

Conscious Consumption: Consumer Attitudes and Behaviors toward Second-hand Shopping

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Around 13 million tons of textiles were discarded by American consumers in 2010 (Wallander, 2012) and only a fraction (15%) of textile and apparel items was recycled and repurposed. Only about 15% of Americans recycle or donate their used clothing, while the remaining percentage simply toss them into the garbage bin which constitute to about 10.5 billion tons of textiles ending up in landfill annually (Cline, 2014). Retailers such as Patagonia, H&M, The North Face and Eileen Fisher have implemented in-store recycling and take-back programs, catering to consumer demands for transparency and sustainability in the fashion industry. However, the fashion industry is actually one of the most change resistant in the world (Gribbon, 2016) and sustainable practices are still to reach the desirable state. Fashion consumers today are believed to be far more empowered than ever before. Their interest in environmentally friendly and retro clothing has created a societal wave which has led to the overall span of second-hand and vintage-clothing market, attracting mainly young consumers today (Yan, Bae, & Xu, 2015). Second-hand shopping as a segment in the retail industry has grown rapidly over the years. There have not been sufficient studies to show the reasoning as to why consumers started to shop at second-hand stores more frequently over the past few years than prior years nor logistic understanding of attitudes towards second-hand shopping. Apparel resale is expected to grow 6% by 2025, showcasing \$25 billion chunk of the \$425 billion retail industry in 2025 (Sutter, 2016). It would be beneficial for the leaders and influencers of the fashion industry to pinpoint the reasoning behind this expected growth of second-hand shopping by analyzing everyday consumer attitudes, behaviors, and its variances in gender. Second-hand shopping, specifically thrifting, has become a lifestyle for consumers of the urban city. People who shop for second-hand items tend to be conscious consumers who are aware for the negative effects of the fashion industry (Sweeny, 2016) and they have initiated to make lifestyle adjustments to make better purchasing decisions.

The purpose of this study was to analyze consumer attitudes and behaviors toward second-hand shopping. Second-hand shopping consumers are classified through the *conscious consumption (or green) theory* (Peattie, 1992), which is defined as “the purchasing and non-purchasing decisions made by consumers, based at least partly on environmental or social criteria” (p.118). Second-hand shopping is an outlet of conscious consumerism in the modern society because it signifies recycling and reuse of clothing. The sustainability movement in the fashion industry is calling for alternative solutions to existing consumption practices. Second-hand shopping, although not a new method of consumption, is being considered as a sustainable consumption practice by the new millennial generation of consumers. Second-hand clothing is viewed as an innovative and creative way of obtaining clothing rather than just as affordable clothing for those who have limited financial resources. The sample of this study consisted of 263 participants with 65.4% females and 34.3% males. Statistical analyses were conducted through SPSS software and included descriptive statistics, correlation, and t-testing.

Results and Implications. The findings partially align with the *conscious consumption (or green)* theory (Peattie, 1992) as a slightly more than half of the respondents shopped at second-hand stores. The results indicated that overall consumers were familiar with sustainable consumer practices and product disposal habits as out of 263 respondents, 90% recycled on regular basis. However, only 30% considered the environment when making purchases in general, while a larger percentage of 39% admitted they did not think about the environment when shopping for clothes. A majority of respondents (92%) donated their clothing to charity shops and a half of them (51%) rarely disposed of their clothing. Only a fraction (11%) of participants stated they disposed garments in trash. Results regarding second-hand clothing indicated that three quarters of respondents (73%) had favorable opinions about second-hand shopping; however, only a third of the sample admitted they find clothing they are searching for in second-hand shops. Therefore, the majority of respondents said they are not able to find what they were searching for in second-hand shops. Interestingly, a half of the respondents thought second-hand shopping is fun and admitted they shop second-hand clothing for trendy and fashionable items. A third of respondents did not appear to chase seasonal fashion trends when shopping at second hand stores. Attitudes increased in favor the more frequently consumers shopped ($r=.490$, $p=.00$).

Gender differences indicated that males ($m=3.34$) tend to struggle more at finding the items they are searching for than females ($m=2.99$, $p=.01$), and males ($m=2.16$) also carry a less favorable opinion toward second-hand shopping than females ($m=1.88$, $p=.03$). However, both genders found the experience fun, and continued to thrift shop for trendy fashionable clothing. In addition, women ($m=1.40$) were more active in feeding the circle of second-hand shopping as they donated clothing to charity shops more frequently than males ($m=1.69$, $p=.010$). Retailers should react to the positive consumer demand in the elongating the life of garments and use this opportunity to create garments that are well made, so consumers are able to pass them on to the community without having them end in landfill (Wallander, 2012). Second-hand retailers must take action and start connecting with their consumers online just like other fashion retailers do. One of the biggest reasons as to why consumers used to shop for second-hand items was due to its low cost (Pilon, 2015); however, that might be changing as consumers today view second-hand purchasing as a sustainable way of consumption, which is worthy of further investigation.

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