

From Closet to Consciousness: Investigating the Links Among Emotional Intelligence, Environmental Values, and Sustainable Apparel Disposal Behavior

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Introduction. Consumer disposal behavior has received much attention as an effect of the throwaway culture and excessive garment consumption (Yee et al., 2016). Consumers' sustainable apparel disposal behavior have the potential to lessen the local and global environmental damage (Joung & Park-Poaps, 2011). Previous consumer studies investigating sustainable apparel disposal behavior were focused on the personal and situational factors (Jahura, 2020), disposal practices (Žurga et al., 2015), female consumers' motivation and intention to dispose apparel (Sonnenberg et al., 2022), female and young consumers as targeted sample (Waghela, 2020). Emotional intelligence also influences consumers' decision-making behavior (Kidwell et al., 2008), shopping behavior (Lim & Kim, 2020), general behavior (Brackett et al., 2004), consumption behavior (Ahn, 2022). There have been few studies that address consumers' attitude towards apparel disposal behavior based on age and gender, and no study has been conducted on consumer emotional intelligence and environmental values in relation to consumers' sustainable apparel disposal behavior (SADB). Thus, the present study investigated the links between emotional intelligence and environmental values on consumers' intention towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior considering their gender and age.

Literature Review and Hypotheses. Previous studies (e.g., Lim & Kim, 2020) have used the cognition-affection-conation framework to support a consumer's emotional intellectual processing and purchasing actions. Present study adopts the framework of cognition-affection-conation to explain the relationships among emotional intelligence (EI) and environmental values as cognition, attitude towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior (SADB) as affection and intention towards SADB as conation in the context of apparel disposal behavior. According to Robinson et al. (2018), adults' pro-environmental behavior and attitudes are influenced by their emotional intelligence, and there is a positive correlation between higher emotional intelligence and higher rates of pro-environmentalism (Aguilar-Luzón et al., 2014). People who practice environmentally conscious behavior demonstrate their appreciation for nature by supporting environmental preservation efforts, recycling, and buying eco-friendly products (Fraj & MartíNez, 2006). Previous studies on EI showed the relationships between people's emotional processing abilities, decision making and behavior (Lim & Kim, 2020). Environmental values have an influence on consumer attitudes towards green products, which in turn influence consumer intention toward embracing a green product (Shin et al., 2017). Consumers' engagement with giving away, swapping, donating, dropping off to recycling bins, and reselling apparel is counted as sustainable apparel disposal behavior (Goworek et al., 2012; Jahura, 2020) (termed as SADB in the present study). Based on the previous literature, this study proposed following five hypotheses. Emotional intelligence will positively influence environmental values (*H1*), environmental values will positively influence consumers' attitude towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior (*H2*), consumers' attitude towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior will positively influence consumers' intention towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior (*H3*), the relationship between attitude towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior and intention towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior will be stronger for the young people

than the older people (*H4*), and the relationship between attitude towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior and intention towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior will be stronger for the female than the male consumers (*H5*).

Methods and Data Analysis. After receiving the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for human subject research, an online survey was utilized to collect data from a convenience sample U.S. residents consisting of both male and female, aged 19 and over. A Qualtrics survey was distributed through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The research variables (i.e., EI, environmental values, attitude toward SADB, intention toward SADB) were measured using five-point Likert-type scales containing items adapted from existing valid scales. Demographic questions were also included. IBM's Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to run the analysis and to test the hypotheses.

Results. The usable sample ($n = 342$) consisted of the 256 male (74.9%) and 86 female (25.1%) with age mean 31.85 years. Cronbach's α values of all the four scales (emotional intelligence $\alpha = .88$, environmental values $\alpha = .86$, attitude towards SADB $\alpha = .76$, and intention towards SADB $\alpha = .79$) were greater than .70 indicating their reliability. The hypothesized relationships among variables were tested through simple regression analysis. The results revealed that emotional intelligence positively influenced environmental values (Std. $\beta = .85$, $p < .001$), environmental values positively influenced consumers' attitude towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior (Std. $\beta = .77$, $p < .001$), consumers' attitude towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior positively influenced consumers' intention towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior (Std. $\beta = .85$, $p < .001$). However, relationship between consumers attitude towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior and intention towards sustainable apparel disposal behavior was not moderated by age (Std. $\beta = .22$, $p > .001$) and gender (Std. $\beta = -.38$, $p > .001$).

Conclusion & Implication. The findings of this study state that emotional intelligence positively influence environmental values, environmental values positively influence consumers' attitude towards SADB, and consumers' attitude towards SADB positively influence consumers' intention towards SADB. Thus, EI plays a significant role in predicting consumers' sustainable apparel disposal intentions (i.e., donating, swapping, renting, recycling, and reselling). This finding contributes to the literature on environmental science, psychology, and consumer disposal behavior. Academics and practitioners may further emphasize research into emotional intelligence and its impact on pro-environmental behavior. This finding also can help retailers design business models that capture the value of apparel via sustainable disposal practices (such as donating, swapping, renting, recycling, and reselling) and establish marketing efforts that appeal to environmentally concerned customers. Brands can highlight emotional links to their sustainable operations, boosting loyalty among environmentally conscious customers. This research can further help policymakers develop apparel waste management and sustainability legislation.

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