

# CONSUMER SATISFACTION WITH CLOTHING DISPOSITION

Sally K. Francis, Oregon State University  
Sara L. Butler, Miami University

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore consumers' satisfaction with clothing disposition. A national survey of adult female consumers was conducted. No significant effects for clothing involvement on consumers' satisfaction with either the most frequent method of clothing disposition or the variety of clothing disposition methods available were found. Also, no significant relationships between several environmental attitudes and satisfaction with clothing disposition were found. Educational level was significantly related to both satisfaction measures although the pattern was not consistent. It is clear from this exploratory research that a great deal more work is needed to enhance our understanding of the role of disposition in the product consumption experience.

## INTRODUCTION

A recent bibliography of satisfaction literature published from 1982 through 1990 reveals a variety of research approaches and foci (Perkins, 1991). Several researchers have worked on furthering the development of theoretical frameworks such as disconfirmation theory. Others have conducted methodological studies to develop and refine measurement techniques. The greatest proportion of studies included in the Perkins (1991) bibliography were aimed at studying consumer satisfaction in relation to a variety of specific products and services, the most common being medical/health care, housing, and automobiles. Other studies examined satisfaction in relation to intangible concepts such as job satisfaction, marital satisfaction, satisfaction with leisure, and overall life satisfaction. The relationships of variables such as consumer personality and demographic characteristics to satisfaction have also been studied.

Studies have been conducted in a number of settings or contexts such as retail, the service sector, cross-cultural settings, and within segments of distribution channels. Consumer dissatisfaction and complaining behavior have also received a

great deal of attention. The literature includes analyses at various points in the consumption experience including pre-purchase, point-of-purchase, post-purchase, and end use.

However, the post-consumption phase has not been the focus of any consumer satisfaction work thus far, nor has it received extensive attention in the general marketing or consumer behavior literature. Post-consumption product disposal is increasingly being recognized as important particularly in view of its obvious impact on critical environmental issues such as solid waste disposal and resource conservation (Hanson, 1980; Harrell & McConocha, 1992; Razzouk, 1980). Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to examine consumer satisfaction in relation to product disposition.

Jacoby, Berning and Dietvorst (1977) proposed three post-consumption disposal options: keep; permanently dispose of the product by throwing it away, giving it away, selling, or trading; and temporarily dispose of the product. Harrell and McConocha (1992) expanded Jacoby, Berning, and Dietvorst's taxonomy by proposing six consumer disposal options (keep, throw away, pass along, sell, donate for tax deduction, and donate without tax deduction). Harrell and McConocha analyzed their six disposal options in relation to consumer attitudes and demographic characteristics. Among "planner disposers," about 70 percent of post-consumption disposal decisions resulted in rechanneling the goods for redistribution through selling, passing along or donating. About 22 percent of the respondents indicated they would keep products, whereas about 8 percent would throw them away. Affective reactions to disposal alternatives were found to be positively correlated with behavior tendencies.

The product involvement construct has become an important element of consumer behavior research in recent years. It has been suggested that involvement with products leads to greater perception of attribute differences and product importance (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Recent work on the development of consumer satisfaction models has included attention to the role of product involvement. Oliver (1989) posited that

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satisfaction is affected by consumer product orientation. In testing Oliver's model, Francis and Burns (1992) found that high fashion involvement contributed to clothing satisfaction. Additionally, clothing has been found to be a high involvement product among some consumers (Forsythe, Butler & Schaefer, 1990). Clothing involvement, therefore, may influence both disposition and satisfaction with disposition.

### METHOD

Survey methodology was used. A questionnaire was developed to measure consumer satisfaction with clothing disposition, clothing involvement, and environmental attitudes. Demographic data were also collected.

Consumers' satisfaction with the one way most frequently used to dispose of used clothing and consumers' satisfaction with the variety of ways available for the disposal of used clothing were measured on 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from not at all satisfied to completely satisfied.

Clothing involvement was measured by adapting Traylor and Joseph's (1984) general involvement scale because it was conceptualized as a response that reflects an individual's sense of self or identity which was considered to be consistent with involvement scales used by previous researchers (Francis, 1992; Francis & Burns, 1992). The scale was comprised of 4 items: (1) You can tell a lot about a person by the clothes he/she wears; (2) When I wear one of my favorite outfits, others see me the way I want them to see me; (3) People form an opinion of me based on the clothes I wear; and (4) My clothes help me express who I am. A 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used to measure responses to the clothing involvement items. A mean score for clothing involvement was calculated for each subject. Using percentile splits, subjects were then classified into three approximately equal groups for use in subsequent analyses. The resultant groups were: high involvement ( $n=122$ ), medium involvement ( $n=164$ ), and low involvement ( $n=115$ ).

General environmental attitudes and environmental attitudes specific to clothing adapted from Stephens (1985) were measured because it was expected that environmental attitudes would

have an effect on consumers' disposition decisions. A 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used to measure responses.

Adult female consumers were the population from which the sample was drawn. A national random sample of 1000 adult female consumers was purchased from a marketing research source that provides names based on telephone directory information. Data were collected using a modification of Dillman's (1978) techniques. Of the 964 deliverable questionnaires, 402 were returned for a 41.7 percent response rate. The final sample size was 402 consumers. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, factor analysis, chi square, and analysis of variance.

### RESULTS

The final sample consisted of 402 adult female consumers. The consumers were fairly evenly distributed across age categories. About 20 percent of the consumers were in each of 5 age categories: 25-34 years; 35-44 years; 45-54 years; 55-64 years; and 65 years and older. Only about 2 percent of the consumers were less than 25 years of age. Only 1 percent of the consumers had not attended high school; 33 percent had attended or graduated from high school. Forty-six percent of the consumers had attended or graduated from college; an additional 20 percent had at least some graduate or professional education.

The consumers in this sample were also fairly evenly distributed among income categories. About 6 percent of the consumers reported total household income of less than \$10,000. Approximately 15 percent of the consumers were in each of 7 other income categories: \$10-19,999 (13%); \$20-29,999 (16%), \$30-39,999 (17%), \$40-49,999 (14%), \$50-59,999 (12%), \$60-69,999 (6%), and \$70,000 or more (17%).

Results indicated that almost three-quarters of the respondents always or often disposed of their used clothing by giving it to a charitable organization. Giving to friends was the disposition method always or often used by 26 percent of the respondents, saving for the future by 11 percent, using as rags by 10 percent, and selling at garage sales by 9 percent. Selling through a consignment store or reusing/remaking used clothing into a

quilt or new clothing was never used as a disposition method by 84 and 88 percent of the respondents, respectively. Slightly more than two-thirds of the respondents indicated that giving used clothing to charity was the disposition method they used most frequently.

Respondents were very satisfied with how they were disposing of their used clothing. Nearly 89 percent of the respondents were either completely or somewhat satisfied with the one way they most frequently disposed of their used clothing. Similarly, 78 percent of the respondents were either completely or somewhat satisfied with the variety of ways available for the disposal of used clothing.

A significant relationship was found between clothing involvement and consumers' satisfaction with the variety of ways available for the disposal of used clothing ( $\chi^2 = 18.62$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p=.02$ ). Low involvement consumers were more likely to be completely satisfied with the variety of ways available for clothing disposal than were medium or high involvement consumers. The relationship between clothing involvement and consumers' satisfaction with the way they most frequently disposed of their used clothing failed to achieve significance ( $\chi^2 = 9.93$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p=.27$ ). A high degree of satisfaction was found for all three clothing involvement groups. Almost two-thirds of the high involvement and the low involvement groups were completely satisfied with the way they most frequently disposed of their used clothing; 59 percent of the medium involvement group were also completely satisfied with their clothing disposition method. Only about 11 percent of the consumers in each group were less than at least somewhat satisfied with their clothing disposition method.

Factor analysis was used as a data reduction technique for the environmental attitude items. Two separate analyses were performed: the first on the 11 general environmental items and the second on the 6 clothing environmental items. Varimax rotation was employed; factors with an Eigenvalue less than 1.0 were deleted. Factor scores were computed by multiplying factor loadings times the standardized variables.

Results of the factor analysis of the 11 general environmental attitudes are displayed in Table 1. Three factors were generated which were used in

subsequent analyses: Factor<sub>1</sub> Pro-Environmental Information/Regulation, Factor<sub>2</sub> Anti Water/Air Conservation, and Factor<sub>3</sub> Pro-Consumption Limitation. The Pro- Environmental Information/Regulation factor accounted for 36 percent of the variance and included variables that reflected a belief that government and the private sector should provide consumers with information about environmental issues and a willingness to pay higher taxes to fund greater control over pollution. The Anti Water/Air Conservation factor accounted for 12 percent of the variance and included variables that reflected the belief that efforts to control water and air pollution are not worth the effort and are not justified. The Pro-Consumption Limitation factor accounted for 10 percent of the variance and included variables that reflected the belief that most consumers buy more than they need and that consumers should limit their use of products made from scarce resources.

Analyses of variance were conducted to examine the effect of the general environmental attitudes factors on consumers' satisfaction with the two aspects of clothing disposition. The Pro-Environmental Information/Regulation factor had no significant effect on either consumers' satisfaction with their most frequent method of clothing disposition ( $F=1.98$ ,  $df=4$ , 385,  $p=.10$ ) or on the variety of ways available for clothing disposition ( $F=0.70$ ,  $df=4$ , 384,  $p=.59$ ). Similarly, the Anti-Water/Air Conservation factor had no significant effect on consumers' satisfaction with their most frequent method of clothing disposition ( $F=1.50$ ,  $df=4$ , 385,  $p=.20$ ) or on the variety of ways available for clothing disposition ( $F=2.25$ ,  $df=4$ , 384,  $p=.06$ ).

Results of the factor analysis of the 6 clothing environmental attitudes are displayed in Table 2. Two factors were generated which were used in subsequent analyses: Factor<sub>1</sub> Clothing Anti-Conservationist and Factor<sub>2</sub> Clothing Conservationist. The Clothing Anti-Conservationist factor accounted for 38 percent of the variance and included items that reflected the attitude that environmental issues are generally not relevant to clothing and that there are many other areas in which we are pressured to conserve. The Clothing Conservationist factor accounted for 18 percent of the variance and included variables that reflected the attitude that environmental issues

**Table 1**  
**Factor Analysis of General Environmental Attitudes**

General Environmental Attitudes	Factor 1 Pro-environmental Information/ Regulation	Factor 2 Anti-Water/ Air Conservation	Factor 3 Pro-Consumption Limitation	h <sup>2</sup>
The government should provide each citizen with a list of agencies and organizations to which citizens could report grievances concerning pollution.	.7726	-.0042	.0999	.61
Commercial advertising should be forced to mention the ecological disadvantages of products.	.7178	-.0496	.1021	.53
Manufacturers should be forced to use recycled materials in their manufacturing and processing operations.	.6452	.0192	.2335	.47
I become angry when I think about the harm being done to plant and animal life by pollution.	.6292	-.3342	.2960	.60
I would be willing to pay a 5 percent increase in my taxes to support greater governmental control of pollution.	.6040	-.2925	-.2062	.49
I think that a person should urge his or her friends not to use products that pollute or harm the environment.	.5644	-.1184	.4023	.49
I would be willing to pay one dollar more each month for electricity if it meant cleaner air.	.5574	-.4198	.0849	.49
Trying to control water pollution is more trouble than it's worth.	.0210	.8455	-.0888	.73
Much more fuss is being made about air and water pollution than is really justified.	-.2320	.8075	-.1335	.72
Most consumers buy more than they need.	-.0158	-.1682	.7699	.62
People should urge their friends to limit their use of products made from scarce resources.	.3477	-.0270	.7021	.61
% variance explained	36%	12%	10%	

**Table 2**  
**Factor Analysis of Clothing Environmental Attitudes**

Clothing Environmental Attitudes	Factors		h <sup>2</sup>
	Factor 1 Clothing Anti-conservationist	Factor 2 Clothing Conservationist	
It doesn't matter if people buy more clothing than they need because it will be passed on to others.	.7818	-.0933	.62
People should not be asked to conserve in clothing consumption because they are already asked to conserve in so many other ways.	.6748	-.1198	.47
There isn't much of a relationship between conservation of resources and clothing consumption.	.6073	-.0400	.37
Clothing is a resource that is often wasted.	-.5873	.2964	.43
I try to purchase clothing from manufacturers who I know are concerned about the environment.	.0090	.8998	.81
People should consider resource conservation when they buy clothes.	-.3323	.7435	.66
% variance explained	38%	18%	

should be taken into account in purchasing clothing.

Analyses of variance were also conducted to examine the effect of the clothing environmental attitudes factors on consumers' satisfaction with the two aspects of clothing disposition. The Clothing Anti-Conservationist factor had no effect on consumers' satisfaction with their most frequent method of clothing disposition ( $F=1.65$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $387$ ,  $p=.16$ ) nor on satisfaction with the variety of clothing disposition methods available ( $F=0.78$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $387$ ,  $p=.54$ ).

Similarly, the Clothing Conservationist factor had no significant effect on consumers' satisfaction with their most frequent method of clothing disposition ( $F=.78$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $387$ ,  $p=.54$ ) nor on the variety of clothing disposition methods available ( $F=0.82$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $386$ ,  $p=.51$ ).

Finally, chi square analyses were conducted to determine whether relationships existed between

demographic characteristics and the two clothing disposition satisfaction variables. Educational level was found to be related to both consumers' satisfaction with their most frequent method of clothing disposition ( $\chi^2=16.48$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p=.04$ ) and to consumers' satisfaction with the variety of clothing disposition methods available ( $\chi^2=17.58$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p=.03$ ). Generally, the more highly educated consumers were less satisfied with both their most frequent method of clothing disposition and with the variety of clothing disposition methods available. Specifically, slightly less than 50 percent of consumers who reported at least some graduate or professional study were completely satisfied with the way they most frequently disposed of their used clothing compared to 62 percent of those who had attended or graduated from college and 71 percent of those who had no education beyond high school.

A similar pattern was found for satisfaction

with the variety of clothing disposition methods available. Sixty percent of those consumers who had no education beyond high school were completely satisfied with the variety of clothing disposition methods available to them compared to 49 percent of those who had attended or graduated from college and 41 percent of those who had some graduate work. Perhaps the more highly educated consumers were more likely to perceive the potential for undiscovered technologies and methods for disposing of used clothing or were aware of disposition methods unavailable to them in their communities.

Age was found to be related to consumers' satisfaction with the variety of clothing disposition methods available ( $x^2=25.75$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p=.001$ ) but not to satisfaction with the most frequent clothing disposition method used. Sixty-four percent of consumers who were 55 years of age or older were completely satisfied with the variety of clothing disposition methods available compared to only about 42 percent of those 35 - 55 years of age and 35 years of age and under. This finding suggests that older consumers may know of more disposition methods than do younger consumers. However, this information has apparently not been passed down.

There were no significant relationships found between total household income and either of the two measures of satisfaction with clothing disposition.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore consumer satisfaction in relationship to product disposition. A national survey of adult female consumers was conducted to collect data on satisfaction with the most frequently used clothing disposition method, satisfaction with the variety of clothing disposition methods available, clothing involvement, general environmental attitudes, clothing environmental attitudes, and demographic characteristics. A final sample of 402 consumers was obtained.

Results indicated a fairly high level of satisfaction with both the most frequently used method of clothing disposition and with the variety of methods available for clothing disposition. Although product involvement has been shown to

be related to consumer satisfaction (Francis, 1992; Francis & Burns, 1992) and clothing has been found to be a high involvement product (Forsythe, Butler & Schaefer, 1990), in the present study clothing involvement had no significant effect on satisfaction with clothing disposition. These inconsistent results may be due to the use of slightly different clothing involvement scales in the three studies. Or, perhaps the involvement construct has no role in product disposition.

Alternatively, perhaps consumer involvement varies distinctly at different stages of the consumption process. That is, it may be that consumers who are highly involved in the acquisition stage may be quite disinterested in the disposition stage of the consumption process. It may also be likely that involvement in the disposition stage is quite low in general. To the extent that these likelihoods are true, new measures of disposition involvement are needed for use in further research. The lack of any relationship between either general environmental attitudes or clothing environmental attitudes and satisfaction with disposition may be because the most commonly used methods of disposition are viewed by many consumers as recycling. Consistent with Harrell and McConocha's (1992) findings, rechanneling goods for redistribution was common. Interestingly, more educated consumers were less satisfied with disposal options, perhaps because they perceive that other alternatives could be made available.

More important, however, than the measurement issue, are the theoretical implications. Oliver (1989) posited that consumer product orientation would affect subsequent satisfaction. Specifically, it was suggested by Oliver, and later confirmed by Francis and Browne (1991), that given a state of low arousal, disconfirmation processing would not occur and the resultant affective state would be acceptance or tolerance. Conversely, Oliver suggested that given a state of high arousal, disconfirmation processing would occur and the resultant affective state would be happiness/sadness; this proposition was also confirmed by Francis and Browne (1991). Thus, for the present study, it was anticipated that clothing involvement would have an effect on satisfaction with clothing disposition. Although the present findings do not support this hypothesis,

they do suggest some directions for future research. For example, perhaps involvement within a given product category differs at different stages of the consumption process and different measures are required. Alternatively, in the case of fashion, perhaps high involvement during acquisition and product use is inversely related to involvement during disposition and is influenced by feelings of guilt.

Finally, new models of the consumption process and of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction that extend through the disposition stage appear to be needed. Harrell and McConocha (1992) have recently presented a model of product disposition that contributes to channels of distribution theory development. A number of implications and research directions were identified that should be of interest to satisfaction researchers.

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**Send correspondence regarding this article to:**

Sally K. Francis  
Apparel, Interiors, Housing & Merch.  
Milam Hall 224  
Oregon State University  
Corvallis, OR 97331-5101