

Understanding Consumer Product Disposition: Scope and Rationale

This research study presents an integrated approach to expound product disposition behavior by identifying factors influencing disposition, disposer typology and disposition tendency. The importance of understanding consumer disposal behaviour for durable and semi-durable goods has grown sharply in recent years, especially with the increased focus on sustainable consumption and circular economy models (Madhuhansi, Ozanne, & Kennedy, 2025). In addition, an attempt has been made to extend the theoretical and empirical evidence of the structural relationships among the constructs of 1) Value Seeking Tendency, 2) Innovation Seeking Tendency, 3) Tendency to De-clutter, 4) Lifestyle Factors, 5) Storage Factors, 6) Product Working Condition and 7) Disposition Channel, 8) Disposition Behavior and 9) Impulse disposition behavior. It brings into focus the moderating effects of gender, age, income, family structure, job transferability and work status on relationships of these constructs. Thus, the findings from this research study will provide a more comprehensive perspective of a vital stage in the consumer behavior cycle. The basic purpose of the study is to further unravel the factors influencing the disposition process and thus serve as a useful contrast and value addition to the fixation with acquisition and consumption that has predominated consumer behavior studies. The scope of this study is to develop a disposer typology by recognizing different disposer segments and also to understand the individual differences in tendency to dispose of goods that fall out of use.

1.1 Overview of Product Disposition Literature

Disposal is ‘the parting of people from their things’ (Gregson et al., 2007) and broadly portrays the final stage of the post consumption process (Hanson, 1980; Jacoby et al., 1977). Disposal of possessions includes not just the physical but also the psychological processes that detach an item from its owner (Roster, 2001). Even though marketing and consumer researchers are as likely to focus on acquisition as consumption, disposal receives much less attention (Phillips & Seago, 2011). Product life spans have been on a decline for a long time. Replacement purchases are being made in response to deliberate influences of producers in curtailing product life through cosmetic changes in design, special offers, and higher trade-in allowances. Life-lengthening innovations have been curbed to encourage consumers to replace products (Cooper, 2004). Second hand or pre-owned goods markets are proliferating as possessions that have both usefulness and resale value are being tossed out from households. High materialistic values, rampant disposition and the depletion of

natural resources are key drivers of disposition studies (Hart & Milstein, 2003; Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008). Hence, a study of the disposition behavior will help foster a caring business and consumer mindset that will help augment the positive economic, environmental and social impacts. Such a research is very pertinent as businesses are discovering ways to design and manufacture more sustainable products and consumer awareness and attitudes are still evolving.

Individual's characteristics are likely to affect one's disposition strategies and behaviors (Jacoby et al., 1978; Phillips & Seago, 2011;). Identity, as a key marketing construct, has usually been developed in the context of acquisition or consumption (Cherrier, 2006; Dittmar, 2004; Elliott, 1997; Kozinets, 1999; Luedicke, Thompson, & Giesler, 2010).

While the significance of product disposition in consumer behavior was introduced by Jacoby et al (1977), disposition as a concept was further developed theoretically in the subsequent years by other researchers (Hanson, 1980; O'Reilly et al., 1984; McCracken, 1986; Belk et al., 1988; Young and Wallendorf, 1989; Harrell and McConocha, 1992; Albinsson & Perera, 2009). Some studies examined disposition across product categories (Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Geyer & Blass, 2010; Green, Mandhachitara, & Smith, 2001; Bradford, 2009; Hsunchi Chu, 2011). Some qualitative studies provided rich insights into emotional significance, life style factors, psychological process, self-concept and personal characteristics as antecedents of product disposition (Brough & Isaac, 2012; Cherrier, 2009; Coulter & Ligas, 2003; Lastovicka and Fernandez, 2005; Maycroft, 2009; Price, Arnould, and Curasi, 2000; Roster, 2001; Türe, 2014; Usha, 2012). Other researchers have focused on the impacts of product disposition on sustainability (Guiltinan, 2009; Knussen, Christina, et al., 2004; Pieters, 1991; Luchs et al., 2011; Cooper, 2005). Product disposition has increasingly been explored through the lens of the circular economy, which, according to recent research, has been defined in over a hundred different ways in the academic literature, most emphasizing reuse, recycling, and resource efficiency (Kirchherr, Reike, & Hekkert, 2017). Thus, product disposition has been researched by researchers in various subject disciplines.

1.2 Significance and Motivation of the Research

Although identity is a key marketing construct, it usually has been developed in the context of acquisition or consumption (Cherrier 2006; Elliott, 1997; Kozinets, 1999; Schau, Gilly, & Wolfenbarger, 2009; Schouten, 1991; Üstüner and Holt 2007). The scant research (Coulter and Ligas, 2003; Harrell and McConocha, 1992; Hanson, 1980; Phillips and Seago, 2011) on the role of identity in the disposal of ordinary possessions has classified consumers as either: (a) packrats

(chronic retainers) or (b) purgers (chronic disposers). These disposal identities have behavioral and psychological perspectives (Coulter and Ligas, 2003). However, this dichotomous classification of disposers lacks empirical backing besides definitional scope and theoretical precision. Despite increasing awareness of sustainability, recent systematic reviews indicate persistent behavioral barriers and limited consumer participation in circular economy practices, underscoring the need for further research (Bressanelli et al., 2022). Hence, we develop this empirical model, in hopes that we can expand and refine it through interviews with consumers who daily face a myriad of disposal decisions while struggling to maintain their desired identities.

1.3 Aims and Research Questions

The aims of the research are to:

- 1) Develop an integrated but parsimonious disposition tendency model based on existing literature and theories. A comprehensive understanding of product disposition is important to direct the course of this study and other studies that are interested in the disposition topic.
- 2) Extend the understanding of the factors that influence disposition behavior. The understanding of the factors that impact disposition is important from economic, environmental and social standpoints.
- 3) Identify disposer typology and examine whether disposition tendency impacts both disposition behavior and impulse disposition behavior. There has been no empirical research on disposition tendency particularly in the Indian context. Understanding disposition tendency is important as disposition behavior will vary across disposer types.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions connected to the research aims mentioned above.

In a context of product disposers in India:

- RQ1: Do Value Seeking Tendency, Innovation Seeking Tendency, Tendency to De-clutter, Life style Factors, Storage Factors, Product Working Condition and Disposition Channel influence Disposition Tendency (DisT)?
- RQ2: What disposer typologies emerge from DisT scores?
- RQ3: Is there a relationship between consumer DisT, Impulse Disposing Behavior and Disposition Behavior?
- RQ4: Do gender, age, income, family structure (nuclear or joint) and job transferability have a moderating effect on disposition tendency?

1.4 Methodology

A disposer is surprisingly nuanced in the ways in which his disposition tendency and external factors coalesce to produce routine disposition practices, and this has potentially significant implications for how disposition is taken up within different family units, as well as by different members of a single family unit. The qualitative data for this study was collected from 30 experienced disposers using a semi-structured questionnaire. The field data obtained was analyzed using content analysis technique and the research model was refined based on the findings of this phase. The quantitative data was collected through online survey invited via Facebook account and second hand product disposition online forum members, LinkedIn and Google+. The disposers in the age group of 25 and above were identified for the survey using convenience sampling technique for pre test, pilot study and the main study. The researcher has structured all constructs in the measuring instrument to use 7-point Likert type of scale, including the independent and the dependent variables. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to test the reliability of the DisT scale followed by EFA using SPSS 20. This resulted in a data reduction from 48 items to 43 items forming 10 factors. The research model was validated using partial least square (PLS) based SEM. A series of multi group analysis were carried out to study the moderating influence of age, income, gender, job transferability, family type (nuclear or joint) and work status. These results are then discussed and the findings are then compared with previous related research findings. The main academic contributions and contributions to practice are then presented.

1.5 Contributions

This thesis makes theoretical and practical contributions to the literature, as well as suggestions for future research. First, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of product disposition behavior by: i) extending the current understanding of disposition behavior in the Indian context; ii) amalgamating the existing theories as the basis of the research model in this study and iii) directing attention to the question of how consumers decide whether to dispose of goods.

Second, this study provides a means to recognize better the moderating effects of gender, age, income, family structure and job transferability. This is the first study exploring the moderating effects of family structure and job transferability on disposition behavior. Also, this study extends disposition behavior theories by introducing innovation seeking tendency as a factor that impacts disposition tendency.

Third, this study identifies various disposer categories and empirically demonstrates assigning a disposition tendency score to predict if an individual is a disposer or not.

Fourth, this study provides a mechanism to understand the influence of disposition tendency on disposition behavior and impulse disposition behavior.

In terms of practical contributions, the research model provides a better understanding of disposition tendency of respondents in India. This study provides practical guidelines for business owners on how to capitalize on the short term relationships between the disposers and their possessions and to stay ahead of competition posed by second hand markets. Last, but not the least, this study provides guidelines for public policy to tackle issues like e-waste, littering, environmentalism, and landfill concerns.

1.6. Limitations

Convenience sampling was used. A more rigorous sampling technique may be used in future to conduct a similar study. The empirical study was conducted in the Indian context. It would be interesting to carry out research in other countries, where the factors like disposition channels options and availability are quite different from those available in India. By using an online survey to collect data, certain types of sampling error and coverage error are introduced into the study. In deciding to conduct an online survey, several members of the population are automatically eliminated as possible respondents. These include individuals without access to the Internet, and lacking the online skills necessary to participate in the study. As our online sample is not representative of the general population of Web users, we are not able to generalize the findings to the entire population of Web users. The final limitation of the study is that the Indian respondents did not get the option of taking the survey in either English or their mother tongue. To reduce the complexities involved, the sampling frame only included respondents who could comprehend English. A region based survey targeting non-English speaking respondents may give a richer insight into disposition behavior in a pluralistic population like in India.

1.7 Summary

This chapter has provided a brief overview and background of the study related to the research topic and to highlight the importance of this research study. The first section of this chapter outlined the significance and motivation of this thesis in understanding product disposition tendency of consumers in the Indian context. The subsequent section provided an overview of the literature

related to the product disposition topic. It then discussed the theoretical foundation of this study. The two following sections then outline the aims and the research questions of the thesis, and the research method. This is followed by the discussion on the theoretical and practical contributions of the research. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined with a brief description of each chapter.

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