

Analysis of Trade Value of Used Clothing

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Introduction: The fashion industry is seen as a polluting and consuming industry. Moreover, fast fashion is rapidly eroding the global fashion market. The environmental problem is becoming more serious as a result of the consumption of clothes that are only used a few times. There are few special facilities that can handle abandoned clothes. Most old clothes are landfilled or incinerated, but it causes serious environmental problems, because it causes air pollution and the natural decomposition of landfilled clothes takes hundreds of years. At the beginning of the 21st century, conscious and sustainable consumption spread among consumers. Fashion companies are implementing sustainable strategies and pursuing corporate social responsibility in various ways. Companies have tried to increase fair trade, ensure transparent finances, and protect the human rights of laborers. In particular, sustainability has become more important in recent years. Companies are looking for ways to reduce resources used and environmental pollution, which is one of the most important corporate social responsibility activities. Therefore, we need to examine the trade value of used clothing.

Background: From fashion companies' perspective, social responsibility is based on an assumption of the obligation of businesses to society; that is, businesses need to help ameliorate problems in society rather than add to them (Bowen, 1953). The 21st century has seen an increase in calls for specifics on how businesses should operationalize this obligation to society. Dahlsrud (2008) finds that the different phrases of corporate social responsibility all refer to five dimensions: environmental, social, economic, stakeholder, and voluntary. Fashion companies are making various efforts to fulfill these social responsibilities. In addition, social enterprises and governments are positively encouraging the recycling of clothing. From consumers' perspective, there is a tendency, called ethical consumption, to increase purchasing clothing considering corporate social responsibility (Cowe & Williams, 2001). Harrison, Newholm, and Shaw (2005) identified sustainable consumption as one type of ethical consumption. In other words, the trade of used clothing can be seen as an activity involving corporate social responsibility and consumers' ethical consumption, and the relocation of used clothing can encourage the distribution of used clothing. Therefore, this study focuses on explaining the significance of used clothing over the last twenty years through social network analysis.

Methods: For the analysis, we selected "Clothing; worn, and other worn articles" (HS code 630900) as the item. Data for analysis were collected from UN COMTRADE, and we created a matrix using 1997, 2007, and 2017 trade data about the top 10 trade countries in terms of imports and exports. We used the NodeXL program for social network analysis.

Results: Korea rose from tenth place in 1997 to fourth in 2017. Moreover, China and Poland, which had not been ranked before, increased in exports (1997: USA, Germany, Belgium-Luxembourg, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Italy, Canada, France, Japan, and Singapore; 2007: United Kingdom, USA, Germany, Canada, UAE, Republic of Korea, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and Japan; 2017: USA, United Kingdom, Germany, Republic of Korea, China, Netherlands, Poland, Belgium, Italy, and Canada). The USA, Germany, United Kingdom, Netherlands, and Italy have always ranked in the top 10. As shown in Figure 1, the USA exports to all over the world, especially to Latin America. The top exporting countries in Europe exported to both Europe and Africa. China and the Republic of Korea exported particularly to Southeast Asia and Africa. Each continent tended to export within itself or to nearby continents. In 1997, not only developing countries but also advanced countries were ranked in the top 10. As shown in Figure 2, many developing countries, such as those in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Central and South America, became major importers. In 1997, advanced countries were the major importing countries in the top 10 due to the popularity of vintage fashion. After that, most importing countries were developing countries such as those in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Central and South America. Used clothing moved from advanced countries rich in materials to developing countries lacking in supplies (1997: Japan, Malaysia, Poland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Netherlands, Belgium-Luxembourg, Tunisia, Italy, and France; 2007: Canada, Poland, Pakistan, Malaysia, Cameroon, Benin, Ghana, Cambodia, and Russian Federation; 2017: Pakistan, Malaysia, Ukraine, Russian Federation, Cameroon, Kenya, Netherlands, India, Tunisia, and Honduras). In 1997, Canada started an environmental movement that lasted until early 2000. Pakistan and India imported a particularly large volume from the USA, and 50% of Malaysia's imports were from Japan. The Netherlands, Russia, the Ukraine, Cameroon, and Tunisia imported from Europe. Kenya imported from diverse countries. Honduras imported an overwhelming volume from the nearest country, the USA.

Discussion and Conclusion: As can be observed, used clothes were imported from and exported to close continents in order to minimize costs. The Netherlands was ranked as one of the highest importers and exporters, which led to the “WASTE” Project in the Netherlands that encouraged people to learn about and engage in recycling. The recycling rate of garments is still low. Therefore, global education and participation are needed for sustainability.

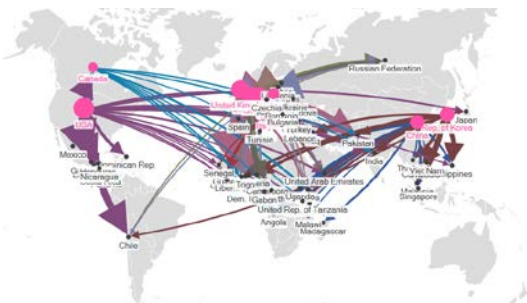


Figure 1. Export of used clothing, 2017 (more than 5,000,000\$)

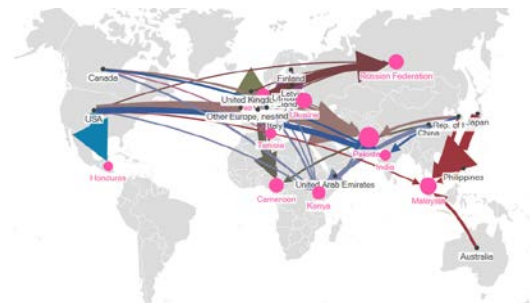


Figure 2. Import of used clothing, 2017 (more than 5,000,000\$)

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