



The Correlates Between Positive Emotions/Attributes and Sustainable Fashion Consumption Behaviors

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Introduction. In the era of fast, disposable fashion, the current U.S. fashion system produces much more than consumers need, contributing excessive garment waste to landfills (Hawley, 2006). To halt this environmental pollution, it is necessary to encourage consumers to buy fewer garments and limit them to those made of sustainable materials. Thus, understanding the factors that contribute to sustainable consumption behaviors in consumers is important.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review. Research on positive factors that predict sustainable fashion consumption is extremely limited. Accordingly, we developed a framework of proposed relationships between positive emotion/attributes (altruism, gratitude, compassion, and happiness) and sustainable consumption behaviors. Our proposed framework emerged from several different conceptualizations: broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) and the value-behavior consistency model (Fritzsche & Oz, 2007). This study tests the relationships specified in our framework and has the potential to contribute to the development of strategies to promote sustainable consumption because it identifies important factors that predict and possibly motivate sustainable consumption behaviors.

Methods. Data were collected using an online survey following approval for use of human subjects. The proposed model was tested using two samples: college students enrolled at a southeastern university in the U.S. ($n = 463$) and a national sample using Amazon Mechanical Turk ($n = 317$). Participants responded, online questionnaires measuring altruism, compassion, gratitude and autonomy, and a new measure of sustainable consumption developed by authors. Participants also supplied demographic information.

Results. First, the proposed model was tested using the 463 college student sample, consisting of 89% female and 72% White between the ages of 18 to 24 ($m = 19.73$). All scales demonstrated adequate internal consistency ($\alpha > .80$). Simple bivariate correlations indicated that sustainable consumption was positively related to altruism ($r = .415, p < .001$) and negatively related to gratitude ($r = -.219, p < .001$). Sustainable consumption was not related to happiness ($r = -.027, p > .05$), compassion ($r = -.078, p > .50$), or autonomy ($r = -.005, p > .05$). These findings alerted us to the factor that autonomy was likely a key construct reflecting one's ability to engage in sustainable consumption and that the miniscule association between sustainable consumption and autonomy might have affected the results, considering that most college students' life styles are limited and not independent (e.g., economically). Therefore, a second data set was collected from

a general U.S. adult sample to further test the proposed model. The 317 participants were 52% male, 73% White, and between the ages of 18 to 75 ($m = 33.19$). As expected, the results were different from those of the student sample. Gratitude ($r = .317, p < .001$), compassion ($r = .300, p < .001$), and altruism ($r = .551, p < .001$) were all positively related to sustainable consumption. However, sustainable consumption was not related to happiness ($r = .031, p = .589$), as in the student sample and contrary to previous literature (e.g., Veenhoven, 2004). Additionally, sustainable consumption was positively related to autonomy ($r = .117, p = .04$) in the general adult sample.

Discussion and Conclusions. Altruism, gratitude, and compassion appear to be key factors associated with engagement in sustainable consumption for the general U.S. adult participants. Happiness was not associated with sustainable consumption however, previous studies do indicate (Veenhoven, 2004) conflicting results of a positive or negative relationship between the two variables. Most of the results, except happiness, support Fredrickson's broaden-and-build-theory which posits that positive emotions/attributes broaden the scopes of attention and cognition and, by consequence, initiate upward spirals toward increasing emotional well-being and predicting positive behaviors. This unique study revealing the relationship between sustainable consumption and positive emotions/attributes helps to develop and direct strategies to encourage sustainable consumption behaviors. For future studies, we suggest the relationship between a variety of positive emotions (e.g., joy)/attributes (e.g., optimism) and sustainable consumption be explored. In terms of study design, growth-curve modeling and experimental studies are recommended. This study has several limitations: first, the participants' socio-economic status was not controlled; second, the nature of cross-sectional design inhibits causal inference.

References

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