RESEARCHING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CIRCULAR FASHION AWARENESS IN VIETNAMESE CONSUMERS' INTENTION TO PURCHASE SECONDHAND CLOTHES

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on understanding the factors that influence Vietnamese consumers' intention to buy secondhand clothes, especially understanding the mediating role of circular fashion awareness. Use quantitative research methods. With the sample size of 823. Data processed by SPSS 22 and AMOSS 22 software. The study has shown that the factors of awareness of circular fashion, uniqueness, price, and store image are influential on consumers' intention to buy SHC. Especially the mediating role of circular fashion awareness. At the same time, it also shows that social communication indirectly affects purchasing intention through awareness. There are differences in gender and income but no difference in age.

Keywords*: Circular fashion, secondhand clothes, circular fashion awareness, uniqueness, store image, social communication, purchase intention, price.*

1. INTRODUCTION

How to reduce the amount of fashion waste into the environment is one of the issues of concern to many countries, scientists, businesses and consumers. Circular fashion (CF) is a model that keeps fashion products in use for as long as possible towards minimizing fashion waste into the environment. The CF model will reuse old items to extend the life of the product, both helping to protect the environment and bringing high economic value. Products will be focused right from the design stage and choosing raw materials at the beginning. All materials also ensure that the product can be reused for as long as possible. Buying secondhand clothes (SHC) instead of buying new clothes is considered one of the most effective circular economy practices [1] because reusing clothes helps prolongs the life cycle of clothing, reduces the amount of clothing thrown away in landfills, thereby reducing environmental pollution and waste of resources [2].

However, in Vietnam, SHC is seen as low-end fashion for poor people. Therefore, to convince Vietnamese consumers that SHC is a way of practicing circular fashion consumption is a difficult problem. At the same time, there is not much research on second-hand fashion in Vietnam, especially in considering used shopping as a measure of circular economy. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research on consumer opinions about SHC in Vietnam.

To shift from a linear economy with a focus on make-dispose to a circular economy aimed at creating endless cycles of resources, with one industry's waste being the input of another, requires effort of both government and business and ultimately, consumer acceptance and action [3-6]. In particular, learning about consumers' acceptance of product use is an important aspect, because only by receiving consumers' acceptance of purchase and use can successful conversion be possible.

This study was conducted with 3 research questions:

First: What factors affect consumers' intention to buy SHC?

Second: How will consumers' awareness of circular fashion influence their intentions?

Third: Are there differences between different consumers in their perceptions and purchase intentions?

2. THEORETICAL BASIS AND RESEARCH MODEL

2.1. Price

Interest in the circular economy and environmental sustainability in general is growing. However, consumers'

purchasing decisions are not always consistent with their awareness [7]. One of the main reasons for the difference between people's beliefs and their actual behavior is price. Consumers believe that sustainable clothing is more expensive than conventional clothing. This higher cost is explained by the complexity of the production process and the diversity of ethical consumption concerns [8]. The costliness of sustainable clothing makes consumers feel they do not have enough purchasing power, so price is an issue in consumers' purchasing decisions. However, with SHC, the price becomes much cheaper than newly produced clothes. SHC's lower price will make people feel that they can access the products more easily. It is easier for consumers to practice circular fashion. This can change thinking and create consistency between consumers' beliefs, perceptions and actions.

H1: SHC's low prices have a positive impact on consumer awareness of circular fashion.

H2: Low price has a positive impact on consumers' intention to buy SHC.

2.2. The product uniqueness

When searching for fashion products, consumers are often influenced by a desire for product uniqueness. SHC is perceived by consumers as often unique [9]. Because they are not available in large quantities and all sizes like newly produced goods, many times they only have a single piece, especially with high-end outfits that are very limited in quantity production makes them even more rare, because they are no longer produced [10]. Furthermore, individuals with a high need for uniqueness are said to be more likely to make non-traditional consumption choices, such as purchasing clothing in SHC clothing channels instead of conventional channels. as a means of expressing their individuality [11, 12]. Thus, the uniqueness of SHC will have a strong impact on consumers' awareness and purchasing intention.

H3: Uniqueness positively impacts consumer perception of circular fashion.

H4: Uniqueness has a positive impact on consumers' intention to purchase SHC.

2.3. The social communication

People tend to use products that conform to social standards to ensure membership in a certain group [13]. Clothing shopping becomes a reference for individuals to perform behaviors [14] through which they can connect, enhancing their personal image interaction with others. people around them [15]. If people do not comply with

the reference, they will be considered non-compliant with group behavior. Therefore, social communication will influence consumers' perception of circular fashion, to demonstrate that they belong to the same social group. At the same time, social communication that influences consumers to choose SHC is also a way to prove they are members of a certain social group [14].

H5: Social communication has an influence on consumers' perceptions of circular fashion.

H6: Social communication positively affects the intention to purchase SHC.

2.4. The store image

Consumers buy SHC often pay special attention to product quality, merchandise presentation, and especially the "cleanliness" of the store [9]. This special concern is because consumers often have concerns about products becoming old and fading, infectious diseases, feelings of pollution and germs [16] or traces of previous users may still remain on clothes such as stains, sweat or odors... and these are taboo when reusing [17]. Therefore, when consumers shop at stores that sell SHC, they always pay special attention to the store's atmosphere [18]. It is mentioned from the store's display, and they are even interested in the "smell of the past" of the store, the advice, the stories they receive from salespeople [19]. They are especially worried about the quality of the product they receive compared to the seller's description. Therefore, the image and reputation of the seller will help them eliminate the feeling of worry about SHC. Consumers form impressions about stores and these impressions motivate them to purchase products [20].

H7: Store image has a positive impact on consumers' perceptions of circular fashion.

H8: Store image has a positive influence on consumers' intention to purchase SHC.

2.5. The influence of awareness on purchase intention

Consumers buy and use SHC will help reduce environmental pollution through reducing waste from disposing of clothes or industrial waste (color, fabric waste...) during the new clothing production process [2]. In addition, there are concerns about the waste of resources that affect the environment and are looking for ways to reduce the impact of commodity production on their environment and society [10]. The reasons to practice purchasing used goods that help consumers demonstrate sustainable and conscientious consumption [21]. Young consumers have shown strong

interest and concern about the environment. While it is not possible to support the environment by purchasing high-priced green products, young consumers can contribute by purchasing SHC items, reducing the number of new products produced [22].

Shopping for SHC is a way for consumers to resist a society that promotes wasteful practices and 'throw' products after use, as well as expressing driving force against the formation and growth of business chains. Consumers create and express social consciousness through their consumption choices of SHC [17]. Roux and Guiot [12] defined rationality as "the disciplined and careful use of money and objects." Given these, buying new clothes is considered an unreasonable behavior as they believe that buying new clothes is a waste of resources and a sign of rampant consumerism.

H9: Awareness has a positive influence on consumers' intention to purchase SHC.

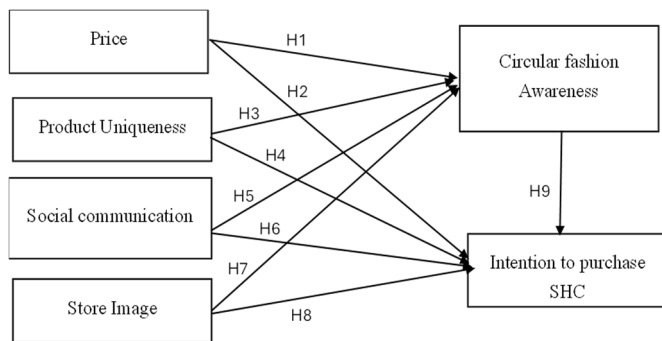Based on the research hypotheses, the research model is proposed:

Figure 1. Proposed research model (Source: Author)

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Use quantitative research methods. Data collected through survey questionnaires. The scales used were inherited from previous studies. The purchase intention scale is taken from the research of Holak and Lehmann

[23]. The product price scale is quoted from the study of Lichtenstein et al. [24]. The uniqueness scale is quoted from the study of Lynn and Harris [8]. The social communication scale is cited in the study of Martin Craig and Turley [25]. The proposed awareness scale is a synthesis of environmental awareness cited in the study of Shim [27] and awareness of sustainable clothing consumption cited in the study of Roux and Guiot [12]. Variables were measured using a Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

In the official quantitative research, the author conducted a survey with a convenience sampling method based on a questionnaire adjusted according to the preliminary qualitative and quantitative research results, the sample size was n = 823. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) method is used to test the convergence and dispersion of observed variables. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) method is used to test the scale and linear structural model analysis (SEM) method is used to test the adaptability of the theoretical model and hypotheses. Data processed by SPSS 22.0 and AMOSS 22.0 software.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Test the scale

Test for unidirectionality and fit with market data

To determine this suitability, this study uses the following indicators: CMIN, CMIN/df, CFI, GFI, TLI, RMSEA and PCLOSE index. Results after CFA analysis, we have: CFA analysis results from the survey sample with TLI = 0.938 > 0.9; CFI = 0.943 > 0.9; CMIN/df = 3.236 < 5; RMSEA = 0.052 < 0.08. This shows that the scales used by the author are appropriate and unidimensional.

Test the reliability, convergence and discriminant validity of the scale

To test reliability, the study evaluated two indicators: standardized factor loading (≥ 0.5) and composite

Table 1. Results of testing discrimination and reliability in CFA analysis

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	YD	DD	HA	NG	MT	XH
YD	0.899	0.642	0.384	0.908	**0.801**					
DD	0.908	0.585	0.536	0.909	0.620	**0.765**				
HA	0.941	0.727	0.536	0.942	0.580	0.644	**0.853**			
NG	0.916	0.647	0.375	0.922	0.542	0.585	0.612	**0.804**		
MT	0.916	0.609	0.536	0.919	0.613	0.732	0.732	0.599	**0.780**	
XH	0.915	0.730	0.399	0.919	0.437	0.625	0.597	0.519	0.632	**0.854**

Source: AMOSS 22.0

reliability (CR ≥ 0.7). To test the convergence of the study, the assessment was based on the AVE index (≥ 0.5). To achieve discrimination, MSV indices must be smaller than the corresponding AVE index; At the same time, the SQRTAVE index must be greater than the Inter-Construct Correlations index. The results shown in Table 1 show that the scale is suitable for analyzing linear structural models.

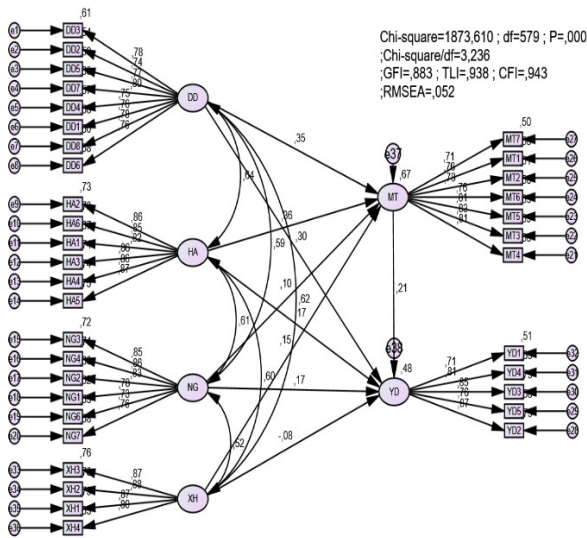## 4.2. Test the model and research hypotheses

Figure 2. Structural model analysis (SEM) - standardized form (*Source: Results of data analysis by Amoss22.0)*

The results of running the SEM model for the research model to evaluate the factors affecting consumers' intention to buy unlicensed clothing are shown in Figure 2. The indexes to evaluate the model's suitability are as follows: CMIN/df = 3.236 < 5; TLI = 0.983 > 0.9; CFI = 0.943 > 0.9; and RMSEA = 0.052 < 0.08. Thus, the model is considered acceptable to perform SEM analysis.

From the results of the regression weight table for the research model (Table 2), it shows that at the 5% significance level, the relationships between price, uniqueness, social communication, store image and awake; between uniqueness, store image, price, and awareness to consumers' intention to buy exclusive clothing. The influence weights all have positive signs, so the image is positive. Social communication factors do not affect consumers' intention to buy SHC. Among the factors affecting consumer perception, store image has the strongest influence with a weight of 0.357; the second is uniqueness with a weight of 0.354; third is social communication with a weight of 0.147 and finally price with a weight of 0.097. Among the factors affecting the intention to buy SHC, the strongest impact is uniqueness

with a weight of 0.300; the second is awareness with a weight of 0.212; The third is price with a weight of 0.175 and finally the store image with a weight of 0.170.

Table 2. Table of regression weights for the research model

	Estimate		S.E.	C.R.	P	Conclude
	Chưa chuẩn hóa	Chuẩn hóa				
MT <--- DD	0.349	0.354	0.039	8.911	0.000	Statistical significance
MT <--- HA	0.339	0.357	0.036	9.318	0.000	Statistical significance
MT <--- NG	0.092	0.097	0.032	2.867	0.004	Statistical significance
MT <--- XH	0.136	0.147	0.032	4.225	0.000	Statistical significance
YD <--- DD	0.326	0.300	0.056	5.862	0.000	Statistical significance
YD <--- HA	0.178	0.170	0.051	3.452	0.000	Statistical significance
YD <--- NG	0.182	0.175	0.043	4.214	0.000	Statistical significance
YD <--- XH	-0.077	-	0.043	-1.786	0.074	Not statistically significant
YD <--- MT	0.234	0.212	0.063	3.737	0.000	Statistical significance
R²(MT)	0.672					
R²(YD)	0.501					

Source: Results of data analysis by Amoss22.0

4.3. Testing the mediating role of awareness

Table 3. Mediating role of cognitive variables

Impact	Direct		Indirect		Intermediate type
	S.ES	Sig	S.ES	Sig	
YD<---MT<--- XH	-0.076	0.074	0.031	0.014	Full intermediary
YD<---MT<--- NG	0.175	0.000	0.021	0.048	Partly intermediate
YD<---MT<--- HA	0.170	0.000	0.076	0.013	Partly intermediate
YD<---MT<--- DD	0.212	0.000	0.075	0.014	Partly intermediate

Source: Results of data analysis by Amoss22.0

Use Bootstrapping technique to evaluate indirect effects. Bootstrapping does not assume the distribution

of the data and it can be applied to small samples with greater confidence. In addition, the indirect effect performance via Bootstrapping has higher statistical sensitivity than the Sobel test. Implementing the Bootstrapping technique on Amos software gives results about the mediating role of cognitive variables in Table 3.

Thus, awareness is a complete mediating variable with social variables. Or social communication affects the intention to buy SHC through consumer awareness. The awareness variable acts as a partial mediator with the variables price, store image, and uniqueness. There is direct impact of the variables store image, price, and uniqueness on the intention to buy SHC and the variables of store image, price, and uniqueness have an indirect impact on the intention to buy SHC through consumer awareness.

4.4. Test differences in gender, age, and income

Test for gender

Gender has 2 groups: (1) Male and (2) Female. After SEM analysis for the two gender-variable and invariant models, the Chi-square value and degrees of freedom df in each model were obtained. The results of evaluating the Chi-square difference in degrees of freedom between the two variable and invariant models of the gender variable have a P-value of 0.0001 < 0.05 (95% confidence), rejecting hypothesis H0, then there is a Chi-square difference between the invariant model and the variable model. In conclusion, there is a difference in the impact between variables in the model between men and women.

Test for income

There are 3 income groups: income under 10 million /month; from 10 to < 20 million/month and $\geq$ 20 million/month. After SEM analysis for two income-variable and invariant models, the Chi-square value and degrees of freedom df in each model are obtained. The results of evaluating the Chi-square difference in degrees of freedom between the two variable and invariant models of the income variable have a P-value of 0.000 < 0.05 (95% confidence), rejecting the hypothesis. H0, thus there is a Chi-square difference between the invariant model and the variable model. In conclusion, there is a difference in the impact between the variables in the model on income.

Test for age groups

The age group is divided into two groups: people under 30 years old and people over 30 years old or specifically: group 1 includes people from 18 - 29 years old and group 2 includes people from 30 - 41 years old. After analyzing SEM for two models that are variable and invariant by age group, the Chi-square value and degrees of freedom df in each model are obtained. The results of evaluating the Chi-square difference according to the degrees of freedom between the two variable and invariant models of the age group variable have a P-value of 0.319 > 0.05 (95% confidence), accepting the hypothesis. H0, so there is no Chi-square difference between the invariant model and the variable model. In conclusion, there is no difference in the impact between the variables in the model in terms of age group.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Theoretical significance

Research results have shown that among the factors affecting SHC purchase intention, uniqueness has the strongest influence, then awareness, followed by price, and finally store image. Social communication does not directly impact consumers' intention to purchase SHC.

Among the factors that influence the perception of circular fashion, uniqueness has the strongest influence, followed by store image, followed by social interaction and finally price.

In particular, the study has identified the mediating role of awareness of circular fashion consumption in the relationship between the factors uniqueness, store image, price and social communication to the intention to purchase SHC. In particular, awareness plays the role of a complete mediator in the relationship of social communication with purchase intention. That is, social communication does not directly affect purchase intention but indirectly through awareness of circular fashion consumption. Perceptions act as partial mediators of the relationships between uniqueness, store image, and price and consumer purchase intention.

Besides, this study also showed that there are gender differences in the influence of variables in the model. What's interesting is that women have a higher awareness of circular fashion consumption than men, but their intention to buy SHC as a way to practice circular fashion consumption is lower than men. At the same time, this study also shows that there are differences in income on the influence of the variables in the model. Usually used clothing products will be noticed by people with lower incomes, but in the Vietnamese context, this product, when perceived as a product practicing circular fashion

consumption, is is welcomed by people with higher incomes.

5.2. About practice

From the research results, the authors propose to segment the SHC consumer market in the context of circular fashion consumption practices into 4 customer groups: (1) Those who pursue uniqueness; (2) Those seeking economic benefits; (3) People who care about face; (4) People looking for quality service at the point of sale.

Those who pursue uniqueness. This is the widest market segment, because uniqueness is the factor that has the strongest impact on consumers' awareness and intention to buy exclusive clothing. This customer group should focus on male consumers, with income greater than 20 million/month, and aged 30 years or older (30 - 41 years old). These are objects that have a larger correlation coefficient than the remaining objects.

Customer groups pursue economic benefits. This group of customers focuses on men, with income from 10-<20 million/month and is mainly under 30 years old (18 - 29 years old). Can be expanded to customers including women with income under 10 million/month or over 30 years old. This group of customers is especially interested in the price of the product when purchasing. They can be considered a price-sensitive customer group but must still ensure awareness that SHC consumption is a measure of consumer practices.

Customer groups care about face. This group of customers focuses mainly on women, has an income of over 20 million/month and is 30 years old or older. This group of customers is relatively special, they buy and wear SHC but are concerned that wearing SHC may affect their image in the eyes of others, so the weight shown has a (-) sign.

Fourth, about communication. When targeting this audience, retailers need to especially promote the effectiveness of communication to increase awareness and remove feelings of anxiety of this customer group. They are very shy when others know they wear SHC. Therefore, media messages should focus on: (1) SHC can provide you with costumes belonging to famous brands that not everyone can buy when they are newly produced goods. export. (2) wearing SHC gives customers outstanding aesthetic taste and fashion style, thereby affirming their status while creating a good impression on those around them. (3) Wearing SHC is a way for you to make those around you admire and learn about the outfits you wear. (4) SHC is not low-end fashion, it represents smart and sustainable consumption because it helps reduce waste into the environment.

5.3. Limitations

The research has only studied 4 groups of factors and the mediating role of awareness on consumers' purchasing intentions, but in fact there are many other factors that affect consumers' purchasing intentions.

The new research scope only focuses on consumers aged 18 - 41 years old, so it should be expanded to other subjects.

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