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Sustainable Fashion Consumption and Happiness: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

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Introduction. In the era of fast, disposable fashion, excessively produced garment waste goes to landfills in the U.S. (Hawley, 2006). To halt this environmental pollution, it is necessary to encourage consumers to buy fewer garments and keep them for a long time. In fact, a growing number of consumers have shown their interests in sustainable consumption in recent years. As positive psychology has gained more attention, interestingly, several researchers (Corral-Verdugo et al., 2011; O'Brien, 2013) discussed the positive relationship between sustainable consumption and happiness.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review. Veenhoven argued (2004) that one of the important reasons for promoting sustainable consumption is that it may give rise to greater happiness for a greater number, at least in the long run. However, to date, there has been extremely limited research on the relationship between sustainable consumption and happiness. To fill this void, we developed a framework of proposed relationships between sustainable consumption (SC) and happiness (H). Our proposed framework emerged from the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to the self-determination theory, humans have three universal basic psychological needs—autonomy (A, a sense of personal initiative), competence (C, to interact effectively with the environment), and relatedness (R, to feel connected to others)—that form the motives for engagement in various human activities. Meeting one's basic psychological needs has been related to positive outcomes in life in general. Based on extant research (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000), it is posited that SC may lead to H, and this relationship is linked to A, C, and R needs.

Our purpose of the study was to test a framework that proposed SC is positively related to H, and A, C, and R mediate the relationship between SC and H. Based on the proposed research model, seven hypotheses have been proposed: SC is positively related to A (*H1*), C (*H2*), and R (*H3*); A (*H4*), C (*H5*), and R (*H6*) are positively related to H; and SC is positively related to H (*H7*). Our findings may help foster sustainable lifestyles and consumption among consumers.

Methods. Data were collected using an online survey via Amazon Mechanical Turk following approval for use of human subjects. The proposed research model was tested using a national adult sample ($n = 317$). Participants responded, using 7-point Likert-type scales, to an online questionnaire of established measures of basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and happiness, and a new measure of sustainable consumption developed by authors. Participants also supplied demographic information. All relevant statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 22.0 (e.g., descriptive statistics) and Mplus 7.0 (e.g., confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling) software.

Results. A total of 325 responses were collected, out of which 317 were deemed usable (51.7% male, 73% White, $M_{age} = 33.19$ ranging 18 to 75). The Cronbach's alphas for all constructs $>.80$. The measurement model had acceptable fit ($\chi^2 = 2034.54$, $df = 485$, $p < .001$; CFI = .93; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .06). Likewise, the structural model had acceptable fit ($\chi^2 = 1171.11$, $df = 488$, $p < .001$; CFI = .92; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .15). Out of the 7 hypotheses proposed, 6 were supported. Only *H5* was contradictory to our expectation.

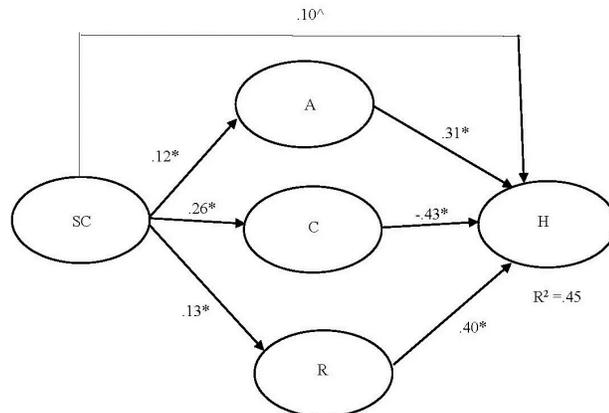


Figure 1. Path Coefficients for the Proposed Research Framework (* significant at $p < .01$; ^ borderline significant at $p = .05$)

Discussion and Conclusion. This is one of the earliest studies to explore the relationship between SC and H, mediated by basic psychological needs. Overall, we found that a relationship between SC and H is mediated by A, C, and R. In other words, engaging in SC leads to H by meeting the three primary psychological needs. However, it is important to note that the direct relationship between SC and H is of borderline statistical significance. Our findings may help promote sustainable lifestyles and consumption among consumers and, further, may contribute to the development of strategies to promote SC by the better understanding of the relationship between SC, H, and primary psychological needs (A, C, R).

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