

A Comprehensive Review of Disposition Literature and Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Introduction

Disposition studies have far-reaching implications for business strategy, engineering design and technology, environmental science and policy making, sustainable economies, consumer psychology and public health. This global need is further emphasized by recent systematic reviews highlighting current gaps and new research avenues (Madhuhansi, Ozanne, & Kennedy, 2025). A study of disposition behavior may 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. Planned product obsolescence, rapid and incremental changes in technology and values of over-consumption mean that possessions that have both usefulness and resale value are being tossed out from households. Disposition practices have opened up further cycles of consumption in the format of second hand used or pre-owned goods and gently-used goods markets. Buying used goods is very much about expressing ethics and ecological citizenship through consumer behavior choices (Brosius, Fernandez, & Cherrier, 2013)

Growing concern about e-waste and the need to foster responsible consumption is another driver of disposition studies. Improper storing of old electronic goods by consumers in their homes or discarding them with the regular trash is prevalent owing to poor recycling and reuse infrastructure (Widmer et. al, 2005). Recognizing the looming threats from rising global consumption, governments in partnership with industry and non-government stakeholders are developing e-waste reuse and recycling guidelines. This will include standards for product design, development of reverse supply chains, recycling programs and also ‘cradle to grave’ orientation to policy options to extend producer responsibility beyond the point of sale until the end of product life (Hart & Milstein, 2003; Khetriwal et.al, 2009; Lenzen, Murray, Sack, & Wiedmann, 2007). Firms that have knowledge of the consumer disposition process can project corporate social responsibility and make better marketing decisions (Raghavan, 2010).

2.2 Review Methodology

2.2.1 Selection - Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

An extensive literature search was carried out to determine the review scope and relevant source material that determine the current state and future directions for consumer product disposition research. The interdisciplinary context of product disposition studies mandated inclusion of academic journal papers and conference proceedings from various disciplines. The search was limited to peer-reviewed publications from the following standard databases: ProQuest Direct, EBSCO Business Source Premier, ScienceDirect, IEEE Xplore, ACM Digital Library and Google Scholar.

Search was based on the descriptor “consumer product disposition behavior” that was to be found in the title or abstract of the paper. Papers where disposition was just a mention or did not receive principal focus were excluded. Key-word searches were done for Consumer Disposition Behavior and related referred terms such as Sustainable Consumption, Product obsolescence, Product design and e-Waste.

2.2.2 Review Process and classification framework

The papers were classified into 5 main theme groups and 22 focal sub-themes based on their central focus. Table 2.1 shows the classification framework and is structured to enable conceptual and methodological analysis of the field.

Table 2.1 Classification framework for literature review

Main Theme Groups	Focal Sub-Themes	Papers (No.)	Total
Seminal studies – Conceptual	Disposition Taxonomy	2	21
	Disposition related frameworks	3	
	New disposition models	8	
Disposition Behavior - Product categories	Clothes	4	8
	Mobile phone handsets	1	
	Toys	1	
	Special Possessions	1	
	Durables	1	
Methods of Disposition	Gifting	3	11
	Car boot sales	2	
	Repair	2	
	Online channels	3	
	Channel intermediaries	1	

Main Theme Groups	Focal Sub-Themes	Papers (No.)	Total
	Thrift stores	1	
Disposition Antecedent Factors	Emotional significance	2	19
	Lifestyle	4	
	Self-concept	6	
	Psychological process	3	
	Disposition tendency	4	
Sustainability	Planned product obsolescence	8	11
	Product recycling	3	
Total			70*
* Total of 67 articles were reviewed, some were in multiple categories			

2.3 Results

2.3.1. Descriptive findings

Time distribution of publication of articles

An analysis of the years in which these selected articles were published show that the seminal article appeared in 1977. Over the past 37 years, a total of 102 papers with product disposition as either a major theme, sub theme or minor theme have been published besides two PhD dissertations and eight Masters theses on this topic. The Masters theses and PhD dissertations were not considered for this paper as they may not be peer reviewed. Out of the total, 67 papers had Product disposition as the main theme and made significant contribution to the topic. Hence these papers were taken up for this review. A sharp increase is evident since year 2000 in the number of publications, with about 50 out of the 70 articles published between 2000 and 2014 (Fig 2.1).

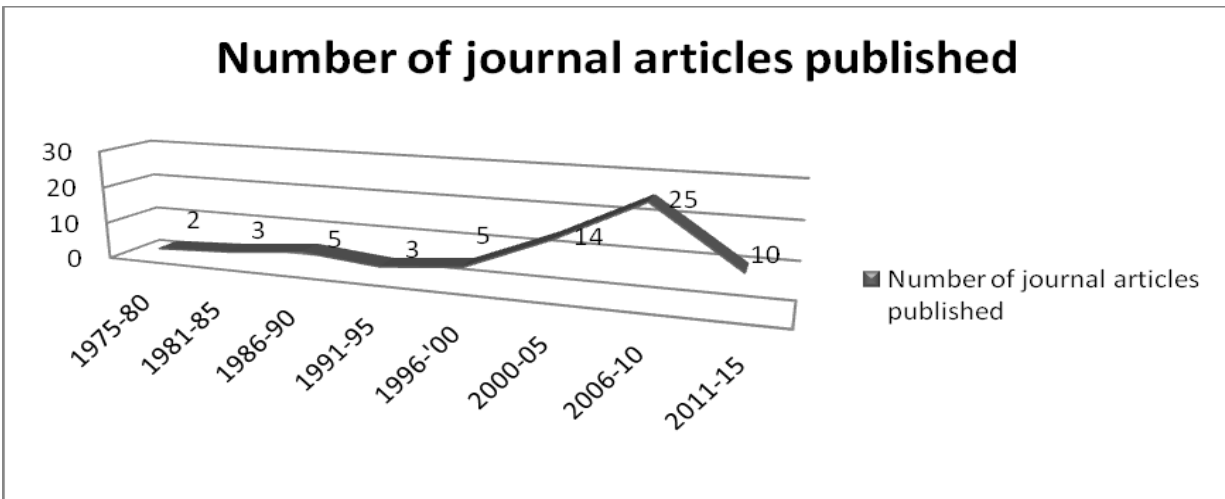


Fig 2.1 Time distribution of published articles

Out of the 67 articles reviewed, 88 percent were journal articles and 12 percent were peer reviewed conference proceedings. This analysis of journal articles reviewed showed that 70 percent articles were published in marketing journals while the remaining 30 percent were spread over the rest of the disciplines (Fig 2.2).

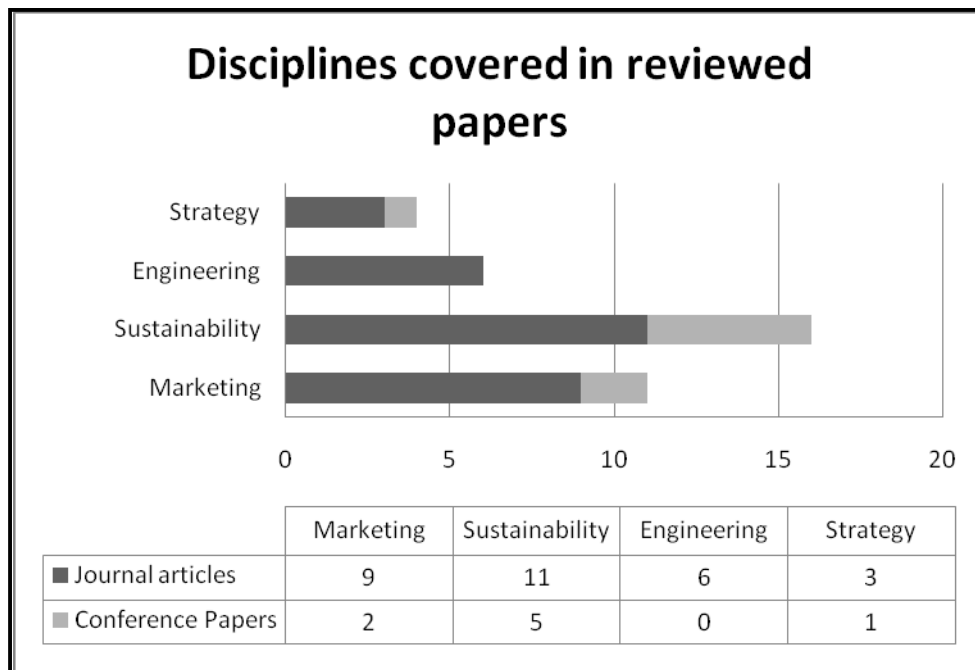


Fig 2.2: Disciplines covered in reviewed papers

2.4 Literature Review

We have organized the literature review in four main sections in line with the framework presented in Table 2.1. We begin by presenting the seminal studies in this field. Next, we examine disposition behavior and the factors influencing disposition. We then present the disposition product categories covered in the review papers. Finally we discuss the disposition methods that have been discussed in the research articles.

2.4.1 Seminal Studies

Jacoby et al (1977) theorized disposition as a distinct stage of the consumer behavior cycle and put forward a taxonomy of nine approaches to product disposition: keeping (continuing to use, repurposing, and storing), permanently disposing (throwing out, giving it away, and re-selling or trading it), and temporarily disposing (loaning and renting. Hanson (1980) identified person, product, and situational factors influencing product disposition decisions. Recent reviews have synthesized these classical foundations with contemporary research, mapping the evolution of disposition theory (Liu & Meng, 2017). This study refined the taxonomy to include six alternatives (discarding, selling, donating, gifting, trading, and storing), eliminating keeping and repurposing.

The reasons for participating in second order marketing as a disposition option were identified as waste reduction, convenience and cost reduction (O'Reilly et al., 1984). Qualitative approaches traced the movement of meaning from consumer goods to the individual consumer during the rituals of possession, grooming, exchange and divestment (McCracken, 1986). A naturalistic inquiry into the activities of disposers operating beyond the marketplace provided rich qualitative descriptions about the texture, processes and activities that take place at a swap meet (Belk et al., 1988). Use of qualitative depth interviews revealed disposition as a painful decision as goods disposed have meanings beyond cash earned (Young et al., 1989). A theoretical model of use innovativeness was presented to investigate the creative interactions between the item and the user in optimizing product benefits (Ridgway & Price, 1994). An exploratory study delving into the household activities of consumers led to the development of the Inventory Ownership Cycle (IOC) framework. The IOC looked at storage, usage, maintenance, disposal and transportation in detail to help add value to products and services (Boyd & McConocha, 1996). An attempt to introduce recycling as an option was done using an empirical study that examined the relationship between environmental attitudes, fashion opinion leadership and textile recycling behavior (Koch & Domina, 1997).

Trocchia & Janda (2002) investigated the relationships between purchase motivations and reasons for non-usage. Hibbert and Horne (2002) adopted a perceived value framework to present a costs–benefits perspective on disposal choices. On resale pricing, Inder & O’Brien (2003) introduced the concept of an ‘endowment effect’ to explain why sellers usually charge considerably more for a good than buyers are prepared to pay. A conceptual framework of voluntary disposition was developed to explore consumer disposition patterns in diverse contexts (Albinsson & Perera, 2009). Individual characteristics, the community and item characteristics play a role in guiding disposition decisions. This study further unraveled five modes of voluntary disposal that disposers engage in. Research shows that the remnants of cultural history get transferred when meaningful products are sold in an auction despite the commoditization of the auction process (Cheetham, 2009). A model of consumer product replacement developed by Gordon (2009) elaborated on the implications of the replacement cycles for firms. The uncalculated costs and benefits of product exchange (externalities) offer potential for creating value. The characteristics of externalities relate closely to issues of sustainability and to the understanding of marketing systems as they significantly impact post acquisition behavior options including forfeiting, possessing, temporary disposal, or permanent disposal (Mundt & Houston, 2010). A recent systematic review not only consolidates the state of knowledge in this area but also pinpoints unresolved challenges and emergent trends that warrant further exploration (Madhuhansi, Ozanne, & Kennedy, 2025).

2.4.2 Disposition Behavior across Product categories

Clothes

Consumers’ have poor understanding of how clothes disposed of in landfill sites affect the environment (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Antecedents to clothing disposal methods in two countries: Scotland and Australia were identified (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010). Consumer recycling behavior, environmental awareness and age have a strong impact on donating behavior (Bianchi, Constanza & Birtwistle, Grete, 2012).

Special Possessions

Price et al (2002) identified heuristics used to identify recipients of goods disposed of in a highly emotional situation, observing that disposition was as likely to be based on perceived emotional connections and willingness to continue an object’s meaning as on pragmatic concerns. They also observed that there was the potential for conflict in the disposition.

Durables

Bayus (1991) investigated the demographic characteristics, attitudes and perceptions, and search behavior of consumers who replace a product during the early and late parts of its lifetime. Early replacement buyers were found to have higher income, education and occupational status and are more concerned with styling and image than late replacement buyers. There were marked differences between the two buyers in terms of engagement in search activity and effects of marketing efforts on replacement.

Toys

Using depth interviews with mothers about disposition of their children's possessions, a disposal identity continuum of keepers and discarders was evolved. The study also threw light on how acquisition and consumption are used as alternatives to disposal to make the task of disposing less daunting. When identities of family members lead to conflict, coping strategies such as avoidance, discussion and subterfuge are used to tackle issues. Disposal can lead to negative emotional outcomes such as ambivalence and guilt (Phillips & Sego, 2011).

Cellphone

Cell phones present a chance to compare closed-loop supply chains for e-waste reuse and recycling. While cell phone reuse has a healthy profit margin, handset recycling is currently a by-product of reuse (Geyer & Blass, 2010). Recent research demonstrates that young consumers' awareness and attitudes play a significant role in shaping their e-waste disposal and recycling behaviors, highlighting the importance of targeted educational interventions (Islam et al., 2021).

2.4.3. Disposition Methods

As consumer product markets evolve, so too do the methods by which individuals dispose of goods at end-of-life. Increasingly, sustainable disposition is facilitated by robust reverse logistics networks, which enable returns, reuse, and recycling through both online and offline channels (Sabbir, Khan, Das, Akter, & Hossain, 2023). These developments coexist with more established routes such as resale, donation, and disposal. The following sections provide a detailed discussion of each primary disposition method, highlighting both traditional and emerging practices that shape contemporary consumer behavior.

Gifting

Sherry (1983) postulated that a gift may face options of storage, disposition, consumption, exchange,

display and rejection. Gift recipients displayed different attitude and behaviors concerning use and disposition depending on whether the gift was common, special, awkward or inadequate (Cruz Cárdenas, 2012). Labels are not only ascribed to gifted assets but transferred from past to future generations through family caretakers who nurture both the symbolic and the exchange values of the gifted assets (Bradford, 2009).

Car boot Sale

A study of a car boot sale in Thailand helped understand the impact of macroeconomic forces on disposition process in an emerging economy context (Green et al., 2001). Paden and Stell (2005) proposed four moderators that influence individuals channel selection: prior knowledge and experience in reselling, availability and access of redistribution conduits, perceived costs and benefits of reselling and social norms and referent influence. The study also suggested measures such as providing economic incentives and facilitating redistribution to help retailers build customer relationships and overcome conventional and unconventional competition.

Repair services

The difference between the utility of repairing and the utility of replacing it by another one guides the scrapping behavior when a product is defective (Antonides, 1990). McCollough (2009) through time series analysis examined the factors contributing to the decline in demand for repair services.

Online Channels

Skilled online resellers treat their used merchandise as liquid assets (Hsunchi Chu, 2011). eBay transforms an ordinary possession into a valuable stock for customers around the world (Knott & Molesworth, 2009) and the eBay digital space helps consumers in creating new desires and wants for the used product (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2010). The sellers rely less on personal meanings as the focus is on impressive product advertising, outreach and price advantage (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2009). Online reselling can be triggered by various motivations and hence will have varied impacts on future purchase and resale decisions (Hsunchi Chu, 2011).

Intermediated used goods market

Using economic and micro sociological approaches, the importance of depersonalizing buyer-seller relations for effective market exchange was highlighted. The authors also explained the role of functional confidence and interactional trust and confidence in the market exchange process (Spulber, 1996)

Thrift Stores

A study examined the process by which thrift store donors decided to donate, collect information about donation outlets and select an appropriate outlet for their donated merchandise (Mitchell, M., Montgomery, R., & Rauch, D., 2009).

2.4.4 Disposition factors

Emotional Significance

Phenomenological research explored the attachments to emotionally significant possessions at different ages (Myers, 1985). Converging studies revealed how consumers with high emotional attachment to products are willing to lower selling prices due to the concern about how the products are to be used after being sold (Brough & Isaac, 2012).

Lifestyle

Disposition influences the day to day consumption behavior of voluntary simplifiers and plays an important role in the early stages of people adopting the simple lifestyle (Shama & Wisenblit, 1984; Oates, Young, & Hwang, 2006; Cherrier, 2009; Ballantine & Creery, 2010)

Self-concept & Disposition

The functions of acquisition, usage, and disposition of possessions during role transitions and processes of identity reconstruction have been given little or no scrutiny in previous research either within or outside of consumer behavior literature. This study reports the effects of possession disposition preceding, during, and following role transitions. Evidence presented here indicates that possession disposition is employed to facilitate or validate both role and status changes enhancing and solidifying new self-concepts and social role identities (Young, 1991)

Many studies focused on the effect of disposition of a possession on self concept (Kates, 2001; Lastovicka and Fernandez, 2005; Price, Arnould, and Curasi, 2000); a study in the context of tattoo removal investigates disposition as a means of identity change (Shelton & Okleshen Peters, 2006). When identities lead to conflict between the players in the disposal decision, coping strategies are used. The disposal process can lead to negative emotional outcomes such as ambivalence and guilt for both keepers and discarders (Phillips & Segó, 2011).

Psychological Process (Dispossession) behind disposition

A study via depth interviews explained the various stages of the psychological process enabling severance of the relationship between a consumer and a possession (Roster, 2001); People engage in

mental depreciation to minimize losses (Heath & Fennema, 1996); An exploratory study examined the effect of material value and frugality on product disposition methods adopted by consumers (Usha, 2012). Consumers build desirable relations around objects to construct, enhance and transfer value. The disposer can reflect back on an objects' consumption, move the object into new contexts and even facilitate object attachment (Türe, 2014).

Recent quantitative research has highlighted that psychological drivers—such as environmental concern, personal responsibility, and perceived convenience—are among the most influential predictors of sustainable disposal behavior (Agovino, Crociata, & Quaglione, 2022).

Disposition Tendency

Based on data from semi-structured depth interviews, perceptions of 'packrats' and 'purgers' as well as their disposition strategies, behaviors, and emotional responses were studied (Coulter & Ligas, 2003); An attempt was made to understand hoarding from a wide range of fields (Maycroft, 2009; Helene Cherrier & Ponnor, 2010). Haws et. al (2012) developed a measure of product retention tendency. Subsequently, experimental research studies were carried out by them to highlight the distinct difference between product retention tendency and clinical compulsive hoarding. These studies also highlighted the impact of product retention tendency on different kinds of possessions and different kinds of keeping behaviors.

2.4.5 Sustainability

Planned Product Obsolescence

Recommendations for public policy were formulated based on the results from research on consumer participation in waste separation programs (Pieters,1991); Planned product obsolescence is a short sighted business strategy that is detrimental to the environment and consumers as it shortens replacement and disposal cycles (Gultinan, 2009); Consumers are the key players who can curb household appliance obsolescence if problems pertaining to economic disincentives and lack of adequate product information are handled well (T. Cooper, 2004); To build a sustainable society, one must explore the most effective ways of engaging householders in the recycling of small waste electrical and electronic equipment or WEEE (Cairns, 2005) including end-of-life electrical and electronic equipment and covers virtually everything with a plug or battery. One way to achieve sustainability is through innovative product designs for longer lasting products based on the consumer motives for product replacement (van Nes & Cramer, 2005; Tim Cooper, 2005). Research studies confirmed that sustainability innovations in phone design and marketing, and changes to

industry practices are needed if lifetime extension strategies are to be effective (Wilhelm, Yankov, & Magee, 2011);

As a response to challenges post by planned product obsolescence, the circular economy has gained prominence as a guiding framework, advocating for product longevity, reuse, and recycling rather than premature disposal. Notably, the circular economy is now defined in numerous ways across academic and policy circles, but all share the core aim of keeping materials and products in use for as long as possible (Kirchherr, Reike, & Hekkert, 2017). Recycling, as a central pillar of the circular economy, offers one of the most effective means for mitigating the environmental impact of rapid product disposal.

Recycling

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) was used to guide an analysis of intentions to recycle household waste in a geographical area (Glasgow, Scotland) with relatively poor recycling facilities (Knussen, Christina, et al., 2004); Optimal waste disposal policy for durable goods can be achieved by levying a disposal fee or an advance disposal fee (Shinkuma,2007); An expanded set of options and benefits across the consumption cycle from acquisition to usage and disposition will not only increase value to consumers but also speed progress towards a more sustainable marketplace (Luchs et al., 2011)

Table 2.2 Key Studies on Product Disposition

Seminal Studies	Jacoby et.al,1977; Hanson, 1980; O'Reilly et al., 1984; McCracken, 1986; Belk et al., 1988; Young and Wallendorf, 1989; Harrell and McConocha, 1992;
	Ridgway & Price, 1994; Boyd & McConocha, 1996; Koch & Domina, 1997; Trocchia & Janda, 2002; Hibbert and Horne, 2002; Inder & O'Brien, 2003; H. Chu & Liao, 2007b; H. Chu & Liao, 2007a; Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Cheetham, 2009; Mundt & Houston, 2010. Gordon, 2009; Hsunchi Chu, 2011
Product categories and Disposition Channels	<p>Gifts Received - Sherry,1983; Cruz Cárdenas, 2012</p> <p>Clothes - Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009; Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010; Bianchi, Constanza & Birtwistle, Grete, 2012</p> <p>Cellphone - Geyer & Blass, 2010.</p> <p>Car boot Sale - Green, Mandhachitara, & Smith, 2001; Paden & Stell, 2005.</p> <p>Gifting - Bradford, 2009</p> <p>Repair services - McCollough, 2009</p> <p>Online Channels - Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2009; Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2010; Hsunchi Chu, 2011</p> <p>Intermediated used goods market - Spulber,1996;</p> <p>Thrift Stores - Mitchell, M., Montgomery, R., & Rauch, D., 2009</p>
Disposition factors	<p>Emotions - Myers1985; Brough & Isaac, 2012)</p> <p>Lifestyle - Shama & Wisenblit, 1984; Oates, Young, & Hwang, 2006;Cherrier, 2009; Ballantine & Creery, 2010)</p> <p>Self-concept & Disposition - Kates, 2001; Lastovicka and Fernandez, 2005; Price, Arnould, and Curasi, 2000; Shelton & Okleshen Peters, 2006); Phillips & Sego, 2011)</p> <p>Psychological Process (Dispossession) behind disposition - Heath & Fennema, 1996; Roster, Catherine A, 2001; Usha, 2012; Türe, 2014.</p> <p>Disposition Tendency - Coulter & Ligas, 2003; Maycroft, 2009;Helene Cherrier & Ponnor, 2010; Haws et al., 2012</p>
Sustainability	<p>Planned Product Obsolescence - Pieters,1991; T. Cooper, 2004; van Nes & Cramer, 2005; Tim Cooper,2005; Gultinan, 2009; Wilhelm, Yankov, & Magee, 2011; Raghavan, 2010</p> <p>Recycle – Cairns, 2005; Knussen, Christina, et al., 2004; Shinkuma,2007; Luchs et al., 2011</p>

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