

LONGITUDINAL INFLUENCE OF ONLINE CONSUMER KNOWLEDGE ON MILLENNIALS' SUSTAINABLE CLOTHING CONSUMPTION

Sarah Portway^a, Tasha L. Lewis^b, Shorna Broussard Allred^b, and Robert Frank^b,

^aThe State University of New York at Oneonta, ^bCornell University

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Purpose and Significance

In early research on the subject, Dickson (2000) concluded that increasing consumer knowledge about sustainable clothing would promote more sustainable clothing consumption behaviors. Echoing such conclusions, sustainable clothing activist groups have invested limited financial and human resources into educating consumers using online channels of communication to promote sustainable clothing consumption. However, sustainable clothing consumption behaviors are "multifaceted, fluid and elusive, subject to individual, contextual, cultural and emotional vagaries" (Carrigan, 2017, p. 16). The purpose of this study was, therefore, to contribute both theoretical and practical insight by characterizing the longitudinal effects of repeated exposures to online sustainable clothing consumer knowledge.

Method

Natalie Grillon and Rhea Rakshit's website ProjectJUST.com, now offline, operationalized online sustainable clothing consumer knowledge. The most frequently used feature on the website was a searchable database that described the sustainability problems or victories of over 150 top global fashion brands. One-hour qualitative interviews were conducted three times during six months in 2016 with 35 Millennial participants (born between 1978 and 1995). Participants were exposed to ProjectJUST.com for five minutes during their first and second interviews and described any perceived changes in their clothing consumption or knowledge-seeking behaviors throughout the study period. The principal investigator coded transcripts line-by-line using NVivo software, axial coding methods, and grounded theory. The principal investigator and two research assistants arrived at a consensus about coding and reporting.

Findings and Implications

Participants described the effect of the interview as awareness-raising (31 participants). ProjectJUST.com's effect was to create a feeling that information about sustainable clothing was

conveniently available (34 participants), yet only 10 participants chose to access the site between interviews. Such findings imply that consumer knowledge from online sources has limited effects. Even when awareness was raised through conversation and information was conveniently available, most participants expressed little interest in actively seeking new knowledge about sustainable clothing.

To better characterize the multifaceted and individual effects of ProjectJUST.com, participants were iteratively clustered into four groups based on the behavior changes they described using Andreasen's (1995) stages of change social marketing segmentation model. Segmentation findings supported Andreasen's model and implied that a more nuanced approach to online sustainable clothing activism is needed. One group could not be persuaded to consume clothing more sustainably for uncontrollable reasons, and a second group already engaged in the desired behaviors. The remaining two groups described being more affected by their exposure to ProjectJUST.com, and this study, therefore, concludes by offering several recommendations for sustainable clothing activists to create a set of more nuanced persuasion strategies that target each of these two groups individually.

References

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