Identifying Apparel Consumer Typologies with the Potential for Slow Fashion

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Abstract

The trend toward fast fashion has upended the traditional fashion calendar, resulting in a fundamental shift in consumer shopping behaviors. Overconsumption now exacerbates the environmental and social impact of the apparel industry. However, the slow fashion movement aims to facilitate the paradigm shift to a more sustainable apparel system. It has become evident that widespread change can only be achieved through a joint commitment by all actors in the fashion system (e.g., organizations, fashion media, consumers). For consumers, this means adopting more sustainable consumption and disposal practices. Research suggests that an entirely green apparel consumer does not exist. Instead, consumers' apparel consumption exists in tension between the sustainable and unsustainable. This exploratory study utilizes a holistic approach to identify apparel consumer typologies with potential for slow fashion by jointly considering participants' sustainable and unsustainable apparel consumption behaviors. The findings highlight attributes of each typology that act as barriers or motivators to adoption of slow consumption. The authors propose that, guided by carefully crafted marketing messages, all consumers have the capacity to make incremental changes toward sustainability. Opportunities are discussed for slow fashion marketers to target each group, with the goal of increasing their engagement in the slow fashion movement.

Keywords: Sustainability, slow fashion, slow consumption, green marketing

1. Introduction

In recent years, corporations across a range of industries (e.g., food, auto, cosmetics, apparel, fast-moving consumer goods) have begun to address sustainability concerns in their production processes and have significantly increased their offering of sustainably produced products to consumers (Cho, Gupta, & Kim, 2015). In turn, sustainable consumption, or "consumption that simultaneously optimizes the environmental, social, and economic consequences of acquisition, use, and disposition in order to meet the needs of both current and future generations" has gained momentum among consumers (Phipps et al., 2013, p. 1227). However, a widespread shift to sustainable consumption has yet to occur.

This research adopts the perspective of Peattie (1999), who proposed that there is no such thing as a truly 'green consumer.'

This idea illustrates that, despite engaging in some green consumption practices, all consumers demonstrate "at least some element of 'grey' consumption in product sectors where green alternatives clearly exist" (McDonald et al., 2012, p. 452). This phenomenon of grey consumption is evident with apparel consumers, as the industry relies on planned obsolescence to fuel spending. For consumers, the propensity toward 'grey' consumption may result from fashion's role in identity construction (Joy et al., 2012). Especially for highly trend conscious consumers, the desire to acquire new fashions is often in direct opposition with the desire to limit consumption (Joy, 2015; McNeill & Moore, 2015), leading them to compartmentalize their sustainability concerns and fashion purchase/disposal habits (Joy et al., 2012). This explains why the tendency toward overconsumption is more of an issue in the fashion industry than in other consumer product sectors (Cho, Gupta, & Kim, 2015).

McDonald et al. (2012) describe the process by which consumers adopt more sustainable consumption behaviors as 'greening,' acknowledging that individuals' approaches to greening their lifestyles are contingent on a range of contextual influences at the micro (e.g., consumer decision-making process) and macro (e.g., societal norms) levels. The authors conclude that, guided by carefully crafted marketing messages, all consumers have the capacity to make these incremental changes. Evidence that the environmental imperative is becoming increasingly urgent has led many social entities (e.g., NGOs, public policy agencies) and academics to advocate for sustainability as a joint responsibility of industries and consumers. In the coming years, research that identifies multifaceted approaches for increasing consumer awareness and engagement on this issue will continue to be meaningful (Cavender, 2018; Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Hopkinson & Cronin, 2015; Ivan et al., 2016).

This exploratory study utilizes a holistic approach to identify apparel consumer typologies with the potential for slow fashion by jointly considering participants' sustainable and unsustainable apparel consumption behaviors. The findings highlight the attributes of each typology that act as barriers or motivators to the adoption of slow consumption, proposing that each group has the potential to adopt more sustainable behaviors. For each typology, opportunities are discussed for slow fashion marketers to target these consumers, with the goal of increasing their engagement in the slow fashion movement.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Slow Fashion

Over the past three decades, the trend toward fast fashion has exploded, upending the traditional fashion calendar and resulting in a fundamental shift in consumer shopping behaviors. It is not surprising that the robust growth of fast fashion in the global retail market has coincided with increasingly indisputable evidence of the environmental toll of the clothing industry. On the company side, high levels of production have exacerbated the negative environmental (e.g., natural resource depletion) and social (e.g., working conditions) impacts of the clothing industry. At the consumer level, overconsumption has resulted in drastic increases in post-consumer waste and landfills that are quickly reaching their capacities (Hill & Lee, 2012). However, the emergence of multiple counter movements that challenge these detrimental production and consumption practices is an encouraging sign that more far-reaching change is imminent.

Slow fashion "encompasses the whole range of 'sustainable,' 'eco,' 'green,' and 'ethical' fashion movements…[and means] not only slowing down the consumption and production processes, but also protecting the well-being of the workers, communities, and the environment" (Ertekin & Atik, 2015, p. 54). Slow fashion researchers adopt a macro institutional approach to sustainability that considers the role of all actors in the fashion system (e.g., organizations, fashion media, consumers) and proposes that a micro, managerial perspective is not sufficient to address the breadth of sustainability challenges facing the sector (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014; Prothero et al., 2011). In other words, mobilizing consumers is perceived as a necessary step toward legitimation (i.e., mainstream acceptance) of the slow fashion movement (Hopkinson & Cronin, 2015; Luchs et al., 2015; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013). For consumers, engaging in the slow fashion movement through slow consumption necessitates a shift from quantity to quality-focused consumption, a willingness to engage in alternate forms of consumption (e.g., second-hand market), and a commitment to conscientiously disposing of used clothing (Jung & Jin, 2014; 2016).

For years, many future-oriented companies have embraced sustainability as a long-term strategic investment that, in addition to being a moral imperative, is a means of achieving economic gains and a viable advantage over competitors (Beard, 2008; Carcano, 2013; LaRocca, 2014). However, the Global Fashion Agenda (2018) annual report marked 2017 as a turning point for the sustainability agenda in the broader fashion industry.

Of the executives polled in the organization's annual measure of corporate sustainability, "52% reported that sustainability targets acted as a guiding principle for nearly every strategic decision they made – an increase of 18 percentage points" from 2016 (Global Fashion Agenda, 2018, p. 5). Despite the growing commitment to sustainable development by the apparel industry, limited messaging by brands and the media about consumers' role in slow fashion (i.e., slow consumption) has cultivated a barrier to the widespread adoption of slow fashion at the consumer level (Cavender, 2018; Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Hopkinson & Cronin, 2015; Ivan et al., 2016; Phipps et al., 2013).

Although awareness of sustainability issues and the slow fashion movement is mounting, the consumer group that is actively engaged in slow fashion remains a niche segment (Ertekin & Atik, 2015). For most consumers, "sustainable fashion is not perceived as a high street alternative, but rather a non-mainstream phenomenon that can be observed in the fashion world" (Henninger et al., 2016, p. 405). Research suggests that because "marketing is the consumer interface and creates the consumer touch points and shapes product experiences, a major part of the responsibility of operationalizing sustainability will rest with the marketer" (Sodhi, 2011, p. 179).

2.2 Mobilization of Slow Fashion among Consumers

Scholars in the fields of marketing, consumer behavior, and communications (e.g., Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Hopkinson & Cronin, 2015; Ingenbleek et al., 2015; Luchs et al., 2015; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013) have anticipated the role of slow fashion marketers in galvanizing consumers toward more sustainable clothing consumption behaviors. Further, research suggests that to engage consumers in the co-creation of a sustainable market environment, a fundamental rethink of marketing's role in fueling the current consumption ideology will be required (Sheth et al., 2012; Sodhi, 2011; Torelli et al., 2012). As consumers in highly populated emerging markets (e.g., India, China) are rapidly approaching Western levels of consumption, increased communication about sustainability issues will become increasingly important in mitigating overconsumption and easing the environmental toll of the fashion industry (Armstrong-Soule & Reich, 2015; Ertekin & Atik, 2015; McDonagh & Prothero, 2014; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Scaraboto & Fisher, 2013). There is an array of retailers whose operations support the sustainability mission, whether directly (e.g., born-sustainable brands, secondhand marketplaces) or indirectly (e.g., luxury). These retailers are uniquely positioned to elevate the sustainability agenda through their branded communication and marketing efforts.

As the industry is slowly moving toward an "agentic perspective on consumers as strategic, purposive actors" (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013, p. 1254) in the paradigm shift to a more sustainable apparel system, research that investigates consumers' potential for slow fashion in this evolving market environment will be valuable (Armstrong-Soule & Reich, 2015; Janssen et al., 2012; Kotler, 2011; McDonagh & Prothero, 2014). The present study answers the call for continued research that identifies opportunities for slow fashion marketers to facilitate the social normalization of sustainable consumption among consumers (Armstrong-Soule & Reich, 2015; Ertekin & Atik, 2015; McDonald et al., 2012; Sodhi, 2011; Zaharia & Zaharia, 2014).

2.3 Consumer Typologies for Sustainable Apparel Consumption

McDonald et al. (2012), through a review of the extant literature, present a number of methodological challenges associated with the segmentation of 'greening' consumers according to objective characteristics (e.g., demographics) and warn against a focus on individual purchases, as each is context and product dependent. The authors also discuss misconceptions that can result from surveying consumers' intentions and implying that they are a proxy for actual behaviors (McDonald et al., 2012). Although intentions are reasonable behavioral indicators in many areas of consumer research, the presence of an attitude-behavior gap is well documented in the literature on sustainable apparel consumption (Gam, 2011; Ertekin & Atik, 2015; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Sadachar et al., 2016). This attitude-behavior gap is most evident among materialistic and trend conscious consumers (Joy, 2015; Joy et al., 2012; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009; Park & Kim, 2016; Sadachar et al., 2016). Instead, McDonald et al. (2012) advocate for the heuristic value of typologies derived from consumers' orientations to research and purchase processes. This approach acknowledges that identifying a homogenous group of green or ethical consumers with uniform intentions is not feasible because no individual's habits are entirely sustainable or unsustainable. Consumers exhibit both 'green' and 'grey' characteristics in their apparel consumption and "approach the greening of their lifestyles in distinct ways" (McDonald et al., 2012, p. 459).

In addition, the authors of the present study believe that simultaneously accounting for sustainable and unsustainable consumption and disposal habits may illuminate opportunities and barriers to the adoption of more sustainable behaviors within each typology. Slow fashion marketers can then leverage these insights in their strategic marketing efforts. Although a range of studies exist that utilize segmentation or typology approaches to identify sustainable consumers, most studies focus on identifying the characteristics of sustainable consumers (Cho et al., 2015; Peattie, 2001, Watson & Yan, 2013), purchase intentions for sustainable products (e.g., Janssen et al., 2012) or product ranges (e.g., Davies, & Ahonkhai, 2012; Kapferer, & Michaut, 2014), levels of sustainability concern or awareness (e.g., Jung & Jin, 2014; 2016), perceived personal impact and responsibility for sustainability (e.g., Leary et al., 2014, 2017, 2018; Luchs et al., 2015), and willingness to purchase sustainable alternatives (e.g., Matthews & Hodges, 2016; Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015). To the authors' knowledge, no study has yet explored consumers' sustainable/ unsustainable apparel consumption and disposal behaviors concurrent with their motivational drivers of consumption (e.g., trend, price). Therefore, the theoretical foundation for studying the 'greening' apparel consumer is somewhat limited, and as a result, so are documented practical implications that can be leveraged through slow fashion marketing strategies to foster increased widespread participation in the slow fashion movement (Cho, Gupta, & Kim, 2015; McDonald et al., 2012, Peattie, 1999). This study aims to fill a gap in the literature by offering a holistic approach to typifying apparel consumers and parsing out potential opportunities to engage them in slow fashion. The findings identify characteristics of each typology that can be reasonably leveraged by slow fashion marketers to facilitate the group's engagement in the slow fashion movement (i.e., slow consumption). The results introduce theoretical underpinnings of the 'greening' apparel consumer that necessitate further investigation and refinement in future research.

3. Methods

The survey instrument for this research was an online questionnaire consisting of eight demographic questions and 103 closed-ended interrogative questions on a 7-point Likert scale. Items were adapted from existing scales in order to measure consumers' motivational drivers of apparel consumption (e.g., trend, price; Lichtenstein, Ridgway, & Netemeyer, 1993) and orientation to slow fashion (Jung & Jin, 2014; 2016). The researchers developed items to measure consumers' sustainable and unsustainable consumption behaviors and propensity toward sustainable and unsustainable clothing disposal. Items were also developed to measure consumers' level of knowledge seeking for sustainability as the researchers consider this construct useful in understanding consumers' potential for slow fashion. As this is an exploratory study, the researchers perceive these newly developed measures to be acceptable initial indicators of consumers' potential for slow fashion in their consumption and disposal of apparel.

Data were collected from a convenience sample of retailing students at two U.S. universities, yielding 405 usable responses. The sample was 85 percent female (n = 344) and 15 percent male (n = 61). Ninety-nine percent of respondents were 18-25 years old, with the majority being Caucasian (82%) followed by African-American (8.9%). Sixty-three percent (n = 255) of respondents reported that they shop for apparel more than three times per month and eighty-five percent (n=361) reported spending less than $100 per shopping trip. Study participants also demonstrated diverse apparel shopping preferences, indicating that they shop at fast fashion retailers (73.8%), high-end retailers (73.6%), second-hand marketplaces that sell/rent luxury merchandise (73.6%), and second-hand marketplaces that sell/rent luxury mass merchandise (47.7%).

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed to examine the basic structure of the measures. Reliability was examined through EFA and the calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficients (.70 or above). The EFA identified four dimensions for apparel consumption behavior: overconsumption, mindful consumption, swapping, and careless disposal (see Table 1). Factor loadings for each item ranged from 0.66 to 0.82. Cluster analysis was then used to assemble respondents into four unique groups based on the apparel consumption variables. Although hierarchical clustering methods were popular in the past, it is now recommended to use a combination of hierarchical and nonhierarchical cluster methods (Bloch et al., 1994; Hair et al., 2010; Reynolds et al., 2002). Therefore, factor respondents were clustered based on factor scores using Ward's method (Jamal et al., 2006; Reynolds et al., 2002). Then, a *K*-means clustering procedure was conducted to obtain the final clusters with the initial seeds provided by the hierarchical analysis solution. The results from the cluster analysis (see Table 2) indicated that there are four distinct clusters (p <0.001): mindful shoppers, apparel hoarders, style consumers, and swappers.

Table 1. Apparel Consumption Factors and Reliabilities

Dimension/items	Factor loading	Reliability
Overconsumption		
I buy larger quantities of clothing than my friends.	0.69	0.75
The amount of clothing I purchase has an impact on the environment.	0.68	
I have too many clothes.	0.76	
Mindful Consumption		
I consider how long an item of clothing will last before purchasing it.	0.79	0.78
I am mindful about the quantity of clothing I purchase.	0.82	
Swapping		
I swap clothing with friends and family members.	0.65	0.77
I buy/sell clothing via online second-hand marketplaces (e.g., Swap.com, Thredup.com, Poshmark.com, The RealReal.com)	0.82	
I have attended a clothing swap event	0.71	
Careless Disposal		
I do not donate my clothing purchased from fashion retailers when I am done wearing it due to the quality of the garments.	0.76	0.70
I throw away my clothing when I am finished wearing it.	0.71	

Table 2. Results of Cluster Analysis

Apparel Consumption	Cluster Means [a] Cluster 1 (Mindful shoppers)	Cluster 2 (Apparel Hoarders)	Cluster 3 (Style Consumers)	Cluster 4 (Swappers)	*F-value*
Overconsumption	-0.57	1.01	-0.48	0.35	106.46***
Mindful Consumption	0.64	0.11	-1.03	0.49	118.36***
Swapping	-0.57	-0.18	0.13	1.12	61.10***
Careless Disposal	-0.09	-0.67	0.09	1.06	56.96***
Cluster size	122	102	116	65	
% of sample	30	25	28.6	16	

[a] The cluster descriptions are based on factor scores that have a mean of zero and standard deviation of one.
*** The mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level

In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the apparel consumption clusters and their potential for slow fashion, shopping profiles for the clusters were also examined. The four clusters showed significant differences in their shopping store preferences (excluding high-end/designer), trend orientation, price consciousness, time/effort consciousness, and their current orientation toward sustainability ($p < 0.001$; see Table 3).

Table 3. Shopping Profiles of Apparel Consumption Clusters

Apparel Consumption Clusters						
Variables	**Mindful Shoppers**	**Apparel Hoarders**	**Style Consumers**	**Swappers**		
Cluster Means					**F- value**	**Sig.**
Store Preference						
Fast Fashion	4.94	5.63	4.98	5.29	8.20	0.000
High-end & Designer	4.77	5.06	5.14	5.08	1.74	0.159
High-end Secondhand Marketplace (i.e., buy/sell, rent)	3.90	4.07	4.46	4.43	3.08	0.027
Mass Merchandise Secondhand Marketplace (i.e., buy/sell, rent)	4.04	4.60	3.92	4.72	4.49	0.004
Trend Orientation						
Trend Consciousness	5.64	6.08	5.71	5.86	5.42	0.001
Fashion Leadership	4.91	5.71	5.24	5.52	9.19	0.000
Price & Time/Effort Orientation						
Price Consciousness	5.64	5.84	5.19	5.60	6.05	0.000
Time/Effort Consciousness	2.75	2.79	3.33	3.60	6.81	0.000
Sustainability Orientation						
Social Equity	4.21	4.49	3.97	4.87	8.56	0.000
Authenticity	5.09	5.11	4.63	5.23	6.31	0.000
Localism	4.94	5.13	4.66	5.34	7.04	0.000
Knowledge Seeking	4.84	5.36	4.21	5.33	18.68	0.000

4. Results and Discussion

The four apparel consumption clusters, or typologies, are discussed in the context of their potential for slow fashion according to their current consumption and disposal behaviors. Opportunities for slow fashion marketers to target these individuals, thereby increasing their engagement in the slow fashion movement, are also discussed.

4.1. Apparel Consumption Clusters with Potential for Slow Fashion

4.1.1 Mindful Shoppers

Cluster 1 (*Mindful Shoppers*) accounts for approximately 30% of the sample (n= 122) and is the largest of the four consumer groups. It is distinguished from the other clusters by its higher ratings on the mindful consumption items (e.g., I consider how long an item of clothing will last before purchasing it; I am mindful about the quantity of clothing I purchase). This group suggests that they do not purchase larger quantities of clothing than their friends and do not think that they have too many clothes. The cluster also shows the least interest in apparel swapping. The shopping profile for mindful shoppers demonstrates that, of the four typologies, they have the lowest level of purchase intention toward fast fashion, high-end apparel, and second-hand marketplaces that sell/rent luxury merchandise. The group has the second lowest purchase intention toward second-hand marketplaces that sell/rent luxury mass merchandise. These consumers are also the lowest ranked group on both trend orientation variables (i.e., trend consciousness, fashion leadership). In addition, mindful shoppers are the second most price conscious cluster but are the least time/effort conscious cluster.

When considering the entire profile of the mindful shopper cluster, it appears that these consumers are not highly involved in fashion. They are building a wardrobe shaped by their personal styles, rather than by current fashion trends (McDonald et al., 2012). This approach to apparel consumption may also explain mindful shoppers' limited interest in apparel swapping and the fact that they are not carelessly disposing of their apparel.

These consumers decline to purchase the latest fashion trends, and instead favor apparel that represents their personal styles, which suggests that they form emotional attachments to their clothes (Watson & Yan, 2013). The fact that their purchases are not trend-driven also allows mindful shoppers to keep apparel items longer (Cho et al., 2015).

Although mindful shoppers' consumption behaviors are the most sustainable of any consumer typology in the study, interestingly, they have the second lowest score on all sustainability orientation variables ahead of the style consumer group. Despite mindful shoppers demonstrating many of the behaviors that characterize slow consumption (e.g., mindful about quantity/quality of purchases, not carelessly disposing), they are not necessarily engaging in these behaviors because of a strong preference for sustainability. However, mindful shoppers' level of knowledge seeking for sustainability (e.g., I would be interested to hear more about the environmental sustainability initiatives of apparel companies in the news, having knowledge of whether apparel companies have environmental sustainability initiatives in place would affect my purchase decisions) is closer to the apparel hoarder and swapper groups than the style consumer group, which has a significantly lower level of knowledge seeking for sustainability. Mindful shoppers' scores on the knowledge seeking variable suggest that they are not adverse to gaining more sustainability knowledge, but perhaps, that they have had limited exposure to sustainability-related messaging due to their minimal level of engagement with apparel industry-related content.

This cluster may be a viable target for "born sustainable" apparel companies (e.g., Everlane, Jessie Kamm). These companies were founded with sustainability ingrained in their ethos and their operations embody the tenets of slow fashion (i.e., slow production strategies, products designed for slow consumption). Consumers who shop born sustainable brands are exposed to educational content about the company-facing responsibilities of slow fashion (e.g., ethical factories, pricing transparency, high quality garments) that shape the brands' operational strategies. Mindful shoppers' knowledge seeking for sustainability is relatively low, and importantly, born sustainable companies very clearly document their sustainability commitments via engaging content across their websites. Research emphasizes "the importance of a clearly structured website with visualized, objective and sustainability-specific content to positively influence consumer awareness and perceptions." (Dach & Allmendinger, 2014, p. 409). These brands often combine content that highlights their commitment to sustainability in the supply chain with messaging geared toward educating shoppers about the consumer-facing responsibilities of sustainability. For example, on one of its interactive webpages, Everlane connects its use of high-quality materials, small-scale production, and lack of trend-driven pieces with the consumer responsibility of minimizing consumption and states, "we want you to wear our pieces for years, even decades, to come" ("We believe, n.d., para. 4). Visitors to Jesse Kamm's website can view all of the editorial features written about the designer and her namesake brand since its inception with common themes centered around the detrimental impact of overconsumption, wardrobe downsizing, and reshaping the consumer mindset from a quantity to a quality perspective.

Mindful shoppers' low ratings for time/effort consciousness and trend orientation also suggest an opportunity for born sustainable brands to appeal to this cluster as purveyors of high quality, long-lasting and classic pieces. Feeling confident that they will find high quality, affordably priced clothing at these retailers when they do go shopping may foster brand loyalty among these shoppers. Mindful shoppers' low level of time/effort consciousness also suggests that they may spend time exploring the websites of these born-sustainable brands, particularly information that can be accessed from garments' product pages. For example, Everlane's "see the factory" link appears on the product page for every garment that is available on its website, exposing shoppers to detailed information (i.e., graphics, statistics) about where the clothing was manufactured. Sustainable brands' strategy of utilizing experiential content to facilitate deeper connections between consumers and the products they purchase has proven to be a viable strategy for strengthening brand loyalty (Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Ivan et al., 2016; Joy, 2015; Sherman, 2017).

4.1.2 Apparel Hoarders

Cluster 2 (*Apparel Hoarders*) represents approximately 25% of the respondents (n=102) and is distinguished by its higher ratings on overconsumption items than the other groups (e.g., I buy larger quantities of clothing than my friends, I have too many clothes). Cluster 2 is also the lowest ranked group on careless disposal behaviors, suggesting that these consumers are unlikely to throw away their used clothing, but that they also do not donate their clothing due to its decline in quality after use.

The researchers deemed these consumers "apparel hoarders" because they are accumulating more clothing than the other groups, but do not indicate that they are throwing away, donating, swapping, or consigning their used clothing. The shopping profile for apparel hoarders indicates that this cluster has the highest preference for fast fashion. The low quality that characterizes fast fashion garments may explain why apparel hoarders are not donating or actively identifying second-life alternatives for their used clothing.

Of the four typologies, apparel hoarders have the highest ranking on both trend orientation (i.e., trend consciousness, fashion leadership) and price consciousness. These consumers' price consciousness, coupled with their high levels of trend consciousness and fashion leadership, also underscores their preference for fast fashion. Research suggests that many consumers, especially those who are young and trend conscious, perceive sustainable fashion brands to have high price premiums, thereby limiting their ability to engage in sustainable consumption despite their willingness to purchase sustainability-produced garments (Henninger et al., 2016; McNeill and Moore, 2015). However, Henninger et al. (2016) found that consumers' opinions about the price of sustainably produced garments are often based on assumptions, rather than on actual purchase experiences. This finding highlights a lack of consumer awareness that, similar to other apparel product categories, a range of price points also exist for sustainable fashion (Henninger et al., 2016).

In the present study, the apparel hoarders seem to be highly involved in fashion, which makes them susceptible to unsustainable apparel consumption behaviors. However, of the four clusters, this group has the highest level of knowledge seeking for sustainability and the second highest ranking on the other sustainability orientation variables (i.e., social equity, authenticity, localism). Therefore, an opportunity exists for budget-friendly sustainable apparel brands (e.g., Pact, EcoVibe Apparel, Threads 4 Thought) to appeal to these consumers. Through marketing messages demonstrating that, just like all other apparel product categories, slow fashion companies represent a range of price points, these brands can inform apparel hoarders that there is a price point that is suitable to their budget. In order for budget-friendly sustainable brands to further position themselves as viable alternatives to apparel hoarders' current shopping preferences (i.e., fast fashion), they could also emphasize that they do offer trend-driven merchandise in addition to more classic design styles.

Apparel hoarders are the second least time and effort conscious group ahead of the mindful shoppers. These consumers' willingness to expend more time and energy shopping for desired merchandise is likely a result of their high fashion involvement. Apparel hoarders acknowledge that they have too many clothes (i.e., overconsumption), but also express a desire to gain more sustainability knowledge. They also have a favorable orientation toward sustainability. Research suggests that gaining sustainability knowledge is an antecedent to behavioral change (Sadachar et al., 2016). Therefore, many opportunities exist for sustainability-oriented brands to leverage apparel hoarders' interest in becoming more responsible consumers.

Although apparel hoarders did not indicate an overall preference for swapping behaviors in the cluster analysis, the shopping profile for these consumers revealed that they have the second highest preference for second-hand marketplaces where visitors can buy, sell, or rent mass merchandise (e.g., Poshmark, Thredup). Although the sale of designer brands (e.g., Gucci, Valentino) is also allowed, these marketplaces are more targeted toward mass-market consumers who are interested in buying or selling gently-used clothing from brands such as Madewell, Free People and Lululemon, to name a few. These marketplaces support slow fashion by giving users an appealing alternative to buying new apparel and provide an avenue for the sale of used apparel to like-minded shoppers. Apparel hoarders may be receptive to these marketplaces' promotions that are geared toward attracting new users, especially if these messages leverage apparel hoarders' price consciousness (e.g., ability to sell used apparel for cash or site credit), trend consciousness (e.g., merchandise assortment includes wide selection of current styles), and their favorable orientation to sustainability (e.g., alternative to buying new apparel).

Apparel hoarders also reported a low level of time/effort consciousness when shopping. This suggests that they are not adverse to the time commitment that is required to engage in buying and selling via a second-hand marketplace. However, apparel hoarders' fashion leadership may be the biggest motivator for them to join a (mass merchandise) second-hand marketplace due to the community-driven and social nature of these platforms. For example, Poshmark deems its sellers "seller-stylists" and allows them to build profiles within the marketplace to promote and sell their products. Seller-stylists can then invite buyers to join their networks so the buyers can track the sellers' available product listings. The Seller-stylists can even curate looks for their buyers as a means of increasing sales and gaining repeat business.

For consumers that are highly involved in fashion like apparel hoarders, experience and engagement are often as highly valued in the consumption process as the purchases themselves (Sherman, 2017). It is plausible that apparel hoarders who participate in second-hand marketplaces can begin to derive more meaning and engagement from their apparel consumption and divestment behaviors than if they were just accumulating large quantities of disposable clothing.

Subscription boxes are continuing to gain popularity with subscribers identifying diverse motivations for using these services (e.g., style assistance, timesaving). One such motivation is to manage consumption habits (Chen et al., 2018). Subscription box services allow users to set their budget. Users are also able to determine their level of engagement with the service, such as whether they prefer to review products for approval before each box is sent. Some services, such as Le Tote, allow members to wear and return the products they are sent in their boxes, essentially allowing them to rent the pieces in exchange for the monthly subscription fee. In cases where users want to keep items from their boxes, they are able to purchase them at discounted prices. Subscription box services may appeal to apparel hoarders' desire to regularly acquire new, on-trend merchandise, but will also prompt them to more thoughtfully consider whether they want to purchase a box item while wearing it during the rental period. The ability to wear products before purchasing (or returning) them may mitigate the desire for instant gratification that exacerbates overconsumption among highly trend-oriented consumers (Sadachar et al., 2016; Watson & Yan, 2013).

Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) found that trend conscious consumers' need for novelty and change can often be satisfied by creative alternatives to consumption, or upcycling (e.g., re-designing old clothes). Apparel hoarders may be receptive to marketing on the 'refashioning' trend (e.g., Refashion Nation, New Dress a Day) and the online communities and in which 're-fashionistas' show off their creations. This would also expose apparel hoarders to the sustainable consumption messaging that underpins these platforms.

4.1.3 Style Consumers

Cluster 3 (*Style Consumers*), which accounts for approximately 29% (n=116) of the sample, is an interesting group of consumers whose apparel consumption habits highlight their potential marketability for slow fashion brands. This cluster has the second lowest ranking on the overconsumption factor but is also the lowest ranked cluster on the mindful consumption factor. Although these consumers are not necessarily mindful of the items they purchase, they do not make regular apparel purchases and are not prone to overconsumption behaviors. The shopping profile for Cluster 3 provides further insight into this group's consumption habits, demonstrating that they do not have a preference for fast fashion or second-hand marketplaces that are geared toward the buying, selling, and/or renting of mass merchandise (e.g., Thredup, Le Tote). However, of the four groups, Cluster 3 has the highest preference for high-end apparel and second-hand marketplaces that exclusively sell designer merchandise (e.g., The RealReal, Vestaire Collective). This group's preference for high-end apparel seems consistent with its ranking as the least price conscious cluster. These consumers also have the second lowest score on trend orientation (i.e., fashion leadership, trend consciousness), ahead of the mindful shopper group. When considering the entire profile of Cluster 3, it appears that these consumers are not closely following fashion trends, but that their personal styles dictate their apparel purchase decisions (McDonald et al., 2012).

The designation, style consumers, seems to accurately describe this cluster. Their preference for high-end apparel, whether new or second-hand, and their avoidance of fast fashion suggests that they consider quality and timelessness to be key criteria in their purchase decisions (Cho et al., 2015; Watson & Yan, 2013). Style consumers' position as the least mindful consumer group in the sample merits further investigation but may be attributed to their preference for high-end brands. Perhaps this group does not consider how long apparel items will last before purchasing them because they perceive high quality to be a latent expectation when buying high-end and designer products (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). In addition, because they are college students, the amount of high-end apparel that style consumers can regularly afford to purchase is presumably somewhat limited, which may clarify why they reported that they are not mindful about the quantity of clothing they purchase.

In addition to being the least price conscious, style consumers are also the second most time/effort conscious cluster. These findings, coupled with style consumers' affinity for both new and used high-end apparel, suggest that they may be a viable target for subscription box services that specialize in new (e.g., Stitch Fix) or second-hand (e.g., Material World) designer merchandise.

Although subscription box services are continuing to grow in popularity and now exist for a variety of product segments and price points, this retail format initially gained traction by appealing to time-pressured consumers who were willing to pay for the convenience of having products curated and shipped to them by a stylist (Chen et al., 2018). It is realistic to assume that style consumers' income levels will increase in the coming years as they begin their careers, allowing them to more regularly purchase from upmarket brands. It is also probable that style consumers will continue to be time/effort conscious shoppers as their personal and professional responsibilities increase after college.

Currently, it is unclear whether this group will develop a propensity for overconsumption as its ability to purchase larger quantities of high-end apparel increases. However, membership with a high-end subscription box service may increase style consumers' mindfulness and sense of accountability about their consumption behaviors since subscribers' accounts track changes in the frequency and quantity of their purchases over time. Moreover, style consumers may be receptive to marketing messages by high-end subscription box services that highlight the exclusive treatment that members receive when working with their stylists. Having a stylist select products for them will also allow style consumers to continue building wardrobes geared toward their personal styles, classic looks, and high quality. Such clothing can be worn for a long time, making style consumers' purchases more sustainable even though, as evidenced by their low ratings on all sustainability variables, they do not yet consider the environmental and social impact of their consumption practices.

Style consumers are also the second highest ranked group on careless disposal behaviors, although there is a significant difference between these consumers and the group that is most prone to careless disposal, the swappers. Style consumers are already participating in second-hand marketplaces that specialize in high-end apparel, but perhaps they are not using these platforms as outlets for sustainable apparel divestment. High-end second-hand marketplaces (e.g., The RealReal, Vestaire Collective) may be able to increase style consumers' engagement through marketing messages that emphasize the ability for users to both acquire and divest designer merchandise on their websites. These messages can also appeal to style consumers' high-level of time/effort consciousness by demonstrating that the process of selling merchandise is streamlined for sellers' convenience. For example, once sellers mail their gently used designer merchandise to The RealReal, the company assumes all responsibilities related to listing and selling the products and disseminates payment back to the sellers once their items have sold. Although style consumers are not a price conscious group, they do express a moderate preference for swapping. Awareness that they can choose to receive site credit instead of cash payments when selling their merchandise may prompt style consumers to make more of their apparel purchases on these platforms, a more sustainable behavior than always buying items new.

Although style consumers are technically engaging in slow consumption behaviors, their level of knowledge seeking related to the environmental impact of apparel consumption is significantly lower than the other three groups, as are their scores on the remaining sustainability orientation variables (i.e., social equity, authenticity, localism). Style consumers' low scores on the sustainability orientation variables may be explained by their low level of fashion involvement, which could result in limited exposure to messaging about sustainability by apparel retailers and the fashion media (Gam, 2011). Research also suggests that high-end and luxury brands' patrons believe that environmental and social responsibility are intrinsically linked with those brands' operational strategies (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013; Davies, Lee, & Ahonkhai, 2012; Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). Therefore, style consumers may perceive environmental and social responsibility to be solely corporate responsibilities, rather than a shared responsibility between companies and consumers (Ertekin & Atik, 2015). Both of these explanations point to a lack of awareness among style consumers about the slow fashion movement and the sustainability challenges facing the apparel industry. This finding indicates an opportunity for high end and designer brands to better incorporate sustainability messaging into their brand communication strategies.

Research suggests that sustainable development has become a top corporate priority in the luxury sector. In fact, luxury organizations (e.g., Kering, LVMH) are leading the entire industry in developing innovative, sustainable solutions throughout their supply chains, within communities, and through investment in R&D (Ivan et al., 2016; Kapferer & Michaut, 2014; Muratovski, 2015). However, many high end and luxury brands have yet to incorporate sustainability-oriented narratives into their brand communication strategies (Cavender, 2018; Ivan et al., 2016; Kapferer & Michaut, 2015; Rahman & Yadlapalli, 2015). Such messaging can educate consumers about brands' commitment to environmental and social sustainability in their supply chains, in addition to the consumer-facing (e.g., slow consumption) responsibilities of sustainability (Ivan et al., 2016; Muratovski, 2015).

High-end brands that have only recently established sustainability targets can also emphasize these commitments through their marketing messages by conveying to consumers that “a step by step progressive modification and control is taking place with high goals at the end” (Kapferer & Michaut, 2015, p. 15). Many of style consumers’ shopping behaviors (e.g., quality over quantity) already align with slow fashion although their actual knowledge of sustainability appears to be limited. Exposure to messaging about slow fashion and sustainability by the high-end brands that they patron may increase style consumers’ awareness “that long-term change, such as that needed for sustainability, arises through the linked actions of organizations and consumers” and prompt them to make a more conscious commitment to mindful consumption (Hopkinson & Cronin, 2015, p. 1384).

4.1.4 Swappers

Cluster 4 (*Swappers*) represents approximately 16% of the sample (n=65) and has the highest score on the apparel swapping factor. The scale items for apparel swapping represent both monetary (e.g., I buy/sell via online second-hand marketplaces) and non-monetary (e.g., I swap clothing with friends and family members, I have attended a clothing swap event) exchange behaviors. Swappers are the second highest ranked cluster on the mindful consumption factor after the mindful shopper group. This finding seems consistent with the cluster’s “swapper” designation since pursuing second-life alternatives for used clothing and a willingness to wear second-hand apparel, whether swapped or purchased, are two characteristics of slow fashion consumers (Jung & Jin, 2016; Watson & Yan, 2013).

Interestingly, the swappers also have the second highest ranking on the overconsumption factor but their score is significantly lower than the apparel hoarder group, which has the highest propensity toward overconsumption. Swappers also rank significantly higher than the other three clusters on the careless disposal factor, a finding that merits further investigation. However, the fact that these consumers are already practicing sustainable apparel divestment through their swapping behaviors suggests that they perceive a barrier to finding second-life alternatives for some of their clothing. Considering their preference for fast fashion, swappers may be trashing the portion of their apparel that they believe is in too poor condition to swap and/or sell on a second-hand marketplace.

The shopping profile for swappers demonstrates that these consumers are both highly involved in fashion and highly oriented toward sustainability. Swappers have the highest ranking on all of the sustainability orientation variables, with the exception of knowledge seeking, where they rank second. Of the four clusters, swappers have the second highest preference for fast fashion, high-end apparel, and second-hand marketplaces that specialize in high-end apparel. The group has the highest preference for second-hand marketplaces that specialize in mass merchandise. Swappers also have the second highest trend orientation (i.e., trend consciousness, fashion leadership) ranking after the apparel hoarders. These findings demonstrate that swappers purchase from a diverse mix of retailers and underscore the important role that clothing consumption plays in their identity construction. Therefore, swappers face a challenge, as they must continually reconcile their desire to practice mindful consumption with their desire to follow fashion trends (Joy et al., 2012; Joy, 2015; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Park & Kim, 2016).

This cluster’s interest in swapping and the second-hand market, a small but growing industry segment, suggests that they are open to engaging in niche forms of consumption that provide sustainable alternatives to purchasing apparel new (Matthews & Hodges, 2016). It is also important to acknowledge, however, that in recent years, the number of available second-hand marketplaces has steadily increased, along with the popularity of this retail format among savvy consumers. It is possible that swappers’ preference for second-hand marketplaces is due to their trend consciousness and a perception that these retail formats are fashionable shopping locations. Nevertheless, the shopping profile for the swapper cluster suggests that these consumers do have potential marketability for slow fashion companies and can also be targeted with messages geared toward increasing their responsibility for sustainable consumption (Luchs et al., 2015).

Swappers have the highest preference for second-hand marketplaces that specialize in mass merchandise (e.g., Thredup, Le Tote) and the second highest preference for second-hand marketplaces that specialize in high-end merchandise (e.g., The RealReal, Vestaire Collective).

This finding suggests that second-hand marketplaces specializing in both mass market and high-end merchandise (e.g., Poshmark) may be most appealing to swappers as they will be able to search multiple price points on one platform.

New merchandise is added to second-hand marketplaces daily, which results in the need for users to regularly visit these sites in order to increase their likelihood of obtaining the most desirable products. Because swappers are the most time/effort conscious of the four clusters, they are likely dissatisfied when they spend time perusing second-hand retail platforms without discovering great ‘finds’ that they believe justify the time and effort spent in the search process (Watson & Yan, 2013). Therefore, these platforms may further appeal to swappers with marketing messages that promote time-saving and customization features. For example, Poshmark users can set their profiles to receive notifications when items matching their preferences (e.g., brands, sizes, styles, etc.) have been made available. These customization tools save users time and allow them to create a more personalized shopping experience. Some marketplaces, such as The RealReal, allow members to pay a small monthly fee to gain early access to new merchandise, a feature that may also appeal to swappers’ time/effort consciousness. Furthermore, many second-hand marketplaces incentivize their users to bring in new customers by offering discounts for referrals. Knowledge of these referral discounts may appeal to swappers’ fashion leadership, prompting them to encourage members of their reference groups to consider second-hand retailers as viable shopping alternatives. All of these marketing strategies may motivate swappers to shop more regularly from second-hand marketplaces and less often from their other preferred retailers (e.g., fast fashion).

Preventing used clothing from ending up in landfills is the first step towards a circular economy and requires a joint commitment by the apparel industry and its consumers (Ertekin & Atik, 2015; “Regain app,” 2018). Research suggests that there is a general lack of consumer awareness about sustainable apparel divestment, especially regarding options for disposal of clothing that is not suitable for the second-hand market or donation (“Apparel recycling,” 2017; Global Fashion Agenda, 2018; Thompson, 2017). This lack of awareness is also evidenced among the swappers, whose high ranking on careless apparel disposal demonstrates that they are not exclusively pursuing sustainable second life alternatives (e.g., swapping, second-hand market) for their used apparel. This finding reinforces the call for increased communication by industry leaders (e.g., The North Face), coalitions (e.g., Sustainable Apparel Coalition), NGOs (e.g., Greenpeace) and nonprofit organizations (e.g., Planet Aid, Goodwill) about the urgent imperative to mitigate overconsumption and the amount of clothing waste that ends up in our landfills (Cavender, 2018; Ivan et al., 2016). This communication can educate consumers about ongoing macro-level initiatives to make the apparel industry more “circular” (e.g., 2020 Circular Fashion System Commitment), and draw consumers’ attention to the ways that they can affect change at the micro-level.

Programs geared toward increasing the textile recycling rate are rapidly expanding, such as NGO-sponsored programs (e.g., Planet Aid’s yellow bins) and recycling reward programs at retailers’ store locations (e.g., Levi’s, Madewell; Cooper, 2018). Thrift stores such as the Salvation Army and Goodwill also participate in clothing recycling programs for donated clothing that is not suitable for resale (Thompson, 2017). Swappers may be an excellent target for informative messages that highlight their options for clothing recycling in order to instill in them a sense of personal responsibility to support the paradigm shift to a more sustainable apparel system (Joy, 2012; Luchs et al., 2015). Research suggests that calls to action for consumers to recycle their clothing should emphasize the shortest and most convenient path to donation (“Regain app,” 2018). Knowledge of easy, convenient, and free options for textile recycling may also appeal to swappers’ time/effort consciousness. Awareness of recycling reward programs, such as the ReGain app, the first digital take back program, may incentivize swappers to recycle clothing in return for discount codes from participating retailers, while appealing to their enjoyment of swapping behaviors (“Regain app,” 2018).

As initiatives to facilitate market change have continued to accelerate, it has become increasingly apparent that the paradigm shift to a more sustainable apparel industry will “require a transformation of the institutions and sacrifices from both consumers and producers” (Ertekin & Atik, 2015, p. 54). Therefore, consumers on a larger scale must be galvanized around the sustainability mission through increased communication by industry stakeholders (e.g., companies, NGOs, etc.). The swapper group exhibits many characteristics (e.g., knowledge seeking for sustainability, favorable sustainability orientation, preference for alternative shopping formats) that may increase their receptiveness to marketing messages positioning “responsibility for sustainability as a shared challenge and commitment” between consumers and the apparel industry (Luchs et al., 2015, p. 15). Moreover, this cluster also has the potential to leverage their fashion leadership, and acting as opinion leaders, elevate the sustainability discourse in consumer society.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

For the transition to a more sustainable apparel industry to accelerate, slow fashion researchers have proposed a macro institutional approach that "incorporates the buyer's contribution to the solution of the social issue, rather than putting responsibility for the issue exclusively with the company" (Ingenbleek et al., 2015, p. 1430). This perspective proposes that systemic transformation of the industry necessitates a concerted effort by organizations and consumers (Hopkinson & Cronin, 2015; Scarabato & Fisher, 2013). Mobilization of slow fashion at the consumer level has been hindered by a lack of active communication from the array of retailers whose operations support the sustainability mission (e.g., luxury, born-sustainable brands, secondhand marketplaces). This has resulted in missed opportunities to cultivate increased consumer awareness and ascribe responsibility to consumers' consumption and disposal habits (Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Luchs et al., 2015). Scholars advise that the paradigm shift to a more sustainable apparel system requires a rethink of marketing's raison d'être. While traditional marketing fueled the current consumption ideology with a push approach, marketing in the era of sustainability, must adopt a more authentic, transparent, and legitimate approach to creating customer value (Armstrong-Soule & Reich, 2015; Janssen et al., 2012; Kotler, 2011; McDonagh & Prothero, 2014; Zaharia & Zaharia, 2014).

This research adopts the position of McDonald et al. (2012) that all consumers have the potential to implement more sustainable consumption behaviors, with knowledge serving as a catalyst for their evolving personal orientations to sustainable consumption over time. The authors cite the value of consumer typologies for allowing sustainable companies to understand and target consumer segments, while facilitating the 'greening' of consumers' purchase and disposal behaviors. McDonald et al. (2012) assert that, because consumer perceptions rapidly change, research investigating their potential for sustainable consumption will have continued practical and research implications, as sustainability initiatives become further ingrained in companies' business and operational strategies.

To that end, this exploratory study adopted a holistic approach, examining consumers' sustainable and unsustainable consumption and disposal behaviors concurrent with their motivational drivers of apparel consumption (e.g., trend, price, time/effort, store preference). The findings revealed four distinct consumer typologies, providing an illustration of consumers' potential for slow fashion at one point in time. As expected, each group exhibited both sustainable and unsustainable consumption and disposal habits. By considering the entire profile for each typology, it is evident that their sustainable behaviors do not necessarily result from a desire to be more sustainable consumers. For example, the sustainable consumption behaviors demonstrated by the mindful shoppers, such as their low ranking for overconsumption and high ranking for mindful consumption, may be better explained by their limited interest in shopping and following fashion trends than a desire to practice slow consumption, given the group's low rankings for sustainability orientation and knowledge seeking for sustainability. Regardless of their motivations, mindful shoppers' aversion to overconsumption does align with the tenets of slow fashion. Similarly, each group's unsustainable behaviors do not necessarily signify an aversion to sustainability. For example, the apparel hoarders, who ranked highest on the overconsumption variable, also had a high level of sustainability orientation and the highest level of knowledge seeking for sustainability out of the four groups. Despite these paradoxes, each group does possess characteristics that highlight its potential marketability for slow fashion. The results of this study offer many contextual examples for how sustainable brands may reach these consumer groups, leveraging personalized, targeted marketing messages.

This research has a few limitations. First, the study utilized a convenience sample of retailing students. Although this approach did provide insight into how more trend conscious consumers reconcile their conflicting desires to consume and limit consumption, a larger and more diverse sample of consumers would have been desirable. In addition, consumers' perceptions of sustainability are rapidly changing and the popularity of alternative retail formats (e.g., secondhand marketplace) is increasing. Therefore, the typologies presented in this research only describe a consumer group at one point in time. Conducting this study at a point in the near future with the same sample may have yielded significantly different results. To that end, future research may employ a longitudinal method to survey consumers' greening of their apparel consumption and disposal behaviors over time. Future research on consumers' potential for slow fashion can also continue to utilize typologies as a means of understanding how consumers are greening their apparel consumption while reconciling a range of contextual influences.

This exploratory study considers select influences (e.g., trend orientation), but more factors can certainly be introduced to glean a more comprehensive picture of the opportunities and challenges to the adoption of more sustainable consumption behaviors that exist within each typology. As McDonald et al. (2012) suggest, diverse typology approaches are encouraged and can be "layered together in order to present a richer, more realistic, and useful picture of sustainable consumption" (p. 450).

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