



Second Hand Clothing Acquisition: Demographic and Psychographic Characteristics of the Second Hand Shopper

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Understanding sustainability as it relates to second hand clothing acquisition can play an important role in decreasing the total amount of waste that ends up in the landfill. Americans generated a total of 250 million tons of trash in 2010 and in contrast recycled only 85 million tons of waste. Approximately 13 million tons of textiles were discarded during the same period but only 1.3 million tons were recycled (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). A focus on maximizing clothing usefulness and lengthening life span could significantly decrease the amount of textiles that end up in landfills.

Second hand stores offer an increasingly popular alternative to the landfill (Brown, Stovall, & Flaherty, 2010). According to the Association of Resale Professionals, resale is a multi-billion dollar a year industry (Industry Statistics and Trends, 2013). Statistics identify the second hand market as a viable and growing business but do not reveal information about second hand clothing consumers. While there has been a considerable amount of research about clothing disposal behavior (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009, Bianchi & Birtswistle, 2012) little research has been done about second hand clothing acquisition (Guiot & Roux, 2010). Industry statistics report that women in the U.S. shop more than men in all retail categories except convenience store shopping (Newswire, 2011). There is clearly a need for research that relates specifically to women second hand consumers in the U.S. This information could help identify gaps in sustainable practices and aid in the development of educational programs geared towards increasing awareness and options for women.

In order to better understand second hand shopping behavior in the U.S. the goal of this study was to recognize demographic and psychographic trends in female apparel acquisition from second hand resources. The specific objectives of the study were to examine if clothing acquisition is related to age, education, income, employment and marital status and to evaluate practices and behavioral changes in clothing acquisition among women. Data collection was the result of an online survey conducted by a market research firm from a panel of households that was representative of the general U.S. population. Panel members were invited to participate in the study through an email. Due to the nature of the study, only females were asked to participate. Data collections took place in July 2012 and the sample size was 502.

A t-test determined that second hand shoppers in the study were slightly younger than non-second hand shoppers. Chi-square correlation tested the following independent variables and their relationship to second hand shopping. Education, employment, income, race and marital status did not appear to significantly affect second hand shopping behavior.

In the study second hand shoppers were more likely to shop at garage sales, sew their own clothes, and repurpose more than those that did not shop at second hand stores. There was a positive relationship between second hand clothing acquisition and used clothing donation to second hand stores. Results revealed an increase in used clothing purchases by second hand shoppers and while the study indicated that second hand shoppers were more apt to change the way they dispose of clothing to lessen the impact on the environment, the results were not conclusive about the specific actions that were taken. In general, second hand shoppers in the study acted in ways that could positively reduce the amount of textile waste.

The study revealed some interesting behavioral characteristics of female second hand shoppers in the U.S. but additional research is needed to further explore demographic traits. Understanding the demographic and psychographic characteristics related to second hand clothing acquisition is an important step in strategizing ways to divert textile waste from U.S. landfills through awareness and education.

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