.A.:N=119, 64.3%; U.K: N= 67, 36.2%), “Donate sewing related resources” (S.A: N=85, 45.9%;U.K.: N= 53, 28.6%) compared to the U.K. participants who “Share personal repurposing projects or other related thoughts/ideas (N= 120, 64.9%). Most of our participants felt a “Sense of achievement” (N= 229, 61.9%) and “Happiness” (N= 187, 50.5%) when they used their repurposed items but there were some significant differences found between two groups. More South African participants felt “Excited” (S.A.: N= 108, 58.4%; U.K.: N= 56, 30.3%), “Happiness” (S.A: N= 107, 57.8%; U.K.: N= 79, 42.7%), and “Unique” (S.A.: N= 101, 54.6%; U.K.: N=64, 34.6%). However, more U.K. participants felt a “Sense of achievement” (N= 125, 67.6%) compared to South African participants (N= 104, 56.2%). When the sustainable behavior of the groups of two countries was compared, there were no significant differences found, except three items, “I engage with groups using similar processes using digital platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, WeChat, Pinterest)”[S. Africa (mean = 4.27, S.D. = 0.92); U.K. (mean= 3.46, S.D. = 1.17), $p <$

0.001], “I participate in neighborhood swaps” [S. African (mean = 3.23, S.D. = 1.13); U.K. (mean= 2.62, S.D.= 1.25), and “I buy eco-friendly products only” S. Africa (mean = 3.65, S.D. = 1.01); U.K. (mean = 3.15, S.D. = 1.09, $p < 0.001$)]. For all those three items South African participants' mean scores were significantly higher than U.K. participants.

Discussion/Implications: The results showed that self-construals of those who repurpose their garments were not much different but interdependence was slightly higher for South African participants than the U. K. participants. This is consistent with previous studies that, unlike Western countries, African cultures are considered collectivistic and tend to be interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). On the other hand, with the contemporary rise of digital technologies and globalization, our study also showed that Independent self-construal was higher for South African participants than the UK participants. It is worth noting that South African participants' mean scores of their motivations were significantly higher than the U.K. participants and significantly more South African participants interact not only with friends/family but also with online communities such as TikTok and YouTube. This study provides valuable information and warrants further studies about those who engage in repurposing clothing behavior from both developed and emerging markets by exploring their repurposing reasons, motivations, social engagement, and other sustainable behaviors.

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