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CONSUMERS' MOTIVES FOR ENGAGING IN SECOND-HAND CLOTHING CIRCULATION IN TERMS OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT: An increase in the number of consumers engaging in second-hand clothing (in short, SHC) circulation is indicated as one of the main ways to balance the consumption of clothes. Therefore, the motives of consumers engaging in SHC circulation are an important issue that requires cyclical and in-depth research. This article aimed to examine consumers' motives for engaging in SHC circulation in the context of the implementation of sustainable clothing consumption in selected European countries. In order to accomplish the objective, 547 CAWI questionnaire interviews were conducted with consumers from five countries: Germany, Sweden, Slovenia, Lithuania and Poland. The main motives for engaging in SHC circulation indicated by respondents are directly – the ecological and altruistic motive – and indirectly – the economic motive – linked to the idea of sustainable consumption. At the same time, it should be noted that consumers are guided by several motives simultaneously, and despite pro-environmental declarations, in most cases, they are also guided by economic motives. The study results can be applied to improving waste management systems and, in particular, campaigns promoting SHC circulation.

KEYWORDS: sustainable consumer actions, motives of second-hand clothing circulation, clothing waste management

Introduction

The idea of sustainable development has been indicated as a remedy to global socio-economic problems for several decades. The concept has evolved through successive earth summits and climate summits, and the most current strategic document for sustainable development with global reach, developed at the international level, is the 2030 Agenda, which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Since developed countries and their widespread corporate capitalism and accompanying consumerism contribute most to the Earth's global problems, one of the main goals of sustainable development – which significantly impacts the other 16 goals – is balancing production and consumption. In the countries of the so-called “Rich North”, a significant influence in changing unsustainable production and consumption patterns can come from consumers, who are encouraged to act sustainably as part of their daily consumption choices.

The literature emphasises that consumer engagement in sustainable activities is contingent on the benefits such activities provide consumers. These benefits can be both individual and collective (for society as a whole), obtained in the short term or over a long time horizon, and tangible or intangible. The benefits of engaging in sustainable activities can be associated with the motives for sustainable consumption activities (Belz & Peattie, 2009).

One group of activities recommended to consumers is balancing clothing consumption by engaging in second-hand clothing (in short, SHC) circulation (Farrant et al., 2010). Identifying consumers' motives for engaging in SHC circulation requires in-depth and ongoing research, which was the primary rationale for addressing the topic. This article aims to examine consumers' motives for engaging in SHC circulation in the context of the implementation of sustainable clothing consumption in selected European countries. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated:

- What are the main motives of consumers in selected European countries to engage in SHC circulation?
- Can statistically significant differences be observed in the motives of consumers in selected European countries to engage in SHC circulation?
- Are the main motives of consumers in selected European countries to engage in SHC circulation related to the idea of sustainable consumption?

A literature review and quantitative research in five selected European countries, i.e. Germany, Sweden, Slovenia, Lithuania and Poland, were used to achieve the purpose of the article. The results can be used to improve waste management systems, especially in social and advertising campaigns encouraging consumers to engage in SHC circulation.

An overview of the literature

The modern garment industry globally represents a considerable burden on the environment and causes serious social problems. It results mainly due to the consumption and pollution of water during production and usage and a low level of recycling of used clothing (Dahlbo et al., 2017; Pal & Gander, 2018; Vehmas et al., 2018). One solution proposed in the area of clothing consumption sustainability is to increase the circulation of used clothing. SHC can be treated as a common good of the community, and forms of its management can contribute to a closed-loop economy and the Sustainable Development Goals (Ekström & Salomonson, 2014; Ostrom, 2009; Ciechelska, 2020; Machado et al., 2019).

Circulation in SHC can take many forms with two main types: 1. selling/donating and 2. receiving/buying used clothing. The forms of disposing of used clothing most frequently cited by survey respondents in various countries include donating to charity, giving clothing to family or friends, garage sales, online sales, and garbage disposal (Herjanto et al., 2016; Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010; Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012). In contrast, SHC can most often be purchased from second-hand stores (brick and mortar and online), flea markets, and sharing economy platforms (Ferraro et al., 2016; Ek Styven & Mariani, 2020).

From the point of view of achieving the 12th goal of Agenda 2030 – i.e., ensuring sustainable production and consumption patterns – it is in the interest of local and global communities to organise the SHC trade in such a way that as many consumers as possible want to engage in it, as this

reduces the waste burden on the environment in the form of used clothing, and the resource depletion and emissions in the production of new clothing (Ek Styven & Mariani, 2020; Fontell & Heikkilä, 2017).

Empirical studies on the motives of consumers to engage in SHC circulation are quite limited and tend to focus on a single country, either comparing motives in two selected countries with apparent sociocultural differences or focusing on differences in consumer motives due to demographic variables (e.g., age) or, for example, the level of environmental awareness (Koay et al., 2022; Hur, 2020; Xu et al., 2014; Sorensen & Johnson Jorgensen, 2019; Wang et al., 2022).

Research indicates that the motives for engaging in SHC circulation vary and depend on several factors. With the growing popularity of the idea of responsible clothing consumption and the development of movements such as slow fashion, fashion and do-it-yourself (DIY), the importance of environmental, social and ethical motives has increased (Jung & Jin, 2014; Henninger & Singh, 2017; Peña-Vinces et al., 2020). However, many researchers stress that the ecological and social motive alone is rarely enough to engage in SHC circulation. The economic motive is fundamental – the possibility of saving money (Harris et al., 2016; Armstrong & Park, 2020; Jagel et al., 2012; Borusiak et al., 2021). On the other hand, among young consumers, in addition to social responsibility, there is a motive related to fun and a desire to change clothes frequently by exchanging with peers (Xu et al., 2014). Thus, consumers can act sustainably despite having little or no sustainable consumption motive (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010; Herjanto et al., 2016).

For this reason, planning a campaign to increase consumer engagement in sustainable activities requires knowing the motives (consumer benefits) of a given action each time and skillfully emphasising in communication those motives that are most relevant to the target audience (Vehmas et al., 2018).

Research methods

In the chapter, the author should indicate and describe the research methods applied to solve the research problem.

For the purpose and research questions, selected results of surveys on household participation in the free exchange and trade of SHC were used. The CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) type of research was conducted in 2022 as part of a grant entitled *Municipal Waste in Developed Countries as a Common Good: Informal Institutions in Used Clothing Management*. The research involved 547 women from five countries: Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden. The countries were selected based on the balance of foreign trade in SHC and the effectiveness of municipal waste management (recycling rate). Sweden and Germany are the countries with the most advanced and effective municipal waste management, with high recycling rates. Slovenia, like Poland and Lithuania, has a relatively new system but achieves one of the highest recycling rates. Despite being mainly a net importer of SHC, Lithuania also achieves a relatively high recycling rate.

On the other hand, Poland mainly exports used clothing but achieves a relatively low recycling rate. The study was limited to women only, as they mainly supply the household with clothing and, according to research, are more environmentally friendly than men (Triguero et al., 2016). The survey questionnaire used in the study consisted of 23 questions and a demographics section including the following socio-demographic variables: age, education level, labour market status, place of residence, number of people in the household (including the number of dependent children), age of dependent children, assessment of the household's financial situation. A condition of participation in the survey was a declaration of participation in a free exchange (receiving or donating) and/or trade (buying or selling) of SHC.

The article formulated the following research hypotheses:

- H1: The female residents of Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden are guided by the same motives when deciding to donate or sell used clothing.
- H2: The female residents of Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden are guided by the same motives when deciding to accept or buy used clothing.

A ch-2 independence test was used to verify H1 and H2.

Results of the research

547 women participated in the study: 106 from Germany, 107 from Sweden, 111 from Slovenia, 100 from Lithuania and 123 from Poland. A condition of participation in the survey was a declaration of participation in a free exchange (receiving or donating) and/or trade (buying or selling) of SHC.

The vast majority of women surveyed engage in SHC circulation, including exchanging or trading with family members and friends. Nearly 85% of the women donate or sell second-hand clothes free of charge, while about two-thirds of the respondents report a need for second-hand clothes, either by accepting them free of charge or by buying them. Every second respondent participates in both practices simultaneously, i.e. on both the supply and demand sides.

The majority of women participating in the survey positively view their household's financial situation. Roughly six out of ten respondents say they have no problems covering all necessary expenses. A quarter of respondents face difficulties, and about 7% admitted that the total monthly household income is insufficient to cover necessary expenses.

The vast majority of female respondents (almost 85%), considering the circle of family and friends, give away free of charge or sell second-hand clothes, and about 2/3 accept/buy them. At the same time, just over half of the respondents participate in both practices. The respondents from Poland (88.6%) are most likely to donate used clothing free of charge or sell it, and the respondents from Lithuania (76.0%) are least likely to do so. The leaders in accepting SHC free of charge or buying it are Lithuanian women (75.0%), while such practices are declared least often by the respondents from Poland (59.3%). Detailed data in this regard are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participation in the free exchange, purchase or sale of SHC (considering the circle of family and friends)

Declared participation in the free exchange, purchase or sale of used clothing	Total [%]*	Lithuania [%]	Germany [%]	Poland [%]	Sweden [%]	Slovenia [%]
I donate free of charge or sell used clothing	84.1%	76.0%	83.0%	88.6%	83.2%	88.3%
I accept free of charge or buy second-hand clothes	67.8%	75.0%	67.0%	59.3%	72.9%	66.7%
I both give away/sell free of charge and accept free of charge/buy used clothing	51.9%	51.0%	50.0%	47.1%	56.1%	54.9%

* Due to the possibility of indicating more than one option in the question, % does not add up to 100%.

Persons older than 56 (90.6%) are most likely to participate in free donations or the sale of used clothing, and the youngest (18-25) are least likely to participate – 78.8% of respondents. Respondents aged 36-45 are most likely to accept or buy used clothing for free, and those over 56 are least likely to do so (53.1%). In addition, it should be noted that age, having children, or financial situation does not significantly differentiate the participation in free donation or sale, as well as free acceptance or purchase of used clothing.

Among the motives declared by respondents for donating or selling used clothing, one can distinguish the following:

- the ecological motive: this way, I protect the environment (67.2%),
- altruistic motives: I help those in need (60.2%); I help loved ones (39.4%); I can feel needed (15.9%); I can act in a group (6.7%),
- economic motives: I get rid of unnecessary things (60.9%); I can earn money (44.6%); I do not like to waste (37.6%); I save on the cost of the rubbish fee (10.9%),
- motives related to fashion, tradition and imitation of others: I learned such patterns in my family home (17.0%), friends do so (10.2%), and a fashion for such activities (6.7%).

In order to verify the statistical significance of the differences between individual motives for donating or selling SHC and the respondents' country of residence, a chi-square independence test was applied. The chi-square test was conducted for the twelve variables (motives) and the country of residence (cf. Table 2).

Table 2. The results of the chi-square independence test for motives for donating or selling SHC and country of residence

Variable (the motive for donating or selling second-hand clothing)	Percentage share of the motive (for 5 countries in total)	Chi-square Statistics Value	<i>P</i>	Decision*
I protect the environment this way	67.2%	2.002	0.735	independence
I get rid of unnecessary things this way	60.9%	14.974	0.005	dependence
I help those in need	60.2%	21.259	<0.001	dependence
I can earn money this way	44.6%	18.160	0.001	dependence
I help loved ones	39.4%	6.538	0.162	independence
I don't like to waste	37.6%	4.585	0.333	independence
I learnt such patterns in my family home	17%	4.435	0.350	independence
I can feel needed	15.9%	10.003	0.040	dependence
I save on the cost of the rubbish fee	10.9%	7.061	0.133	independence
Friends do that	10.2%	8.693	0.069	independence
I can act in a group	6.7%	14.684	0.005	dependence
A fashion for this type of activity	6.7%	3.086	0.544	independence

* For *p* with a value of less than or equal to 0.05, the null hypothesis should be rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. The null hypothesis is a hypothesis about the independence of variables.

The chi-square test allowed H1 to be positively verified for seven of the twelve motives studied for donating or selling used clothing. However, the test result indicates differences depending on the country of residence for the two main economic motives and the main altruistic motive.

Among the motives declared by female respondents for receiving or buying SHC, one can distinguish:

- economic motives: this way, I can reduce my expenses on buying new clothes (74.0%); I don't like to waste (37.7%); this way, my relatives help me (27.9%); this way, strangers (individuals or charitable institutions) help me (19.2%),
- the ecological motive: this way, I protect the environment (69.5%),
- motives related to fashion, tradition and imitation of others: I learnt patterns in my family home (22.2%), a fashion for this type of action (21.1%), friends do that (17.3%).

Table 3. Results of the chi-square independence test for motives for receiving or buying SHC and country of residence

Variable (the motive for receiving or buying used clothing)	Percentage share of the motive (for 5 countries in total)	Chi-square Statistics Value	<i>P</i>	Decision*
This way I can cut down on spending on buying new clothes	74%	20.119	< 0.001	dependence
I protect the environment this way	69.5%	11.304	0.023	dependence
I don't like to waste	37.7%	9.995	0.041	dependence
This is how my loved ones help me	27.9%	3.628	0.459	independence
I learnt such patterns in my family home	22.2%	7.547%	0.110	independence
A fashion for this type of activity	21.1%	8.965	0.062	independence
This is how strangers (people or charities) help me	19.2%	12.854	0.12	independence
Friends do that	17.3%	8.965	0.062	independence

* For *p* with a value of less than or equal to 0.05, the null hypothesis should be rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. The null hypothesis is a hypothesis about the independence of variables.

In order to verify the statistical significance of the differences between individual motives for receiving or buying SHC and the respondents' country of residence, a chi-square independence test was used for each of the eight variables (motives) and the country of residence (cf. Table 3).

The chi-square test allowed H2 to be positively verified for five of the eight studied motives for receiving or buying second-hand clothes. As with the acquisition motives, the test result indicates a variation depending on the country of residence for the two main economic motives. However, the independence hypothesis should also be rejected for the environmental motive, which would need to be clarified in further research.

Conclusions

The research conducted helped in answering all the research questions. In the countries surveyed, the main motives for donating or selling used clothing include:

- the ecological motive: this way, I protect the environment (67.2% answer),
- economic motives: I get rid of unnecessary things (60.9%), I can earn money (44.6%), I do not like waste (37.6%),
- altruistic motives: I help those in need (60.2%), I help loved ones (39.4%).

On the other hand, the most important motives for buying and acquiring SHC were:

- economic motives: I can reduce expenses for buying new clothes (74.0%); I do not like waste (37.7%),
- the ecological motive: this way, I protect the environment (69.5%).

Validation of the hypotheses regarding consumers' motives for engaging in the SHC trade showed that for most of the motives most often indicated by respondents, there are no statistically significant differences by country. The similarities probably stem from a similar cultural background and socio-economic system, including the way the waste collection system is organised. The main reasons for which the hypothesis of independence could not be positively verified mainly concern economic motive, which can be explained by the different levels of wealth of the studied countries (see Table 3). The exception is the altruistic motive for selling and/or donating SHC and the environmental motive for buying and/or accepting SHC. The explanation of these differences will be the subject of the second stage of research based on in-depth interviews.

The main motives for engaging in SHC circulation indicated by respondents are directly – the ecological and altruistic motive – and indirectly – the economic motive – linked to the idea of sustainable consumption. At the same time, it should be emphasised that the study confirmed the results of other researchers¹, that consumers are simultaneously driven by several motives, and despite pro-environmental declarations, in most cases, they are also guided by an economic motive. This information should be considered when planning social campaigns to increase consumer involvement in the SHC trade.

The contribution of the authors

The article was written in collaboration with all authors. The authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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¹ Cf. the Literature review in this paper.

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MOTYWY ANGAŻOWANIA SIĘ KONSUMENTÓW W OBRÓT ODZIEŻĄ UŻYWANĄ W ASPEKTCIE ZRÓWNOWAŻONEJ KONSUMPCJI

STRESZCZENIE: Zwiększenie ilości konsumentów angażujących się w obrót odzieżą używaną wskazywane jest jako jeden z głównych sposobów równoważenia konsumpcji odzieży. Dlatego istotnym zagadnieniem wymagającym cyklicznych i pogłębionych badań są motywy angażowania się konsumentów w obrót odzieżą używaną. Celem artykułu było zbadanie głównych motywów angażowania się konsumentów w obrót odzieżą używaną w kontekście realizacji zrównoważonej konsumpcji odzieży w wybranych krajach europejskich. Do realizacji celu przeprowadzono 547 wywiadów kwestionariuszowych CAWI z konsumentami z pięciu krajów: Niemiec, Szwecji, Słowenii, Litwy i Polski. Główne motywy angażowania się w obrót odzieżą używaną wskazywane przez respondentów są bezpośrednio – motyw ekologiczny i altruistyczny oraz pośrednio – motyw ekonomiczny – powiązane z ideą zrównoważonej konsumpcji. Przy czym należy podkreślić, że konsumenci kierują się równocześnie kilkoma motywami i pomimo deklaracji prośrodowiskowych, w większości przypadków towarzyszy im również motyw ekonomiczny. Wyniki badań mogą być zastosowane w doskonaleniu systemów zarządzania odpadami, a w szczególności w kampaniach promujących obrót odzieżą używaną.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: zrównoważone działania konsumenckie, motywy obrotu odzieżą używaną, zarządzanie odpadami odzieżowymi