



“You are Doing What?” Motivations for Fashion Acquisition Abstinence

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Background and Purpose. At the core of many environmental problems confronting society is excess consumption in Western culture—including consumers’ embrace of fast fashion. Without a significant reduction in consumption habits, especially in developed countries, a sustainable future is unattainable. However, research demonstrates that encouraging consumers to engage in more sustainable apparel consumption habits is difficult (Hiller Connell & Kozar, 2012). Clothing consumption provides many social-psychological benefits; therefore, satisfying these needs without superfluous consumption is an ambitious endeavor. Inspired by the Free Fashion Challenge (www.freefashionchallenge.com), and with the objective of exploring social-psychological implications of restrained fashion consumption, researchers at three US universities challenged their students to abstain from acquiring any fashion items for 13 weeks. University students were an ideal sample, as they are key patrons of fast fashion. The purpose of this paper is to understand the motivations that led students to accept what the researchers termed, the “Fashion Detox” challenge.

Method. Participants were recruited through textile and apparel courses at three universities. First, all students in targeted classes completed a questionnaire that included three scales: Material Values (MV) (Richins & Dawson, 1992), Use Innovativeness (UI) (Price & Ridgway, 1983), and Fashion Leadership (FL) scale (Goldsmith et al., 1993). The researchers then introduced the Fashion Detox project and recruited participants. Parameters provided to participants included refraining from acquiring fashion items for a semester and writing weekly blogs. For the first blog the participants reflected on current shopping habits and motivations for accepting the challenge. The remaining entries focused on feelings, temptations, and strategies.

The study included quantitative and qualitative data analysis. An intention of the survey data was to examine how students who chose to participate in the Detox may have differed, in terms of material values, use innovativeness, and fashion leadership, from students who opted out of the study. Therefore, after evaluating scale reliability through Cronbach’s standardized alpha (and achieving values above .8 for each scale), summed mean variables were calculated for each of the scales. The survey data was then grouped by Fashion Detox participants and non-participants, and independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the means scores for each group. To understand the motivations of the Detox participants on a deeper level, the researchers used inductive content analysis to identify emergent themes from the initial participant blogs. First, a long list of tentative codes was assembled. Then, utilizing Nvivo 10 analysis software, the codes were assigned to data selections to cover until the greatest portion of data was covered. Finally, the codes were aggregated into overarching themes.

Findings. Between the three schools, a total of 273 individuals completed the questionnaire. From that group, 112 students chose to participate in the Fashion Detox. Data analysis revealed no significant difference in mean MV scores for participants ($M=4.2123$, $SD=.81946$) and non-participants [$M=4.1035$; $SD=.76259$; $t(271)=-1.124$, $p=.262$]. Similarly, there were no significant differences in UI for participants ($M=4.10$, $SD=.88$) and non-participants [$M=4.03$; $SD=.81$; $t(271)=-.66$, $p=.51$] and FL scores between participants ($M=5.10$, $SD=1.26$) and non-participants [$M=5.02$; $SD=1.21$; $t(271)=-.57$, $p=.61$]. Therefore, data indicates the Fashion Detox participants, in terms of at least these three variables, were similar in nature to the nonparticipants.

In analyzing the blog entries, four different motivational themes emerged. The *first theme* (Love the One You're With) was mentioned 51 times and revealed two sub-themes motivating participation: 1) the opportunity to become more creative in outfit assembly by mixing and matching already owned items and 2) a need to better utilize the abundance of fashion items already owned by the participant. The *second theme* (To Thy Own Self be True) was explored 49 times. Within this theme, some participants discussed wanting to participate in the challenge because of a desire to step back and better understand what was important in life, and specifically, the difference between wants and needs. Additional participants stated they accepted the challenge because they were curious to see what would happen and to prove to others that they could forgo fashion purchases for 13 weeks. The *third theme* (The Itch I Can't Scratch) was referenced 47 times. Within these references, participants either recognized the detrimental and compulsive nature of their shopping habits or they desired to explore ways other than shopping to meet their emotional needs. The *last theme* (Virtue is Its Own Reward?) was examined 61 times in the data. Fifty-six of these references noted the challenge was a way to save money and five discussed the offer of extra credit as being a motivator.

Implications and Conclusions. The motivations described by participants provide initial understanding why consumers may opt for consumption restraint. As entities work to encourage more sustainable consumption patterns, these motivators may be framed as advantageous benefits. The fact that no statistical differences were found in relation to MV, UI and FL between participants and non-participants is not necessarily surprising considering both groups included students in fashion disciplines. Further study should: 1) seek subjects from other disciplines, 2) explore differences between participants and non-participants in relation to the motivational factors related to the four qualitative themes, and 3) further investigate how the quantitative variables relate to the qualitative data.

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