

Comparison between Second-Hand Apparel Shoppers versus Non-Shoppers: The Perspectives of Consumer Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Second-hand apparel shopping has been increasingly popular, and the industry is one of the fastest growing retail sectors. It is also considered as one of the eco-friendly consumption choices. The importance to investigate the sector to promote consumer ethics prompts in-depth understanding about the ethical traits and decision-making processes of second-hand consumers. The purpose of the study is to compare consumer ethics between shoppers and non-shoppers of second-hand apparel products. This study specifically focuses on finding differences in ethical traits such as altruism, ethical concerns, and ethical obligation; attitudes toward social responsibility in the apparel and textile industry; and ethical purchase and post-purchase returning intentions between the two consumer groups. An independent samples t-test was used to compare the groups on the means of individual ethical variables listed above. The analyses identified that second-hand shoppers were higher than non-shoppers on most of the variables examined.

Keywords: consumer ethics, ethical returns, environmentalism, second-hand apparel

INTRODUCTION

Consumption of apparel products has been connected with environmental impacts due to the global nature of the supply chain from production of materials to disposal of pre- and post-consumer textile wastes. To reduce environmental burdens of consumption, research has suggested that pro-environmental consumer groups tend to simplify their lifestyles by reducing clothing purchases with the belief that they can reduce production of clothing by diminishing demand (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 2014), textiles comprise more than eight percent of the entire waste volume in the United States. Some consumers may choose to purchase second-hand products instead of buying new items to prolong clothing life cycle and save the energy. Ninety-eight percent of clothing sold in the U.S. travels thousands of miles from overseas to be located in stores, which increases environmental impacts due to consumption of energy and air pollution (ABC News, 2011). Buying new items also incur waste associated with packaging and carrying bags. With consumers' concerns and fashion needs, second-hand fashion market has become one of the fastest growing segments in retailing. Goodwill has experienced 67 percent increase in sales since 2001 (Claudio, 2007), and the growth rate of online second-hand apparel market is estimated to be 82 percent with the expectation of \$25 billion market value in 2025 (Thredup, 2016). According to America's Research Group, around 18 percent of Americans shop at thrift stores and this figure is similar in other forms of stores: consignment/resale market (15%), factory outlets (11.4%), specialty stores (19.6%), and department stores (21.3%) (NARTS, 2016). While the mainstream retail market is still bigger than the second-hand or

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consignment market, it is noteworthy that second-hand shopping has become more popular and it is perceived as an ideal alternative to shopping for eco-conscious products (Livingston, n.d.).

With the growing consumer interests in second-hand shopping, comprehending its motives has been one of the targeted research topics in the domains of apparel and retailing. Shopping for used apparel was typically adopted by economically unprivileged individuals or families. However, unlike the previous belief that second-hand clothing is purchased for economic concerns and restraints (Hamilton, 2009), consumers have reported various reasons why they shop used products. Used clothing has been an important niche market in Western countries because it provides unique advantages that are not found in other retail sectors. For instance, second-hand shopping fulfills consumer needs to find unique items (Sherry, 1990), vintage styles (Cervellon, Carey, & Harms, 2012; Yan, Bae, & Xu, 2015), and authentic designer brands (Sihvonen & Turunen, 2016). Other benefits rather than product attributes include social interaction and recreational browsing (Gregson & Crewe, 2003). With growing consumer concerns about the environmental impact of apparel production, purchasing second-hand goods instead of buying new products has been considered pro-environmental. The beneficial role of buying used goods in saving the environment has also been documented. According to Farrant and her colleagues (2010), consumers can help reduce environmental impacts of clothing by reusing garments, ranging from 14% reduction of global warming for cotton T-shirts to 45% decrease of toxicity in human health for cotton and polyester blended trousers. The analysis was based on the reuse of 100 garments. In association with the environmental benefits of reusing clothes, researchers have investigated the link between second-hand shopping and pro-environmentalism and suggested that second-hand shoppers are environmentally conscious (Cervellon et al., 2012; Guiot & Roux, 2010; Yan et al., 2015).

In spite of the research findings related to second-hand purchases and environmentalism, there is still a dearth of studies about shoppers of used goods along with their ethical traits and decision making processes. To fill the research gap, this study aims to comprehend how second-hand apparel consumers differ from non-consumers in terms of their consumer ethics-related traits. First, this study investigates whether second-hand apparel shoppers are more ethical than non-shoppers by comparing their altruism, ethical concerns, and ethical obligation. Consumers who engage in environment-conscious consumption tend to portray greater ethical values than those who are not (Cleveland, Kalamas, & Laroche, 2005; Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009). Although previous studies examined those variables to understand the antecedents of ethical consumption such as organic or sweatshop-free shopping, it is unknown whether they play a role in distinguishing second-hand shoppers from non-shoppers. Second, ethical shoppers tend to show more positive attitudes toward socially responsible practices of companies (Dickson, 1999; Rudell, 2006). Consumers who practice ethical consumption tend to show their general interests in various ethical issues including environmental and societal issues (e.g., Dickson & Littrell, 1996). The study investigates consumer attitudes toward social responsibility in businesses to examine whether shoppers of used apparel are different from non-shoppers in their attitudes toward ethical business practices in general. Finally, consumers with strong ethical belief tend to display their values in various manners (Akehurst, Afonso, & Gonçalves, 2012; Gadenne, Sharma, Kerr, & Smith, 2011). For example, if shoppers of second-hand goods are different from non-shoppers regarding their ethical values and attitudes, it is plausible that they would also show more interests in buying other types of ethical products such as organic, fair trade, sweatshop-free, or recycled. Those who are ethical would portray their ethics in the post-purchase consumption as well (e.g., ethical product returns).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Second-hand clothing is a crucial niche market in the fashion industry of western countries. The multi-billion market has great potential to fulfill consumers' diverse needs while help reduce the clothing waste and thus the impact on the environment. The types of retailing in the segment range from thrift stores like Salvation Army, Goodwill, and Plato's Closet to online-based resale and consignment markets like Thredup and The RealReal that only deal with used designer products. While consumers increasingly express interests in used goods, there is lacking knowledge about the shoppers and their psychographic background in relation to consumer ethics. For developing hypotheses related to second-hand buyers and non-buyers, this study discusses previous studies about second-hand shopping and ethical consumption. Moral values and attitudes are important antecedents of environmentally conscious consumption. This study assumes that second-hand shoppers would portray higher ethical values and attitudes along with greater ethical purchase and post-purchase intentions compared to their counterparts. Based on the discussion, the importance of including these variables for hypotheses is explained.

Ethical Traits and Second-Hand Apparel Consumption

As important antecedents of ethical consumption, ethical traits such as altruism, ethical concern, and ethical obligation are known to predict purchases of ethical products (Barnett & Cloke, 2010; Dickson, 1999; Rudell, 2006; Shaw & Shiu, 2002). Values are “abstract beliefs about behaviors or end-states of existence that transcend specific situations and guide the selection or evaluation of behavior and events” (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, p. 551). These abstract beliefs are transformed into particular forms of personal traits (Smith, 1982). Before discussing ethical traits, it is necessary to comprehend the meaning of consumer ethics. Dodge, Edwards, and Fullerton (1996) defined consumer ethics as “the rightness as opposed to the wrongness of certain actions on the part of the buyer or potential buyer in consumer situations” (p. 823). Based on the definitions of values and consumer ethics, ethical values can be understood as personal beliefs about what is right and wrong based on one’s moral standard and responsibility (McGregor, 2006). Ethical traits are formed based on an individual’s abstract beliefs about what is right or moral and more likely to result in related behaviors. For example, consumers high in ethical traits are more likely to act on their beliefs by choosing goods that are more ethical than other products. In spite of the relationship between ethical traits and ethical consumption, it is unknown whether ethical traits can be used to distinguish second-hand shoppers from non-shoppers. Considering that second-hand shopping is an alternative way of buying eco-conscious products, it is plausible that second-hand shoppers may show higher level of ethical traits than non-shoppers.

Altruism drives consumers to act in an environmentally-conscious manner for collective benefits of the society and its generations. Due to its value to consider others while sacrificing one’s convenience or benefits, altruism has been one of the most frequently examined variables in the domain of ethical consumer research. For example, Granzin and Olsen (1991) identified the crucial role of altruism in predicting environmentally-conscious behaviors. In their study, participants who reported higher frequency of donating goods for longer use and recycling newspapers were found to be more altruistic than those who donated and recycled less. Akehurst and his colleagues (2012) also found a similar pattern in that altruism helped determine various ecologically conscious consumer behaviors such as purchasing energy efficient products or goods made from recycled materials. In line with the previous findings about altruistic consumers who are more pro-environmental, the study hypothesizes that buyers of second-hand apparel products would show greater altruism than non-shoppers.

While altruism is pro-social actions to help others (Krebs, 1970), ethical concerns refer to individuals’ worries and interests in ethical issues for one’s or others’ sake (Cowe & Williams, 2000). Ethical issues include societal and environmental matters. Some examples of societal issues are unfair trading practices between developed and developing economies and manufacturing processes that use child labor, and those of environmental issues are pollutions of the nature and excessive use of water and natural resources related to manufacturing processes. Buying used goods can help mitigate societal problems by avoiding purchases of goods manufactured by factory employees in developing countries who possibly work under unsafe working conditions. Ninety-eight percent of clothing sold in the United States is manufactured in foreign countries (ABC News, 2011), and the prevalence of the fast fashion retailing is frequently associated with sweatshop labor and poor working conditions (Chow, 2015). Considering these, replacing purchases of new items with buying used items can reduce the possibility of consuming goods manufactured by sweatshop labor. Furthermore, second-hand shopping helps environmental problems by reusing items that would otherwise go to landfills and produce pollution. While previous studies examined the relation between environmental consciousness and purchases of used goods, the current study examines the role of both environmental and societal concerns in determining second-hand purchases. This study posits that second-hand shoppers are more concerned about the environmental and societal issues with comparison to non-shoppers.

Researchers often argue that ethical obligation predicts ethical behaviors more effectively than do ethical concerns because it motivates individuals to follow the structured rules in life to behave properly (Shaw & Shiu, 2002). Individuals who feel strong responsibility toward ethical issues would take an action to follow their internal rules as an effort to help the issues. Defined as “an individual’s internalized ethical rules, which reflect personal beliefs about appropriate behavior” (Shaw & Shiu, 2002, p. 287), ethical obligation is closely linked to how individuals form their self-identity by recognizing ethical problems and initiating what to do (Shaw & Clarke, 1999). For example, individuals engage in ecological behavior such as recycling to avoid feeling guilty by not following their moral responsibility (Kaiser & Shimoda, 1999). Thus, it is likely that second-hand shoppers are more ethically obligated than non-shoppers and their personal obligation is part of the reason why they shop for second-hand apparel.

H1: Second-hand apparel shoppers are different from non-shoppers regarding their ethical traits, including altruism, ethical concern, and ethical obligation.

Attitude toward Social Responsibility and Second-Hand Apparel Consumption

Positive attitudes usually lead to related human behaviors (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). When individuals have favorable attitudes toward a particular matter or behavior, it is more likely for them to act in consistent with their attitudes. Social responsibility is an important business philosophy that many companies incorporate into their business activities and production processes (Perry & Towers, 2009). Socially responsible companies tend to be oriented toward the environment and people by considering the different points in the supply chain from production, distribution, and marketing and seeking balance between ethics/morality and profitability (Dickson & Eckman, 2006). The overall goal for the practice is to minimize potential negative impacts on the environment and people. Some of the examples of socially responsible activities in the fashion industry are adopting eco-friendly materials (e.g., recycled polyester) and production processes (e.g., natural dyes), collecting used apparel to recycle or reform, and donating for a good cause. Consumers with positive attitudes toward socially responsible companies are more likely to support such businesses (Kim, Littrell, & Ogle, 1999).

This study examines whether second-hand shoppers have stronger attitudes toward social responsibility in the fashion industry compared to non-shoppers. A limited financial resource was once considered as the major motive for second-hand shopping, but researchers have identified other reasons for the consumption of second-hand clothing. Second-hand fashion is mainly associated with the vintage look from its history and uniqueness (Cervellon et al., 2012; Yan et al., 2015). Cervellon et al. (2012) separated vintage clothing from second-hand clothing and pointed out that frugality influences the purchases of the latter, but not the former. Frugal consumers are motivated to purchase second-hand clothing and such frugality impacts recycling behaviors (Roux & Guiot, 2008). Yan et al. (2015) also indicated that second-hand clothing shoppers are environmentally conscious and purchase used apparel to be green. While researchers identified second-hand consumers' eco-consciousness and recycling behaviors which are some of the characteristics of socially responsible consumers, it is unknown whether they present stronger attitudes toward businesses that are socially responsible than those who don't shop for second-hand goods. Since second-hand shoppers have presented the characteristics similar to socially responsible consumers who have positive attitudes toward socially responsible businesses, it is also logical to hypothesize the following:

H2: Second-hand apparel shoppers are different from non-shoppers regarding their attitudes toward social responsibility in the apparel and textiles industry.

Ethical Purchase and Post-Purchase Intentions and Second-Hand Apparel Consumption

In relation to motivations to buy used products, Guiot and Roux (2010) identified four different shopping motives of second-hand goods among 708 French consumers: "polymorphous enthusiasts" (28.5%), "thrift critics" (30.4%), "nostalgic hedonists" (19.3%), and "regular specialist shoppers" (21.7%) (p. 393). The researchers indicated that second-hand shoppers have critical attitudes toward the conventional market system, which might affect their active participation in recycling and anti-waste activities from their ethical and ecological concerns. Similar to the finding, Yan et al. (2015) also found eco-consciousness among second-hand shoppers. These two studies demonstrated second-hand shoppers' environmental concerns and related actions such as extending the life of used apparel (Yan et al., 2015) and recycling (Guiot & Roux, 2010), both of which are examples of eco-conscious acquisition behaviors. Other examples of such consumer behavior include limiting apparel acquisition, buying apparel made from environmentally friendly materials, and acquiring apparel through eco-preferable sources such as second-hand stores and eco-conscious businesses (Hiller Connell, 2011). When consumers are eco-conscious, they would participate in various forms of related behaviors. For example, they would not only recycle but also seek consumption that is environmentally safer. In this logic, consumers who concern about the environment or society are more likely to engage in a wide range of eco-conscious consumer behavior such as buying various types of ethical apparel products including second-hand clothes and those made from recycled or environmentally preferable materials. They are also likely to support companies that emphasize social responsibility throughout their business practices and would not mind travelling a few more miles or spend more money to support such businesses.

As previously mentioned, second-hand shoppers put importance on extending product lifecycles through recycling, which is an example of post-consumption processes. If they are ethical purchasers and consider extending product lifecycles to be imperative, it is also plausible to posit that their returning practices are

ethical and moral as unethical product returns potentially incur waste and harm businesses (e.g., TruleSolutions, n.d.). Although there are various motivations for second-hand purchases, the focus of the study is ethics and responsibility associated with the consumption of used apparel. If second-hand consumers are ethical and responsible, they are more likely to display such traits in their decision-making process, including the post-consumption process. One prime post-consumption example is the process of product returns. Return fraud is one of the biggest challenges that retailers have been facing and this is likely to continue according to the National Retail Federation (2017). Consumer ethics is defined as “the rightness as opposed to the wrongness of certain actions on the part of the buyer or potential buyer in consumer situations” (Dodge, Edwards, & Fullerton, 1996, p. 823). It also refers to “the moral principles and standards that guide behavior of individuals or groups as they obtain, use, and dispose of goods and services” (Muncy & Vitell, 1992, p. 298). Return fraud is performed by consumers who have lacking consumer ethics (Harris, 2010). The key example of return fraud is buying a dress or tuxedo with an intention to return after wearing it at an event. Returning products after wearing several times can be considered as unethical because the products may not be sold after being returned. This study posits that second-hand shoppers may show more tendency to not only purchase ethical apparel products but also avoid any unethical returning practices.

H3: Second-hand shoppers are different from non-shoppers regarding their socially responsible apparel purchasing intention and ethical returning intention.

METHOD

Three hundred and two consumers (60 % females and 40% males) completed a survey at a regional shopping center. Consumers were recruited during the store opening hours on the weekdays and weekends for about two months. The mean age of the participants was 26 years old. Second-hand apparel shoppers were identified by asking in the survey whether they had shopped for used apparel during the past six months and the frequency of the consumption. One hundred sixty-six participants reported that they had done second-hand shopping, which comprised 60 percent of the sample.

Four items developed by Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981) were included to measure altruism ($\alpha = .76$). An exploratory factor analysis with seven items from Dickson (2000), Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, and Jones (2000), and Hustvedt and Dickson (2009) revealed two factors for ethical concerns: concern for environment (4 items: $\alpha = .86$) and concern for production (3 items: $\alpha = .77$). Ethical obligation was measured using four items adopted from Kaiser and Shimoda (1999) and Sparks, Shepherd, and Frewer (1995) along with two items developed for the study. Two factors were identified: personal contribution (4 items: $\alpha = .82$) and self-obligation (2 items: $\alpha = .78$).

Consumers' attitudes toward social responsibility in the apparel and textiles industry were measured using seven items developed by Creyer and Ross (1997), Dickson (1999), and Dickson (2000) ($\alpha = .86$). Four items were adopted from Kim and Damhorst (1998) and five items were created to measure socially responsible apparel purchase intentions among second-hand shoppers. The reliability test among these items produced the value of .92 for the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Finally, in terms of ethical post-purchase returning intention among the participants, four items from King, Dennis, and Wright (2008) were measured to identify consumers' ethical or unethical returning intentions ($\alpha = .82$).

RESULTS

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the means of two independent samples between second-hand shoppers and non-shoppers. These two samples were compared on individual ethical variables such as altruism, ethical concerns, ethical obligation, socially responsible attitudes, socially responsible apparel purchase intention, and ethical returning intention. The analyses identified that second-hand shoppers were higher than non-shoppers on most of the variables examined.

In terms of ethical traits, the shoppers displayed higher ethical concerns (i.e., concern for environment and concern for production) and self-obligation (i.e., one factor for ethical obligation). Concern for environment among second-hand shoppers was higher than that among non-shoppers ($M = 5.73$ vs. $M = 5.21$, $p < .001$). The means of the other factor, concern for production, was also significantly higher among shoppers than non-shoppers ($M = 4.72$ vs. $M = 4.33$, $p < .01$). For ethical obligation, only self-obligation showed the similar statistical pattern ($M = 4.46$ for shoppers vs. $M = 4.15$ for non-shoppers, $p < .05$). Altruism ($M = 5.72$ for shoppers vs. $M = 5.48$ for non-shoppers, $p = .067$) and personal contribution (i.e., the other factor of ethical

obligation: $M = 4.88$ for shoppers vs. $M = 4.62$ for non-shoppers, $p = .079$) did not produce significant mean differences between the two samples. The differences of the shoppers were statistically marginal with the p value under .10.

Second-hand shoppers reported significantly higher scores for other remaining variables related to attitudes toward socially responsible businesses along with ethical purchases and consumer ethics. Shopping experiences in second-hand markets were associated with consumers' attitudes toward social responsibility in the apparel and textiles industry ($M = 5.24$ for shoppers vs. $M = 4.86$ for non-shoppers, $p < .01$). Those shoppers were also more ethical in the purchase and post-purchases processes. They not only displayed higher intentions to purchase ethical apparel products and engage in ethical consumption ($M = 5.69$ vs. 5.07 for shoppers and non-shoppers respectively, $p < .001$) but also were more willing to return products ethically ($M = 6.24$ vs. 5.86 for shoppers and non-shoppers respectively, $p < .01$).

DISCUSSIONS

Second-hand apparel was once considered for economically marginalized people (Williams & Paddock, 2003). However, consumers are more concerned about the environment than ever before, used apparel products have become one of the eco-conscious options for those individuals. With its increased market size, the importance of fully understanding second-hand consumers has been emphasized. While various studies examined motives for second-hand shopping (Ferraro, Sands, & Brace-Govan, 2016; Guiot & Roux, 2010) and some of the characteristics among the shoppers (Yan et al., 2015), the research stream still requires in-depth understanding of the shoppers. To fill this gap, the study investigated the differences between second-hand shoppers and non-shoppers on a range of ethics-related variables. The statistical analyses revealed that second-hand shoppers were generally more ethical than non-shoppers in their decision-making process.

When it comes to ethical traits, the shoppers reported higher ethical concerns and self-obligation than those who had not shopped for second-hand apparel, but the former was not different from the latter on the levels of altruism and personal contribution. Similar to previous studies (e.g., Cervellon et al., 2012; Yan et al., 2015), second-hand apparel shoppers were concerned about the environment and any potential negative impacts of apparel production and distribution on the environment and people working for the industry. Previous studies identified the link between second-hand apparel consumption and environmental concerns (Cervellon et al., 2012; Yan et al., 2015). However, the current study added new knowledge about other ethical concerns that second-hand apparel shoppers had. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they were concerned with issues related to working conditions affecting workers in the U.S. and foreign clothing manufacturing businesses. Results showed that second-hand apparel shoppers of this study were also more concerned about the working conditions of garment factory workers across countries than non-shoppers.

In addition to their concerns about the environment and factory workers associated with apparel production, second-hand shoppers presented greater responsibilities toward them than did non-shoppers, even though they were not different from non-shoppers in the beliefs about their ability to contribute to improving the circumstances. That is, both second-hand shoppers and non-shoppers believed that their purchases of second-hand products could help improve the environment and working conditions of domestic and foreign garment factories, but the shoppers had greater obligation to enhance any situations that could be improved. Therefore, feeling obligated to change negative situations had a greater impact on second-hand shopping than did individual beliefs about personal positive contribution. Both consumer groups reported high altruism, but it did not explain second-hand purchases. This could be understood from the fact that second-hand shopping is a more environmentally preferable choice rather than an option to support factory workers. When consumers have higher altruistic values, they might be more likely to consider the working conditions of factory workers in their purchase decisions if they are aware of the issue. Second-hand apparel consumption is, however, found to be more directly related to environmental concerns rather than concerns related to factory workers because it can help prolong the lifetime of used products.

The second-hand shoppers also displayed more positive attitudes toward social responsibility in the apparel and textiles industry than did the non-shoppers. While previous studies specifically focused on the relation between environmentalism and second-hand apparel consumption (Cervellon et al., 2012; Yan et al., 2015), this study extended the knowledge about the consumers of the market by investigating what they think about the concept of social responsibility in the industry and apparel companies that perform better business practices. For example, they were more interested in businesses that focus on socially responsible practices and more willing to recognize and support such companies.

The shoppers not only showed more supportive attitudes toward socially responsible businesses but also expressed stronger intention in performing ethical purchase and post-purchase practices. Guiot and Roux (2010) did not investigate ethical consumerism or consumer ethics as the motives for second-hand shopping, but the study extended some knowledge about second-hand shoppers and their ethical purchases and post-purchase processes. Compared to those non-shoppers of second-hand apparel goods, the shoppers presented stronger interests in purchasing various types of ethical apparel products such as organic, eco-friendly, sweatshop-free, and fair-trade goods along with those made from recycled materials. Longer lifecycles of apparel products were more important to them rather than trendy styles of goods that go out of style quickly. Participants were also asked whether they would pay more money for a product from an apparel firm that they knew to be ethical. Instead of shopping for new items to look trendy, second-hand shoppers in the study considered other factors such as the negative aspects of apparel consumption and production. Interestingly, the two consumer groups reported differences in their ethical returning practices as well. The shoppers strongly agreed that they would not engage in a range of unethical returning activities such as deliberately damaging apparel to be thought as a defective item to return, buying for a single event with an intention to return, returning worn clothes as new, and returning even though the damage was their own fault.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The goal of this study was to identify the differences between second-hand apparel shoppers and non-shoppers on the primary variables related to ethics and social responsibility. The findings offer crucial insight about second-hand apparel shoppers, clearly indicating that these consumers are more ethical and socially responsible than non-shoppers. This information would be useful for second-hand online and offline businesses and the marketers of such companies.

Second-hand clothing stores mainly focus on the availability of gently-worn branded items (e.g., Plato's Closet) or the size of their companies (e.g., thredUP.com: "Largest Online Thrift Store") for their marketing and advertising. These companies advertise by listing well-known brands they carry or the popularity of their stores. Another focus of the advertising among the retailers that carry high-end designer products is the authenticity of their products and the variety of brands (e.g., therealreal.com). This study suggests that second-hand companies should advertise the environmental and social benefits of buying their products to appeal to their target market. The second-hand shoppers in the study reported much higher ethical traits than those who had not shopped for such products. Marketers can also utilize the information when they create advertising campaigns. They may appeal to ethical concerns or the sense of responsibility to catch the attention of the target market. Furthermore, most large firms own different brands for their portfolio diversification strategy (i.e., Aaker, 2009). Considering that second-hand shoppers are also interested in buying other types of ethical apparel products, second-hand retailers may diversify their brands by acquiring or developing brands that sell different categories of products such as organic or eco-friendly, fair-trade, sweatshop-free, recycled goods. In this manner, such companies can increase operational efficiency as well as profitability by targeting similar types of consumers.

In spite of the increasing market size and the significance of the industry, there is lacking information about second-hand consumers and business practices. Although this research provides important information about second-hand shoppers and their characteristics, it requires related consumer research to understand these consumers from different aspects. Thus, first of all, researchers may develop a segmentation model for the market and identify diverse second-hand consumer segments. They can also explore the psychographics and other important variables of the target market by differentiating consumers through their age cohorts. Secondly, based on the current research, researchers may compare which advertising appeal works better between the message that generates consumer concerns and the one that evokes consumer responsibility. Finally, this study identified that second-hand shoppers tend to worry about both the environmental and social issues associated with apparel manufacturing. It is important to investigate whether second-hand shoppers have critical views in apparel production and how they perceive purchasing new products or fast fashion products. In general, this research provides the platform in which researchers can create new, insightful ideas for their future research related to the second-hand industry.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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