

Investigating fashion disposition with young consumers

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is first, to investigate young consumers' fashion disposition behavior, second, to identify motivations for their fashion disposition, and third, to identify emotional responses experienced during and after the fashion disposition process. The paper also aims to investigate young consumers' ideas about their future fashion disposition practices and to what extent did participants link being socially responsible to their fashion disposition decisions and behaviors.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative approach was adopted wherein undergraduates wrote an essay concerning their apparel disposal habits. Data were analyzed using content analyses.

Findings – Participants engaged in multiple fashion disposition behaviors including donation, selling, repurposing, and swapping unwanted clothing. Participants mentioned fashionability, physical condition of an item, and social responsibility as factors that prompted their fashion disposition. Participants experienced primarily positive emotions when disposing of unwanted apparel items. In the future, participants indicated a desire to make additional efforts to donate unwanted clothing, repurpose clothing, and to attempt to reduce the amount of clothing they acquired.

Originality/value – By investigating young consumers' fashion disposal, underlying motivations for disposal were identified as well as the need for education on how to dispose of clothing items in socially responsible ways as responses suggested that these young consumers were open to disposing of their unwanted fashion items in a socially responsible manner but did not always have the skill or knowledge to do so.

Keywords Consumer behaviour, Fashion disposition, Motivations, Social responsibility, Fashion, Young consumers

Paper type Research paper

Fast fashion retailers (e.g. ZARA, H&M) offer trendy and innovative apparel to consumers with a low price in a short selling cycle. Because of the character of these fashion items, fast fashion is often labeled 'disposable fashion.' Thus, the existence of fast fashion may one factor contributing to the "throwaway" fashion attitude of some consumers (Birtwistle and Moore, 2006). Evidence that some consumers see fashion items as easily disposable comes from the fact that the average individual living in the USA throws away about 68 pounds of clothing each year (Claudio, 2007) resulting in about 500 trillion tons of used clothing added to landfills (Mitchell, 2008). Consumers in the UK may hold similar attitudes as they annually dispose of about 77 pounds of clothing per person of which approximately 9 pounds is sent for re-use through charities and the balance is discarded (Allwood *et al.*, 2006).

In addition to throwing items away, there are other methods to dispose of unwanted fashion items. For example, people can dispose of their used clothing by donating it to non-profit organizations (e.g. Goodwill, Salvation Army). In 2010, more than 74 million people donated their items to Goodwill (Goodwill.com). Consumers can eliminate clothing from their wardrobes by passing it to other family members (Koch and Domina, 1999; Mitchell, 2008) or selling it on auction sites or consignment stores. About 95 percent of apparel is recyclable

or reusable (Mitchell, 2008), thus some people redesign or repurpose their used clothing. Repurposing clothing can have significant environmental impacts. For example, according to the Bureau of International Recycling, if everyone living in the UK purchased only one repurposed woolen garment annually, 1,686 liters of water would be saved (Bureau of International Recycling, 2011).

One factor that may be impacting fashion disposition is consumer's level of social consciousness (Roberts, 1995). Social consciousness, defined as "personal awareness of social injustice" (Giddings, 2005, p. 224), may motivate socially responsible consumer behavior (SRCB). SRCB is defined as "the behavior of a consumer who bases his or her acquisition, usage, and disposition of products and services on a desire to minimize or eliminate any destructive or harmful effects and to maximize the long-term beneficial impact on society" (Mohr *et al.*, 2001, p. 47). Fashion retailers and manufacturers are increasingly offering consumers opportunities to purchase "socially responsible" products thus encouraging socially responsible consumption in the acquisition stage. For example, under the "RED" campaign, several fashion retailers and brands such as NIKE, Gap, American Apparel, and Converse sold products wherein a percentage of the profits were donated to organizations supporting AIDS prevention. ADIDAS, a German sports apparel manufacturer, developed and sold sustainable products (e.g. eco hang).

Being socially responsible at the acquisition stage may not be sufficient in meeting consumer's needs as some consumers want to be socially responsible through all consumption stages including disposition (Ha-Brookshire and Hodges, 2009). Consumer disposition refers to a "consumer's attempt to get rid of a product that has outlived its purpose" (Raghavan, 2010, p. 50). Thus, the question remains, what part does the desire to be socially responsible play in the disposal of fashion items? To what extent do young adults view their disposal behaviors as socially responsible? What need is there to educate young consumers on socially responsible means of fashion disposal?

Understanding the fashion disposition process of young adults is important because:

- disposal has public policy implications concerning the environment (Greenwood, 1990; Shim, 1995);
- knowledge generated can inform the development of socially responsible and sustainable consumption practices; and
- knowledge of the existing practices is requisite for any socially responsible orientation we may wish to impart on students as well as other consumers to address the problems that can result from excessive fashion disposal.

Literature review

Consumer disposition process

Methods of disposal were identified by Jacoby *et al.* (1977) in their classification of consumers' disposal options. Their taxonomy included three general choices:

1. keep the product using it for its original purpose or to convert it for a new purpose;
2. permanently dispose of the product by throwing it away, giving it away, selling, or trading it; and
3. get rid of the product temporarily by lending it to someone else.

Harrell and McConocha (1992) later revised the taxonomy and included six product disposal options: keeping, throwing away, selling, passing, donating for a tax deduction, and donating without a tax deduction. Specifically focusing on textile products, Winakor (1969) noted that people can dispose of their unwanted garments by throwing them away, handing them down, selling, exchanging, or making them over (i.e. repurposing). Solomon and Rabolt (2009) added donating to this list. People are typically involved in more than one type of clothing disposal method (Shim, 1995).

Motivations for initiating the consumer disposition process can be differentiated by type of product. DeBell and Dardis (1979) investigated factors (i.e. performance obsolescence, technological obsolescence) affecting consumption and disposition of appliances (e.g. washing machines, refrigerators) with US consumers. Mechanical problems (i.e. performance obsolescence) motivated the replacement of most washing machines but not refrigerators. Other general products (e.g. hardware) maybe disposed of because they no longer function or new technology has become available.

In contrast, motivations for clothing disposal appear greater in number. Fashion items may be removed from an individual's wardrobe because they represent outdated styles (obsolescence) or because the consumer is no longer interested in keeping them (Shim, 1995). Koch and Domina (1999) noted that consumers clothing disposition can be motivated by being an outdated style as well as poor fit, wearer's boredom with the item, or because the item is worn out. Birtwistle and Moore (2006) found that reasons for consumer's disposition of fast fashion items included its low quality, the arrival of a new fashion trend, or its event specific nature (i.e. clothing purchased for a single event).

Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) investigated relationships between products and the self and how consumers' connection to products evolved through the disposition process. They conducted two investigations. The first utilized participant-observation to gather data at 11 garage sales. The second utilized survey methods to gather data on the meaning(s) that women ($n = 43$) associated with wedding dresses that they had for sale. Participants shared that they sold items that were never initially linked to their self-concept. They also sold items that were linked to a past self that was currently undesired. By selling these items, participants believed they were able to move closer to a desired future self. Thus, the clothing items relationship to self or lack of a relationship was a reason for clothing disposal.

In subsequent research, Joung and Park-Poaps (2011) conducted a study with 232 clothing and textile undergraduates in the US to identify factors that motivated their clothing disposition. They examined four methods of clothing disposal (e.g. resale, donation, reusing and discarding) and five specific motivations (e.g. environmental, economic, charity, convenience). Participant's environmental concerns were related to resale and donation behaviors. Economic concerns motivated the resale and reuse of apparel. Convenience was a motivator for throwing apparel away and concerns about charity induced donation behaviors. The researchers also examined the influence of participant's environmental attitude and family and friends on environmentally motivated disposal behavior. They found that participants' environmentally motivated donation and resale behaviors were influenced by environment friendly beliefs as well as by the pro-environmental attitudes of family and friends. Other researchers have also noted the importance of family members and peers as influences on the consumer decision making of young consumers (Lachance *et al.*, 2003; Ward, 1974). Taken together these findings imply that motivations for product disposal may be product-specific suggesting that disposal studies and corresponding models should also be product-specific.

Clothing disposal

Empirical support for the methods of clothing disposal identified previously (Jacoby *et al.*, 1977; Solomon and Rabolt, 2009; Winakor, 1969) comes from research by Birtwistle and Moore (2006). To understand how young consumers disposed of their clothing, the researchers conducted 71 interviews with young women between the ages of 18 and 25. Many of their participants shared they donated unwanted garments to charity shops and that their donations made them feel good. Others held "clothing swapping parties" with their friends or passed clothing to family members for their use. Everyone indicated they threw away clothing that was damaged or not useful to other people. A few sold items via second hand shops or eBay. Interestingly, these women tended to keep expensive clothing items even when they no longer wore them. Some participants stated that they experienced guilt when disposing of expensive items that had been worn only a few times. One participant repurposed old clothing into new items. These researchers noted that their participants were unaware of the need for sustainable clothing disposal methods (e.g. recycling) yet their

participants shared they would consider changing their disposition behavior if they were made aware of the social and environmental outcomes of their disposal decisions.

Clothing disposition process and social responsibility

There is some evidence that some consumers' dispose of their clothing in socially responsible/sustainable ways (Birtwistle and Moore, 2006; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2011) regardless of whether they actually recognize their disposal method as socially responsible. For example, Shim (1995) applied a multi-methods approach to examine the effects of general environmental attitudes and general waste recycling behaviors on the clothing disposal practices of 468 undergraduates. She also investigated demographic influences on disposal (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity). Using focus group interviews with male and female students ($n = 16 - 24$), she first identified eight patterns of clothing disposition: economically motivated resale, environmentally motivated resale, charity motivated donation, environmentally motivated donation, economically motivated reuse, environmentally motivated reuse, convenience-oriented discarding, and unawareness-based discarding. Using survey methods she found that environmental attitude was related to engaging in an environmentally oriented clothing disposal method. Women and mature participants tended to use environmentally oriented disposal methods (i.e. reuse, donate, resale) more than men or young participants.

Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009) were also interested in the role that social responsibility played in one form of clothing disposition, donation. They interviewed 15 individuals who had donated apparel to charity organizations (e.g. Goodwill Industries). Participants' motivations for donating apparel tended to be self-oriented (i.e. outcomes that directly benefited the individual such as alleviating guilt) and tied to gaining hedonic and utilitarian value rather than socially-oriented (i.e. outcomes that benefit others or society at large). For example, rather than helping society, participants mentioned needing additional closet-space as incentive for their donations. These researchers suggested that participants gained hedonic value through their donations because they felt better after their donation, they diminished the guilt associated with a wasteful past purchase, and they removed unused items from their closets. They also suggested that participants gained utilitarian value by gaining closet space.

There is some evidence that willingness to engage in socially responsible textile disposal is impacted by the availability and perceived difficulty of engaging in the behavior. Domina and Koch (2002) utilized a survey methodology with 5,000 individuals to examine the effect of convenience on recycling behaviors. The more convenient it was for participants to recycle (e.g. curbside recycling program), the larger the amount and variety of materials recycled.

Even though there is growing interest in social responsibility and practicing sustainable fashion consumption, there is limited documentation concerning to what extent this interest actually impacts routine decision making concerning fashion disposal. Thus, centering on clothing as the specific fashion item, our project was designed to address the following questions:

- How was clothing disposed of and what motivated the clothing disposition of young adults?
- As the role of emotion is important to the acquisition stage, interest was in investigating the role of emotion in disposal. What emotional responses if any, were experienced during and after the clothing disposition process?
- What role, if any, did the desire to be socially responsible (i.e. socially oriented) influence reported disposal practices?
- What were participant's views on improving or changing their future clothing disposal behaviors?

Method

Data collection

Young adult consumers (between the ages of 18-24) are a group that spends a considerable amount of time and money on fast fashion and wardrobe-building clothing items. Therefore, they may also be an important source of apparel waste. If disposal practices are going to change, it is this age group that needs to be influenced (Birtwistle and Moore, 2006). In addition, young women and men studying in fashion-related content areas may be especially prone to have large wardrobes and a desire to keep with trend. Thus, young adults enrolled in an introductory fashion course were deemed an appropriate group to invite to participate.

We followed a data collection procedure outlined by Rudd and Lennon (2000). After receiving approval for use of human subjects in research, essays were assigned to students. ($n = 151$) enrolled in an introductory fashion course. They were directed to reflect on their apparel disposal habits and specifically asked to describe the methods that they used, how frequently these methods were employed, and identify factors that shaped their fashion disposition decisions. They were asked to include any outside influences on their decision making as well as to share their thoughts and feelings about the disposal process. They were also asked to share any ideas they had about new or better means of disposing of their unwanted apparel. Participants were also asked to provide demographic and disposition-related information including approximate wardrobe size. Those students ($n = 71$) who agreed to allow their essay to be included in our data set were analyzed. This data set was comprised of 197 pages of data. Identifying participant information was removed from essays prior to analyses.

Data analysis

The researchers used thematic analysis to analyze participant's essays. A deductive reasoning and line-by-line approach was used to analyze the data (Van Manen, 1990). Each essay was read by two researchers to find participant's responses relative to each of our questions. Although the essay response format encouraged participants to structure their experiences and opinions, participants' responses were found throughout their essay, often as supplemental description to other ideas. Once responses were identified, participant answers were compiled into categories according to common ideas. Each individual response that was grouped into a category was similar to other responses within that category and dissimilar to responses within other categories. As analysis progressed, categories were grouped into distinct themes.

Findings

Participant profiles

Participants ($n = 71$) were female ($n = 68$) and male ($n = 3$) undergraduates enrolled at a Midwestern university within the USA who were between the ages of 18 to 24 ($m = 19.4$). The sample represented primarily retail merchandising or apparel design majors (58 percent) in their first year of study (40.7 percent). Most participants (82.9 percent) were Caucasian. The approximate size of their wardrobe averaged 194.3 items. Most participants noted either their mother or their parents were strong influences on their fashion disposal practices. Participants also noted that magazines or friends were an important influence. Participants reported a disposal habit that occurred somewhat often. The most popular frequency was twice a year ($n = 17$) followed closely by four times a year ($n = 11$).

Participants' clothing disposal behaviors

Participants engaged in multiple clothing disposition behaviors: donating, selling, throwing items away (garbage), recycling, swapping, and storing. Most participants donated fashion items to either professional organizations (e.g. Good Will, Salvation Army), other formal organizations (e.g. church, homeless shelters, non-profit organization), to family members,

or to close friends as hand-me-downs. This donation behavior is one indicator of some desire to dispose of items in a socially responsible manner.

Participants also eliminated clothing from their wardrobes by either taking it to existing second-hand retailers for sale or by selling the items themselves through garage sales or using auction sites (e.g. Ebay). There were some participants who threw clothing away primarily because the item was damaged or worn out. Some participants repurposed their clothing into a new use (e.g. used it to clean other household items) or redesigned the clothing (e.g. added embellishments). A few participants exchanged their unwanted items with friends and/or siblings. Some participants did not dispose of unwanted apparel rather they moved it into storage. Their reason for storage rather than disposal was to preserve something with sentimental value.

... I re-use the materials to make new clothes or accessories. Re-using clothes can make a more beautiful garment than buying supplies. ... I was self-inspired to re-create things out of old clothes. I feel fabulous when I receive compliments about my creations. ... [repurposing].

... Each shirt holds a different memory for me. I feel as if throwing my shirt away is throwing away a memory that was had, which is why I prefer reconstructing them into things I may actually wear [repurposing].

Motivations for clothing disposition

A total of 16 themes emerged from responses capturing motives that prompted fashion disposal. These themes were classified into three broad categories:

1. individual attributes;
2. product attributes; and
3. situational attributes.

Individual attributes

Individual motivations included the lack of psychological fit to wearer (e.g. "My personal style has changed.") as well as consideration of how long it had been since the last time the garment was worn. A few participants responded that the physical fit of item to them was an important motivator for disposal. Other responses categorized as tied to individual differences included financial need, a desire to buy a new item, downsizing wardrobe (e.g. "It's selfish to own too many clothes."), personal beliefs about disposal (e.g. "I don't give a tattered piece of clothing to someone."), and habit (e.g. I get rid of all my clothing at the end of a season). All of the individual attributes reflected a self-oriented rather than socially oriented motivation.

I discontinue wearing my clothing typically due to the fact that I get bored with it [lack of psychological fit].

I dispose of items because I chose not to wear clothes made by a certain manufacturer any more [lack of psychological fit].

Product attributes

Some participants responded that the physical condition of the item was an important motivator for clothing disposal. One participant noted the economic value of the item as a criterion.

The factors that help me decipher what items I get rid of include the condition of the item. If the item is stained, torn, or faded I will put it in a pile of "get rid of's". If the item is out of style or the weather does not call for the item any more I will get rid of it [physical condition].

Situational attributes

Some participants indicated that they disposed of their clothing because the style was obsolete. There were a few participants who disposed of clothing because of an external stimulus. External stimuli included a call to action from charity organizations (e.g. charity pick-up's services) or natural disaster relief, as well as encouragement from a family member

to begin the disposal process. Lack of storage motivated a few participants to dispose of unwanted clothing (e.g. "I need space in my wardrobe."). Another response categorized as indicating something about the situation included transition to a new stage of life (e.g. "I got rid of all my [brand name] clothing because that's what I liked to wear in high school. . .and now I have grown out of that stage and moved onto more fashionable clothing.").

Factors that contribute to my decision to get rid of clothes are whether the items are still in style and fashionable, their condition, the way they look on me, the length of time I've owned them, the available space in my closet and drawers, and a plea from charity, school, or church for gently used clothes and coats.

Emotions tied to clothing disposal

Emotions shared were experienced prior to fashion disposition as well as after disposition. Participants indicated having difficulty with disposal of fashion items with which they had formed an emotional attachment because of who had given them the item, the item signaled a significant life event, or for other significant reasons including that the item was a reflection of their identity. Most of the participants indicated several positive emotional responses after disposition including feeling good (e.g. "I feel good to give back to the less fortunate.") and happy, glad, or excited (e.g. "I was happy because I could connect with my friend by giving an item to her."). Other emotions indicated were satisfaction and relief (e.g. "I am relieved I have more closet space (with no more clutter)"). Many participants reasoned that they felt good because they were helping others through their disposal (e.g. donations). Also, a few participants listed that clothing disposal made them feel good in instances where they could get some of their initial investment returned to them by selling their unwanted apparel.

...it helps me feel good as a consumer to get money back after usage. My theory is, if I buy a pair of jeans for \$50 plus get a year's worth of wear out of them and then sell them for \$10. I essentially gained money and bought the jeans at a decent price.

Some participants described negative emotional responses after disposal such as feeling bad, distressed, or guilt (e.g. "I tend to get an anxious when I give up things in my closet, even when I know that I really do not need them anymore", "I feel like I am wasting something [after I throw it away] that could be recycled for a new purpose."). Other negative emotions reported included regret (e.g., "After disposing, I always miss them . . .") and concern (e.g. "I feel like someday I will need it for something"). Interestingly, one student responded that she felt awful about herself (e.g., "I feel like I own too many material things and that I should be getting rid of some of it.").

Future clothing disposal

For new or better ways of disposing of apparel, participants described several options including not changing their disposal methods regardless of what method they used. Participants noted that donation, recycling/reuse, and cutting down on their acquisition of new fashion items as possible future options for them. A few participants noted that retailers might have a part to play in the disposal of fashion items.

... Thankfully, vintage fashion is now getting more attention from public, and clothing stores ... have their own lines of vintage clothing. I think the fashion industry needs to try harder to portray vintage clothing as unique and different.

Old clothes that are unusable could be collected in order to use the fibers to make new clothing, which would save a lot of resources.

Most of the participants responded that in the future they plan to donate clothing items to professional organizations that would pass the items to those in need. Interestingly, one participant responded that she will donate her unwanted fashion items to a factory that uses the material to make "new" items. Participants expressed interest in repurposing their unwanted clothing into a new use or redesigning the clothing into a new style (e.g. "Like some of the environmentalists, I can decorate my room with parts of my old clothes"). A few participants said that they will try to reduce their fashion consumption (e.g. "I hope to cut down on consumption to eliminate frivolous spending"). Additional responses included selling and sharing or swapping items. Interestingly, one participant commented about

taking sufficient time to make the final disposal decision. This idea is captured in the following quote. "I should give myself time between the decision of disposal and the actual disposal, so I cannot judge myself too harshly and too quickly get rid of it." One participant responded that she was interested in buying clothes that would decompose when tossed out because textile waste would decrease drastically.

Discussion

Participants engaged in multiple fashion disposition behaviors. Many participants noted they donated at least some of their unwanted clothing. Several noted they donated out of a desire to help others. Others shared they sold items, repurposed, or swapped clothing. All of these methods help to avoid waste, a stance that is consistent with protecting the environment. Even though few participants labeled their behaviors as either socially responsible or environmentally friendly, these responses suggest many participants had a socially- oriented rather than a self-oriented approach to actual disposal unlike the participants in the Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009) research. Different from participants in Birtwistle and Moore's (2006) research who indicated they were unaware of the necessity for sustainable disposal methods, several participants appeared to practice methods that reflected some environmental concern at least some of the time.

As common motivations for fashion disposition, all responses fit within the broad categories (i.e. individual, product, situational attributes) developed in the disposal taxonomy (see Table I). Participants did mention several self-oriented motives for disposal including financial need, desire to purchase more items, and that the items were no longer a fit with their current selves. That a lack of fit to self motivated disposal is consistent with Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) who found that a motivation to dispose of items by selling them was that the items no longer fit or never fit with current self-concepts. These findings are all also

Table I Taxonomy of motivations for disposal and actual disposal of fashion items

<i>Motivations for disposal</i>	<i>Author of research article, date</i>
<i>Item attributes</i>	
Poor quality, fit, or wear	Birtwistle and Moore (2006); Koch and Domina (1999)
Event specific item	Birtwistle and Moore (2006)
<i>Situational attributes</i>	
Obsolescence/new trend	Shim (1995); Birtwistle and Moore (2006)
<i>Individual attributes</i>	
Self-oriented	
Boredom	Shim (1995)
Lacks connection to self	Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005)
Economic interest	Joung and Park-Poaps (2011)
Convenience	Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009)
Need closet space	
Alleviating feelings of guilt	
Socially-oriented	
Interest in the environment	Joung and Park-Poaps (2011)
Interest in supporting charities	
<i>Methods of disposal</i>	
Socially-oriented	
Donate	Birtwistle and Moore (2006); Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009); Shim (1995)
Swap with friends/family	Birtwistle and Moore (2006)
Recycle (i.e. repurpose to new style or item)	Birtwistle and Moore (2006)
Self-oriented	
Sell (Ebay, garage sales, consignment stores)	Birtwistle and Moore (2006); Shim (1995)
Place into storage	Birtwistle and Moore (2006)
Throw away	Birtwistle and Moore (2006); Shim (1995)

consistent with those of Ha-Brookshire and Hodges's (2009) who found their participants' motivations for donating apparel were self-oriented. Our participants also identified some additional individual and situational motivations not previously noted (e.g. habit, desire for new items, need for money, need for space) for their fashion disposal adding to the considerations identified previously by Jacoby *et al.* (1977) and Hanson (1980).

Uncovering the part that emotion may play in clothing disposal is an important contribution of this research. Participants experienced primarily positive emotions rather than negative ones as an outcome of disposing of their unwanted clothing. Similar to Birtwistle and Moore's (2006) and Ha-Brookshire and Hodges' (2009) findings, many participants shared they felt good about donating their fashion items to charities as well as creating space in their closets for new acquisitions.

The responses of some participants who shared they felt regret or remorse indicated they experienced a great deal of stress about a decision to remove items from their closets. Stress generated by needing to let go of objects brings to mind hoarding behavior. Hoarding occurs when an individual continues to acquire goods and fails to get rid of goods when they have limited value (Frost and Gross, 1993). Consistent with our participants' rationale for negative feelings, hoarders often indicate they do not want to get rid of items because of a concern that they might want to use them at a future date (Warren and Ostrom, 1988). Possessions allow people to feel a sense of control over their environment. Furby (1978) argued that people possess items to prevent themselves from being in a situation where they need something. The negative feelings and stress reported about discarding clothing items may result from these participants being concerned that they may need or want these items in the future and the fact that they will not have them anymore creates stress because it suggests a loss of control. As hoarding behavior is an under researched area of consumption, identifying antecedents to hoarding with young consumers could provide valuable information in treating this non-normative consumer behavior.

Previous researchers had not explored ideas concerning future clothing disposal. One idea that stands out is reducing consumption to reduce disposal. When participants recognized the high number of apparel items they owned and how many they were not actively wearing, they often self-identified as being engaged in over consumption. Educational efforts to encourage socially responsible disposal by addressing over consumption may be effective if directed at this age group.

Conclusions, implications, and suggestions for future research

Even though some participants' disposal behavior could be classified as socially oriented, our data suggest that efforts to inform, educate, and promote the benefits and consequences of socially responsible consumption and disposal may be useful. In addition to experiencing classroom lectures, students could be actively engaged in developing promotional programs around recycling on campus or work with community partners as a class project on developing fashion recycling programs to facilitate sustainable fashion disposition (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2011). They could participate in redesign or repurposing projects as a design activity. According to Halvorsen (2008), convenient access to recycling processes significantly influenced household recycling rates. Local governments could consider offering funding for developing advanced clothing recycling techniques and appropriate policies to support recycling (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2011).

Some participants mentioned that responsibility for fashion disposition may not reside exclusively within the realm of the consumer. Rather, these participants identified retailers as a possible partner in clothing disposal. A partnership between retailers and consumers in clothing disposal opens another avenue for relationship management that could contribute to loyalty. One example of a clothing disposition program run by a department store chain in the USA is a program where consumers are invited to donate their unwanted apparel in exchange for price-off coupons.

For future studies, researchers could investigate retailers' interest in participating in fashion disposition programs and document the impact that such programs could have on customers' patronage and loyalty. Future researchers can use quantitative methods to investigate significant antecedents of socially responsible clothing disposal behaviors including social-consciousness, altruism, utilitarian/hedonic/ethical motivations, or self-efficacy with both young and mature consumers.

Limitation

In this project a convenience sample of undergraduates were asked to write an in-depth essay regarding their fashion disposition practices. At times the content of their essays was brief and their responses were shallow. It could be that these students were not able to be as reflective and introspective as the essay prompt asked them to be relative to their disposal behaviors. Thus, the methodology of the research could have inhibited data collection. Interviews or focus groups could have facilitated depth in responses due to the researcher's ability to probe.

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