



Too much stuff: Motivators of overconsumption

Courtney King, Pamela S. Norum, University of Missouri, USA

Keywords: Overconsumption, consumption, sustainability

The fast fashion industry has contributed to a shortened lifespan for apparel in the United States. Consumers seem increasingly willing to buy low priced goods with low quality. As a result, there is an abundance of clothing in the market, as well as in the landfill. This trend towards overconsumption, defined as the creation of fashion waste through the excessive purchasing of products (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013), is in contract to the slow fashion movement, which challenges the belief that fashion refers to only new products (Clark, 2008). The movement's intention is to create a more conscientious consumer who is aware that higher quality clothing lasts longer than low-priced trendy garments (Brosdahl, 2007), as well as being aware of the wastefulness of the fast fashion industry, which commonly has shown little acknowledgment of the environment (Clark, 2008). Studying overconsumption is vital for creating a more sustainable future. Though not all of the effects of overconsumption can be undone, there is much harm that may be avoided in the future. The purpose of this research is to determine what motivates consumers to make purchases of clothing, and what factors influence their decision to continue to participate in the overconsumption of clothing. Research questions of interest include: Why do women buy clothing? What retailers encourage these consumption patterns? Are women overconsuming intentionally?

A qualitative research approach was used for this study. Interviews were used to collect primary data from a convenience sample of 22 women ages 40-65. The data were collected until repeatable regularities occurred, which allowed the data to determine the sample size. The personal interviews were conducted in the participants' home using an interview schedule to guide the interview regarding motivations behind recent purchases. Prior to the interview, each participant was asked to select ten items from their closet that were considered 'new' purchases. During the interviews, the participant sat with the interviewer in or near the closet with the clothing present. The garments were utilized as a way of telling a story, thus the clothing serves as a 'text' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) that connects the participant's story of the garment to the motivation of the purchase. By having the garment present, the participant was able to draw a richer meaning in the story, as the memories associated with the garment were more connected to them.

The data were collected from October 2014 to February 2015. Each interview was audio recorded. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed using qualitative analysis. Through the interviews it was clear that many of these women had similar expectations while shopping. There was the desire for clothing that was on sale, and many women even insisted that they would never pay full price for their clothing. This appeared to be more important than quality to some women, who believed that it was acceptable for clothing to not have a long shelf life if the price

was low enough. While other women had high expectations of quality, they still insisted on paying less. Some retailers who contributed to this form of consumption are Macy's, Old Navy and JC Penney, who were each mentioned consistently by participants. Women also expected versatility. Even when the women purchased clothing for a particular event, they expected the clothing to be versatile enough to be worn on a regular basis. In this way, the participants are discouraging wasteful consumption behaviors. Another main similarity was the tendency to buy in store. Finally, planned, and unplanned purchases were fairly evenly divided. There was, however, a tendency for the women to make unplanned purchases based on price and aesthetics. Most of the women made planned purchases for work clothing or events.

This research does have some limitations; the largest being the convenience sample, which may only represent one region of the country, rather than the United States as a whole. Further limitations include time restraints and relying on the memory of the participants when discussing the information of the clothing, including the dollar amount spent and the stores where the clothing was purchased from. Regardless, the research contributes to our understanding of motivators of consumption among female consumers. Further research must be completed with different age groups, and throughout different regions of the country, to get a better understanding of all American consumers. This research may also be useful for clothing retailers in order to gain a better understanding of what consumers want, and what factors lead consumers to make purchases. Even still, the research provides a useful foundation for further research and analysis on both consumption behaviors, and for ways to reduce the footprint currently created by the fashion industry by looking directly to the core of the industry: the consumers.

References

- Brosdahl, D. (2007). *The Consumption Crisis*. In *Future Fashion*. New York: Earth Pledge.
- Clark, H. "Slow + Fashion—an oxymoron—or a promise for the future...?" *Fashion Theory*. 12.4 (Dec 2008): 427(20). Academic OneFile. Gale. Kansas State University Libraries. Web. 5 Mar. 2014
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (2000). Introduction. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd Edition (pp. 1-28). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Pookalangara, S. and Shepard, A. "Slow Fashion Movement: Understanding Consumer Perceptions -- An Exploratory Study." *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* (2013): 200-206. Elsevier. Web. 18 Mar. 2014.