Mindful Consumption: Segmenting Consumers to Foster Sustainable Fashion and Enhance Economic Resilience

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This study explores how behavioral economics, specifically nudging theory (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), can be applied to encourage sustainable fashion choices, particularly through second-hand clothing. Although awareness of fast fashion's environmental and social consequences has increased, many consumers struggle to translate concern into behavior. This "green gap" (McNeill & Moore, 2015) remains a barrier to widespread adoption of sustainable consumption. The study addresses this issue by identifying distinct consumer segments that differ in environmental attitudes, perceptions of second-hand fashion, and social influence.

A national survey of U.S. adults aged 18–65 will be administered via Qualtrics. The instrument includes measures of environmental concern, attitudes toward fast fashion, perceived value of second-hand goods, and social norms. Cluster analysis will identify consumer segments with shared beliefs and behaviors. These segments will guide the design of targeted nudging strategies that align with consumer motivations.

Nudging offers a non-coercive approach to guiding decisions by altering choice environments. While widely used in areas like food and energy, its application to fashion consumption is still limited. This study applies nudging in a novel context to promote behavior change at scale.

Expected findings will clarify which consumer groups are most open to second-hand consumption and under what conditions. For example, some may respond to normative messaging, while others may be influenced by economic framing or ease of access. These insights can help bridge the gap between awareness and action.

Retailers can use these findings to shape campaigns that elevate second-hand fashion. Policymakers and educators can craft public messaging that resonates with key consumer groups. By moving beyond generic appeals, this research supports more effective and inclusive sustainability strategies.

Ultimately, this work integrates behavioral economics with consumer segmentation to promote mindful consumption. It offers insights for advancing environmental sustainability and consumer well-being while respecting individual choice.

References

McNeill, L., & Moore, R. (2015). Sustainable fashion consumption and the fast fashion conundrum: Fashionable consumers and attitudes to sustainability in clothing choice. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 39*(3), 212–222. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12169

Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. (2008). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. Yale University Press.

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