

**Maximizing Rewards, Minimizing Clothes:  
Examining Consumers' Motivations for Building a #capsulewardrobe**  
Sergio C. Bedford & Heejin (Jeanie) Lim, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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**Purpose/Rationale:** A recent industry survey revealed that consumers worldwide concerned about diverse environmental issues such as air/water pollution, packaging/food waste, water shortages, and pesticide use and adjust their shopping habits to minimize their ecological footprint. (Nielsen, 2018). In such a consumer culture where healthy and sustainable lifestyle has become an important guide of consumption (Nielsen, 2019), a rapidly growing fashion movement is capsule wardrobes. First coined by Susie Faux in the mid-1970s (Dougher, 2015), the capsule wardrobe was developed to encourage consumers to purchase better quality products that they could wear more often by mixing and matching the limited number of items in a closet. To combat the prolific fast fashion industry that has caused the significant amount of environmental and social suitability issues, Todeschni, Cortimiglia, Callegao-de-Menezes, and Ghezzi (2017) suggested capsule wardrobe practices as an innovative solution. While the majority of apparel consumer research on sustainability have focused on consumers' sustainable buying decisions (e.g., Kong et al., 2016; McNeill & Moore, 2015) and firms' sustainable operations such as the slow fashion movement (e.g., Jung & Jin, 2016; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013), there is a dearth of studies that explore consumers' sustainability practices for already owned possessions. Thus, this study aims to expand our understanding of consumers' motivations to engage in sustainability practices in the use of fashion products by analyzing digital discourse of participants of the capsule wardrobe movement. Additionally, we aim to discover a role of digital engagement in participating consumers' practices of the capsule wardrobe.

**Conceptual Framework/Hypotheses Development:** This study adopts self-determination theory (SDT) as a theoretical lens. Gagné and Deci (2005) posit that motivations are dichotomized between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. While the intrinsic motivations are driven by self-motivations and their personality (Koole et al., 2019), the extrinsic motivations are driven by various external forces (e.g., relationship quality, social support, and sense of belonging; Wang et al., 2019). Thus, two research questions are asked: (1) What are consumers' motivations to participate in the capsule wardrobe movement? (2) What are consumers' motivations to engage in digital sharing of their capsule wardrobe practices?

**Methods:** Self-determination theory emphasizes the first person narrative of the lived experience (Koole et al., 2019). Further, Instagram is a popular social media site as evidenced by 1 billion monthly active users that fosters high levels of engagement (e.g., 95 million new posts and 4.2 billion likes for posts daily) (Clarke, 2019). Thus, we collected our corpus from Instagram by searching posts with frequently used hashtags for capsule wardrobes such as #capsulecloset (18,000 posts), #project333<sup>1</sup> (38,400 posts), and #capsulewardrobe (269,000 posts) that highlighted the first person narrative. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify themes that emerged from analysis of visual images and discourse of selected posts. Following multimodal discourse analysis guidelines (Jewitt et al., 2016) two researchers analyzed and

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<sup>1</sup> Project 333 challenges consumers to wear 33 pieces of clothing for 3 months. This challenge was created by a popular capsule wardrobe blogger Courtney Carver @bemorewithless.

coded independently, and, then, refined the identified themes upon agreement. In the analysis, researchers coded for metaphors, often used to represent concepts and identify meanings often hidden in the text and images assembled in the corpus (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

**Findings:** Our data analysis revealed consumers' participation in the movement is driven by several intrinsic motivations. First, emotional rewards highlighted the positive benefits that the consumers gained (e.g., "...thinking about what in my closet sparks joy.; "...it was SO FUN."; [Photograph of satisfied and grateful smile with a text] "My face. Every morning. 'cause I know what I'm wearing."). Second, the consumers highlighted the functional benefits that the capsule wardrobe provided (e.g., "...efficient storage...how quickly I now pick outfits in the mornings..."; "I loved discovering new outfit combinations and not having to worry about what to wear..."). Third, the consumers spoke of their self-disciplining through the capsule wardrobe (e.g., "...if I could do this you can... I am a serious clothing addict and I LOVE good deals... I created my own set of rules and guidelines for mine.). Fourth, the participants displayed self-improvement as their capsule evolved over time (e.g., "...it helps us to start changing those old unhelpful habits and replacing them with new supportive habits.") Last, the corpus revealed support for sustainable consumption as a global consumer (e.g., "...the most sustainable fashion is to wear what you already own and then re wear it over and over and over again." Additionally, our findings demonstrated that their digital engagement on Instagram is driven by three extrinsic motivations. First, our data analysis of participants' visual content revealed that self-promotion was prevalent through professional photography of carefully curated photos with links to personal and/or business websites. Second, two-way inspiration emerged as consumers would create open dialogue with followers (e.g., "I highly recommend trying a simplified wardrobe to make life a little easier. Anyone else tried a capsule?"; "Thank you @notbuyingnew for introducing me to this challenge!"). Finally, through hashtags and shout outs, connection with like-minded others suggested that they developed a community of other consumers who developed capsule wardrobes (e.g., "It's awesome to find another eco angel on Insta[gram].") Further data analysis revealed that social connections via Instagram lead them to reinforce their behavior, help them to develop effective strategies, and improve competence. As a result, they learn to develop autonomy in managing their fashion consumption behavior. In addition, data analysis reveals that consumers' desire for social connection through Instagram is extended to other issues of sustainable consumption such as slow fashion and vegan lifestyle.

**Discussion:** The findings of this study exhibit consumers' diverse intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for participating in the capsule wardrobe movement via Instagram. Our findings suggest that consumers participate in the capsule wardrobe movement initially driven by intrinsic motivations. As they engage digitally in social connections through Instagram, their extrinsic motivations become evident. In line with Gagné and Deci (2005), social presence and connection with other like-minded consumers reinforces their internalization of extrinsic motivations, develops their autonomous motivation of having control, and regulates their fashion consumption behavior based on their strong sustainable values. Jung and Jin's study (2016) revealed that corporate-focused factors such as firms' supply chain issues (e.g., fair trade, working conditions), manufacturing process (e.g., craftsmanship, handcrafts), product functionality, and local support do not determine consumers' perceived value of slow fashion, which leads to behavioral intention when consumers buy a new apparel product. In contrast, our study demonstrates the effectiveness of the capsule wardrobe movement in which consumers endeavor to develop a sustainable behavior in the use of apparel products in their daily lives. Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that consumers can become more sustainable without having to purchase slow fashion.

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