A Longitudinal Study of Consumer Awareness of Sustainable Fashion
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Background and Purpose

Sustainable fashion is a movement to foster changes in the fashion system towards greater ecological integrity and social justice. In this movement, a joint effect is essential including not only the fashion industry, but also fashion consumers. According to Rogers (2003), before consumers make any decision for innovation adoption if we see sustainable consumption as an innovation adoption, they need to be knowledgeable about the innovation. Because Rogers Innovation Adoption Model shows a five-step process starting with knowledge, followed by persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. Only when consumers become aware of what sustainable fashion is and have knowledge of what it entails, can consumers move on to the rest of the process.

The purpose of this study is to track the progress of consumer awareness of sustainable fashion in a longitudinal way and to investigate any improvement in consumer awareness of sustainable fashion. The objectives of this study are (1) to examine consumer awareness of sustainable fashion longitudinally, (2) to identify the key changes of consumer awareness by using the sustainable fashion criteria; and (3) to explore the appropriate strategies to increase consumer awareness of sustainable fashion.

By closely examining the extant sets of sustainability criteria through literature review, a comprehensive list of criteria emerges, including eight broad categories: (1) Recycle, (2) Vintage, (3) Artisan, (4) Custom, (5) Fair Trade, (6) Locally Made, (7) Organic, and (8) Vegan.

Data Collection, Analyses, and Results

A survey was conducted by using a sample drawn from the student population of a large state university. For the longitudinal examination purpose, students from a same general education course were selected from each year during 2014-2019 including a total of eight semesters. A total of two hundred and fifty returned questionnaires were useful for further data analyses after data coding and cleaning. Profile analysis was used to compare the eight sustainable fashion variables across eight semesters in the last six years. The result shows that there is a significant effect across the eight dependent variables in each semester. More importantly, the tests of between subject effects shows that there is a significant difference scores across all the eight semesters, this essentially suggests a difference in levels (the profile plot show all the lines unparalleled.)
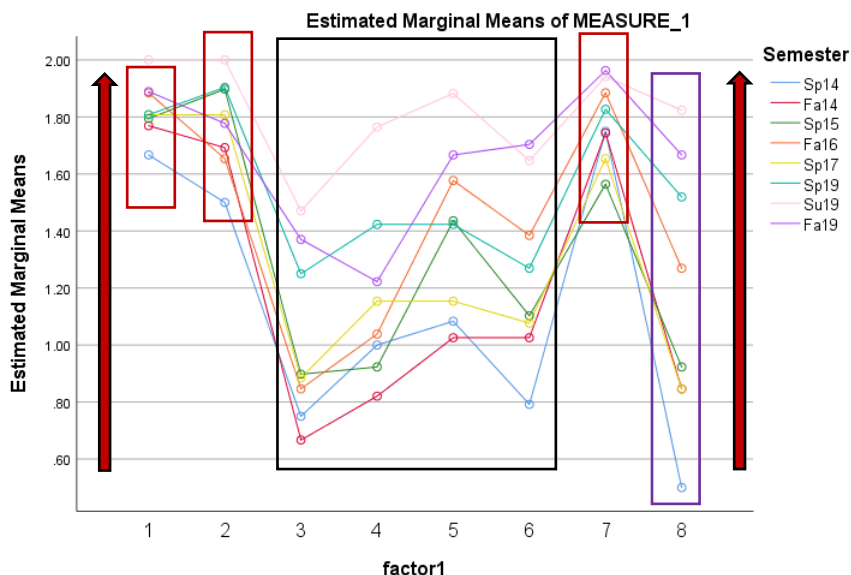
In the profile above, there is a difference in level across all points – the more recent the semesters are, the higher scores tend to be for each of the eight dependent variables. Across the eight sustainable fashion criteria, Item 1, 2, and 7 show some consistency across the eight semesters because the points are clustered closer, especially Item 1. In addition, these three clusters are all located more on the higher end. This means consumers are more aware of the connection between Recycle and sustainable fashion, the connection between Vintage and sustainable fashion, and the connection between Organic and sustainable fashion, respectively. The profile plot shows that Item 8 (Vegan) has the most significant changes across the eight semesters from starting very low in 2014 to high in 2019. This means consumer awareness of the connection between Vegan and sustainable fashion has be increased dramatically. The profile plot shows the rest four items - Item 3 (Artisan), Item 4 (Custom), Item 5 (FairTrade), and Item 6 (LocallyMade) – require more promotion and education to lead to more consistent results of consumer awareness. Because their clusters are more scattered and the changing patterns across the last six years are more random.

Conclusions and Implications

Consumer awareness of sustainable fashion has been improved in the last six years. Among all the specific criteria, consumers tend to be more aware of Recycle, Vintage, and Organic, especially Recycle. The biggest improvement of consumer awareness of sustainable fashion is Vegan. More consumer education needs to be developed and conducted for Artisan, Custom, FairTrade, and LocallyMade.

Originality/Value

This study is the first to explore consumer awareness of sustainable fashion longitudinally. What has been improved in consumer awareness of sustainable fashion and what needs more effort in consumer education are explored providing further insights.

References

Rogers, E.M. (2003). *Innovation of adoption* (5th edition), New York: The Free Press.