



An Investigation of Socially Responsible Consumers' Behavior in Thrift Stores

Jennifer Yurchisin, Hongjoo Woo, and Kittichai Watchravesringkan,
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA

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The annual revenue of U.S. thrift stores is estimated to be \$12 billion (First Research, 2014). Apparel products represent the majority of the products sold in these stores (Shim, 2010). While sales of apparel at thrift stores increased steadily during the economic downturn that began in 2008 (Tully, 2012), sales are expected to decrease as the economy improves (IBISWorld, 2012). To remain viable, thrift store managers need to have a solid understanding of their core apparel consumers in order to satisfy their needs (Carrigan & De Pelsmacker, 2009).

According to Dickson's (1982) person-situation market segmentation framework, consumers' product evaluations result from an interaction between the consumer and the product-use situation. Applying Dickson's framework to a retail store, Bloemer and Odekerken-Schroder (2002) demonstrated that, when consumers who possess certain characteristics shop in stores that they perceive to have a positive image, they have a positive affective reaction to the experience.

Most consumers who purchase apparel from thrift stores are women (Chahal, 2013). Because female consumers tend to be more socially conscious than male consumers (Paul et al., 1997), it seems likely that female consumers would tend to be more aware of the thrift store's level of social engagement. When consumers who are highly aware of the store's social engagement activities also have positive perceptions of the thrift store's image, they should experience positive affect (Bloemer & Odekerken-Schroder, 2002). Consumers who experience positive affective responses also tend to be satisfied with their shopping experience (Menon & Dube, 2000). Those consumers who are satisfied are likely to return (Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998). Applying this logic, the following hypotheses were proposed: H1: Women will be more aware than men of a thrift store's level of social engagement; H2: Consumers' affective response will be positively predicted by their awareness of a thrift store's level of social engagement and store image perceptions; H3: Consumers' affective response will be positively related to their shopping satisfaction; and H4: Consumers' shopping satisfaction will be positively related to their intention to return to the thrift store.

To test these hypotheses, a store intercept survey was conducted with a convenience sample of 174 individuals (female = 66%; under 50 years old = 63%) who were shopping for apparel in a local thrift store. The questionnaire contained four-point Likert-type items to assess participants' awareness of the store's level of social engagement, store image perceptions, affective reaction, shopping satisfaction, and intention to return.

To analyze the data, a series of regression models were tested. The first regression model was significant ($F=266.34$; $p\leq.001$), indicating that women were more aware than men ($\beta=3.39$; $t=16.32$; $p\leq.001$) of the thrift store's level of social engagement. Thus, H1 was supported. The second regression model was significant ($F=3344.24$; $p\leq.001$), indicating that consumers'

awareness of the store's level of social engagement ($\beta=.47$; $t=4.46$; $p\leq.001$) and perceptions of the store's image ($\beta=.53$; $t=5.07$; $p\leq.001$) were both positively and significantly related to their affective response. Hence, H2 was supported. H3 was also supported by a third regression model ($F=8052.02$; $p\leq.001$), indicating that consumers' affective reaction ($\beta=.99$; $t=89.73$; $p\leq.001$) was positively and significantly related to their level of satisfaction. Lastly, the fourth regression model was significant ($F=4942.46$; $p\leq.001$), indicating that consumers' level of satisfaction ($\beta=.97$; $t=70.30$; $p\leq.001$) was positively and significantly related to their intention to return to the thrift store. Therefore, H4 was supported.

The results of this study suggest managers of thrift stores should design marketing materials to highlight their social engagement activities. To drive store traffic, they should concentrate on creating a positive image and providing a positive shopping experience, particularly for female apparel consumers. Future research could investigate the impact of specific aspects of the thrift store's image on consumers' perceptions or additional characteristics of the person that may influence consumers' affective responses while they are shopping.

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