Understanding the Global Trade of Second-Hand Clothing: An Analysis of Used Clothing Donor Perceptions in Ottawa

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(Source: Savers, 2019)

**THRIFT
STORE**

(Source: Salvation Army, 2018)

(Source: Diabetes Canada, 2018)

(Source: Goodwill Industries International, 2019)

Inside a Value
Village in
Burlington, ON

CONSERVE.

IT TAKES 1800 GALLONS OF WATER TO MAKE A NEW PAIR OF JEANS.
YOU'RE HELPING TO SAVE THE PLANET JUST BY SHOPPING HERE.

A BETTER WORLD
THROUGH
REUSE

value village™

EVERY YEAR, 10 MILLION TONS OF
CLOTHING ARE THROWN AWAY. YOU ARE
HELPING TO CHANGE THAT. THANKS A TON.

(Source: Photos taken by
Tayler Hernandez, 2018)

Gikomba market in Nairobi, Kenya

(Source: From Eagle Online article written by George Mangula, 2018)

Owino market in Kampala, Uganda

(Source: From Huffington Post article written by Eleanor Goldberg, 2016)

Research Questions

- How do donors of used clothing view their role within the second-hand clothing commodity chain?
- How does this impact their clothing donation behaviour?

Methodology

- 20 participants (16 female, 4 male)
- Semi-structured interviews (30-60 minutes in length)
- Participants were recruited through posters on-campus, word of mouth, and snowballing methods

Theme 1 – Donation Behaviour

- Why do you donate your used clothing?
 - Top responses: Environmentally motivated (30%); Others can make value from their clothing (25%); Help others in the community (25%)
- How does donating make you feel?
 - Top responses: Good (75%); Neutral (10%)
- Do you research the places you donate to?
 - Top responses: No (95%)

Where do you donate your used clothing?

Based on data from interviews with participants.

Theme 2 – Purchasing Behaviour

- Do you shop at second-hand stores in addition to donating?
- Why?
 - Top Responses: The price (50%); Environmental reasons; More unique items
- Why not?
 - No nearby stores; Don't like the idea of wearing used clothing

Second-hand clothing shoppers are ...

Theme 3 – What happens afterwards

- What do you think happens to the used clothing items that you donate but that aren't purchased or given away?
 - Landfill (65%); Donated elsewhere (30%); Could end up in countries in need overseas (30%); Remains until sold (10%)

- How do you feel about your donations ending up overseas?
 - Neutral (45%); Negatively (30%); Positively (25%)
- One participant described her feelings about it ending up overseas positively:

“I feel good about it. Watching the video it seems like it’s idealistic and I don’t think that a lot of places go through that effort to sort through all of it and that it just ends up being dumped in landfills. But if that video is true then it would make me even more motivated to donate my clothes.”

– Participant #1

Theme 4 – The Global Scale

- How do you feel about the global impacts on receiving countries?
 - All respondents said they felt negatively about the global impacts (even those who had previously said 'positive' or 'neutral')

- How do you feel about the global impacts on receiving countries?

“I will think twice before donating because for me, I belong to one of those countries [that the used clothing is shipped to]. So I think that my clothes bought here, might be then worn by somebody there and it could be for a higher price, I don’t know. So it’s a big no-no. I’d rather them make an effort and give it to a charity to the underprivileged rather than commercializing it.”

- Participant #3

“That’s very interesting...That makes me think of like, does that just reinforce a hierarchy between the West and the Rest? And how many used clothing items come into Canada versus the other countries? Because I feel like it’s not that many because we’re not imposing tariffs on them”

- Participant #15

- How does this change your perception of supporting new clothing stores versus used clothing stores?

“Well now I feel like there’s no difference. I feel like where I buy from, it doesn’t make a difference, socially now. They’re both a business, they’re both doing what they need to make a profit.”

- Participant #11

So what?

- 100% of participants learned something new from the interview
- 100% of participants felt as though the average Ottawa resident does not know about the industry and the global impacts
- 100% of participants were willing to try new things

On a scale of 1-5 how likely are you to continue to think about this global impact and research more about it?

Based on data from
interviews with participants

In an ideal world, what do you think is the best way for everyone to dispose of their used clothing?

Key Takeaways:

- Students were unaware of the global impacts but were willing to change their behaviour upon knowing the impacts - change is possible and it's necessary
- Everyone who consumes clothing is a part of this system - it is all of our responsibility's to be informed and be a conscious consumer

“Best way to dispose of our used clothing...I would say stop buying so [many] clothes, would be the first thing because disposing of it, there’s no really effective way to dispose of it. We’re a consumption society so I think it starts with just not consuming so much clothing. I think that would be the start.”

- Participant #6

References for images

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