‘Green’ trends in Sydney

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Abstract: ‘Green’ fashion promotes ethical, environmentally-friendly practices, and in this paper it is used as a proxy for mainstream acceptability of sustainable practices and as a representation of self. This paper presents the findings from research that explores second-hand and recycled fashion shopping in inner Sydney as it relates to the ‘green’ movement. Using surveys, interviews and geo-spatial observations, this paper seeks to characterise trends in second-hand and recycled clothing channels while establishing the dominant motivations behind participation in this form of retail. These trends are evaluated within the context of ethical and environmental awareness of the participants.

Key words: green; fashion; recycled; second-hand; ethical fashion; Sydney.

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“In days where recycling is a way of life.” (Glebe Markets Website, 2013)

Introduction
Since the 1990s, consumers have become more aware of environmental issues and more likely to present these values outwardly (Green & Peloza 2011; Swaidan 2012; McColl et al. 2013). Broad-scale media coverage provides constant reminders of human impacts on the Earth’s ecological systems, and often links these impacts to consumer choices (Butler & Francis 1997; Rowlands et al. 2002). Research on the nexus of human-led impacts on global environmental change and our resultant actions has routinely focused on broad political and social responses, such as greenhouse gas reduction, recycling and incorporation of ecologically sustainable development (e.g. Kennedy 2006; Wilkinson 1998). Gibson and Stanes (2011) highlight the relationship between environmental and ethical principles and the emergence of second-hand and recycled clothing as alternatives to unsustainable widespread clothing consumption. This paper critically analyses this relationship by assessing how deeply these ‘green’ principles have been incorporated into what we wear and why. Clothing is used as a proxy to determine the incorporation of ‘green’ in, and by, the self through a critical analysis of second-hand and recycled shopping. I contend that purchase and wearing of second-hand clothing, can tell us more about the embodiment of ‘green’ practices and behaviours.

The embodiment of self through presentation makes the study of clothing appropriate to assess personal values towards sustainability. Clothing is strongly linked to cultural influences; it is one way the self seeks acceptance or isolation in social spheres (Negrin 1999). What we wear is a form of materialising the self, and is not simply an aesthetic practice but shows deep consideration of how we wish to identify ourselves (Crewe 2008; Colls 2004). Clothing has direct ties to micro-social order; it can promote scorn and ridicule, praise and acceptance (Gibson & Stanes 2011). Such opinions rarely escape even those who appear disinterested in fashion, which are still likely to dress in a certain way to avoid
negative social repercussions (Bell 1976 in Entwistle 2000). Clothing is a proxy for conscious choice in personal representation, as an outward embodiment of what is acceptable to the wearer.

What is, and why wear second-hand and recycled fashion?

Second-hand clothing encompasses any garment that has been previously owned and worn, regardless of condition and time period in which it originated. Recycled fabric for the production of new designs has also been considered as second-hand clothing, as it is a recycling practice. Second-hand clothing can also include ‘vintage’ items, which are garments originating from a clear fashion era (Cervellon et al. 2012). These garments inspire a sense of nostalgia that greatly improves the fashion value of the garment (Colls 2004). Characteristic of market stalls or charity stores are the various mixes of clothing and textiles originating from different periods of time and representing divergent trends existing side by side on clothes racks (Guiot & Roux 2010).

Historically, recycling of clothing was not accepted due to a fear of both medical and moral ‘contagion’ (Williams & Paddock 2003; Roux & Korchia 2006). However, such fears of contagion are no longer of concern, and the purchase and wearing of second-hand clothing has increased in the last two decades (Gregson & Crewe 2003). Cervellon et al. (2012) argue that the main factors promoting this increase are related to a combination of frugality, the search for unique and ethical and sustainable choices, as well as an acceptance of past styles and uses of those garments. The changed/ing perception of second-hand clothing can also be linked to an increased awareness of the need for more sustainable and ethical living, which will be discussed further.

Wearing second-hand garments allows for a sense of individuality, as second-hand clothing stores are not often marketing a specific trend, but allow consumer sovereignty in the creation of new trends via composition of old items (Entwistle 2000; Roux & Korchia 2006). The search for the ‘unique’ to enhance a sense of individuality in the consumer and nostalgia of old fashion pieces are ways in which fashion value has influenced the increase in second-hand shopping. Although second-hand clothes are often cheaper than current trends, it is unlikely that an increase in second-hand shopping is entirely due to a necessity for cheaper clothing. The mass production and (de)centralisation of clothing manufacture in countries without or with lower minimum wages has resulted in retail clothing prices significantly decreasing (Crewe 2008: McColl et al. 2013). The dwindling cost of retail clothing coincides with increasing awareness of the unethical practices and conditions surrounding mass clothing production. Increased ethical awareness, the search for ‘unique’ items to promote individuality and the lower price of second-hand products has served to propel an increasing trend for ‘green’ fashion (Mintel 2007 in Morgan & Birtwistle 2009; Bianchi & Birtwistle 2010).

Methods

A mixed methodology was utilised to measure the acceptance and key motivations of second-hand shopping in Australian society. Sydney was chosen for the study location, as the researcher had both prior knowledge of the popularity for second-hand fashion in this city, and personal experience of many second-hand shopping channels. My positionality was an important consideration in this research because as an avid second-hand shopper who actively avoids conventional shopping channels for environmental and ethical principles, my situated knowledge enabled me to identify with participants. Ethics approval (#135061, Human Ethics Advisory Panel, UNSW) was obtained for the three main methods: spatial analysis, surveys
and interviews. The spatial analysis entailed identifying popular second-hand shopping locations and assessing the resident demographics of these areas. The rationale for this part of methodology was to identify if a store or market’s positioning was strategic and indicative of a target market for second-hand shopping (Bridge & Dowling 2011). These locations were then mapped, their establishment dates recorded and target market for second-hand shopping identified. Demographic data – age, gender, average weekly income – was generated from the 2011 Census for areas where multiple second-hand shopping channels were located. The suburbs found to have the most second-hand shops demographic data were compared to the data for the city centre, ‘Sydney’, as a State Electoral Division. This was to exclude the potentially confounding factor of proximity to the city.

A survey was distributed to second-hand shoppers to ascertain the motivations behind second-hand shopping and the level of inclusion of sustainable practices. Forty-seven second-hand clothing shoppers completed the surveys, which were conducted at Glebe Markets, Rozelle Markets and numerous garage sales in the suburb of Newtown. Each survey contained three sections. The first section asked demographic questions to strengthen the corresponding analysis of second-hand shopping locations mapped in the spatial analysis. The second section sought to determine respondents’ inclinations for second-hand shopping, their motivations to shop second-hand, how strictly they promoted ethical and sustainable practices and the extent to which they also shopped in conventional retail outlets. The final section focussed on assessing participants’ levels of environmental awareness and actions, which was determined through the incorporation of ‘green’ principles in the second-hand shopper’s ethos. These questions sought to highlight the potential for discrepancy between what a consumer values and their actual actions, and also to characterise the depth of ‘green’ values by measuring personal knowledge, immersion and sacrifice (Cervellon et al. 2012; Butler & Francis 1997). The survey responses were qualitatively and quantitatively analysed to establish general trends, using SPSS and manual coding to generate and triangulate themes.

Four semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain nuanced and longitudinal views on shopping trends and retailer’s attitudes with second-hand market owners. The interviews varied from 15 to 30 minutes in length and incorporated questions on establishment dates, success of the business or stalls, identification of target demographics, and motivations to engage in this form of trade. The interviews were transcribed and compared to the results from the spatial analysis and survey data.

Results and Discussion

Demographics of study sites and survey participants

Overall 88 second-hand retail channels were located within the inner Sydney region (Figure 1). The second-hand shopping channels were categorised accordingly: privately owned second-hand stores, those owned by not-for-profit organisations and second-hand markets. Privately owned sites and markets give a clearer indication of target market through store and market positioning in a geographical context. Not-for-profit stores are more constrained in location due to rental prices and obligation to societal groups who require cheaper clothing out of necessity (Rettig 1998; Gregson & Crewe 2003). This spatiality does not suggest that select not-for-profit stores do not accommodate a target market, but simply that their spatial positioning is unlikely to be indicative of such influences.
The largest area of recycled and second-hand clothing channels was the Surry Hills, Darlinghurst and Paddington areas, and Newtown had the highest density of stores on one street, mostly privately owned. Second-hand stores were clustered in close spatial proximity and along shopping strips in Rozelle, Glebe, Newtown and an agglomeration of Surry Hills, Darlinghurst and Paddington. These suburbs had source markets for selling second-hand goods and clothing, and also had two not-for-profit second-hand stores (Rozelle Markets n.d.; Figure 0).

Figure 0. Sites of second-hand or recycled fashion channels (not-for-profit, charity, markets and privately owned) in Sydney.
Glebe Markets 2013). Suburbs that held chain recycled fashion stores were Marrickville, Newtown, Surry Hills, Darlinghurst, Bondi and Rozelle.

Due to the popularity and prevalence of sister second-hand shopping stores, non-for-profit second-hand stores and second-hand markets, Glebe, Rozelle, Newtown, Surry Hills, Darlinghurst and Paddington were chosen to assess likely second-hand shopper demographics.¹ These suburbs are all also located within the inner city, which creates a commonality in demographics compared to outer suburbs – for example the younger median age and higher proportion of professionals (Table 1). The characteristics of the suburbs are indicative of cohorts likely to be interested in second-hand shopping. The proximity of tertiary education institutions and the relative affluence of the inner-city locations suggest two possible explanations to the location of these second-hand and recycled clothing businesses within these suburbs. One may relate to thrift through the provision of cheaper clothing for students. Conversely, the second explanation possibly relates to these residents actively seeking out alternative clothing options, as their household incomes and occupational status suggests that they would not need to seek cheaper clothing out as a necessity.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of key study sites in Sydney using Australian Bureau of Statistics data (2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburbs</th>
<th>Tertiary educated (%)</th>
<th>Professionals (%)</th>
<th>Median Weekly Rent ($)</th>
<th>Average weekly household income ($)</th>
<th>Median Age (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glebe</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newtown</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>1753</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddington</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>2290</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlinghurst</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rozelle</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>2598</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surry Hills</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>1760</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Electorate</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Acceptance of second-hand fashion

The acceptance of second-hand fashion within contemporary society is related to increased demand (Gregson & Crewe 2003). Each interviewee attested to an increase in the volume of customers within their markets:

*For the last 5-8 years demand for stalls has outweighed the number of stalls we have available* (Rozelle Markets, 22 August 2013).

¹ The findings of this research present an avenue for future research into the micro-geographies of second-hand consumption in inner-city Sydney, as there was an identifiable spatial pattern of second-hand channels and retail outlets. This pattern could be further defined by research beyond the scope of this project, akin to work undertaken by Bridge and Dowling (2011), to provide additional insight into the mentality, rationale and overarching trend of second-hand consumption.
Trade has been good, enough to make the council complain about the alleged effects to the businesses surrounding ... there is an increase in demand for more enquiries and more bookings. I try to cap the clothing stalls to leave space for the other stall holders to sell local treats, plants and produce having priority (Newtown Markets, 24 August 2013).

There has definitely been an increase in the number of customers over the years ... sales have increased (Rozelle Markets, 22 August 2013).

An increase in young women in second-hand clothing consumption is an indication of fashion acceptability of second-hand clothing, as the most fashion conscious consumers tend to be females within 18 to 25 years of age (Cervellon et al. 2010; Morgan & Birtwistle 2009; O’Cass 2004). There was a high response from this demographic in the surveys and, market owners commented on this in interviews:

[The] most common characteristic customer, is ... 20, 25 ... female, she’s inner city in a slightly grungy way, she’s probably a uni student, she of course likes fashion ... (Glebe Markets, 31 August 2013).

We have quite a few groups of young women aged 18 to 25 years who have stalls together selling their pre-loved clothing on Sundays (Rozelle Markets, 22 August 2013).

Young women’s use of second-hand channels suggests a level of acceptability of recycling in current fashion (Gibson & Stanes 2011). However, the survey and suburb data also indicated a level of diversity in demographics, which suggests complexity that may go beyond fashion acceptability:

I don’t think the customers can be generalised ... you have people from all walks of life, and all ages. Maybe an increase in the young (Rozelle Markets, 1 September 2013).

There are lots of over 40s both male and female ... mums with teenage daughters, and younger couples in their 20s and 30s without children (Rozelle Markets, 22 August 2013).

There is a varied mix of customers, all backgrounds, ages and persuasions (Newtown Markets, 24 August 2013).

You’re now beginning to see people purchase, the average person, purchasing more ‘green’... it’s now flowing into the general population (Glebe Markets, 31 August 2013).

Sustainable Actions
To ascertain whether fashion acceptability (Gregson & Crewe 2003) or a more general acceptability of recycled fashion is the cause for the greatest increase in the use of second-hand clothing channels (Gibson & Stanes 2011), the sustainable actions of second-hand shoppers and motivations to shop second-hand were investigated for the average second-hand consumer. The noted increase in acceptability and consumption of second-hand and recycled
clothing in Sydney coincides with the increase in environmental awareness of human impact and the commencement of the ‘green’ movement in the 1990s (McColl et al. 2013; Roberts & Bacon 1997; Gregson & Crewe 2003). Greater commitment to the clothes recycling process is likely from a position of awareness and motivation to support ‘green’ principles. Many establishment dates of stores in Sydney were after 1990, comparable to the increase in second-hand consumption noted in other studies (Gregson & Crewe 2003). This would suggest that the increased purchase of second-hand clothing might have a relationship to the increase in environmental awareness (Cervellon et al, 2012).

Most survey participants were aware of environmental and ethical issues, and incorporated sustainable practices into daily activities. For example, the majority of survey participants were aware of the unethical conditions in factories supplying to mainstream clothing chains (Mintel 2007 in Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Most respondents (88 per cent) knew of the recent Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh (Butler & Hammadi 2013), and 60 per cent said that this event changed their awareness about the textile industry. The average number of sustainable practices undertaken per individual was five out of a possible eight suggested in this survey, and included recycling rubbish, energy saving light bulbs, solar power usage and taking public transport over private transport. ‘Recycling of rubbish’ received the highest affirmative responses and solar power being the lowest, suggesting general incorporation of everyday and achievable aspects of sustainability into respondents’ lifestyles, but a lower response to sustainable practices of greater effort and lower affordability (Pookulangara & Shephard 2013). The greater the financial sacrifice or the lower the convenience, the less likely a respondent was to be involved in that practice. This helped to identify the limitations of commitment to ‘green’ principles in second-hand shoppers.

As most respondents did not exclusively shop ‘green’, ethical and environmental concerns are unlikely to be the dominant motivation to shop for second-hand clothing. The level of commitment to shopping second-hand by survey participants did not indicate a strong adherence to ‘green’ principles. This was also indicated in the interviews:

They want to be told green, but they [are] also here (Glebe Markets) [to] get green ...
but, they’ll swing everywhere else as well (Glebe Markets, 31 August 2013).

When asked the frequency of second-hand shopping, the respondents ranged from avid to infrequent shoppers, with equal responses spanning from weekly to annually. Only 26 per cent of respondents owned a wardrobe predominantly comprising second-hand items or second-hand and vintage items, and the majority owned clothing from a various mix of origins. Most participants bought second-hand items other than clothing, and so incorporated ‘green’ principles into other living activities, but few participants shopped solely second-hand. This phenomenon may have something to do with fashion status; a combination of new and second-hand suggests a critical eye for style, while wearing/owning predominantly second-hand clothing may “raise respectability fears” (Gregson & Crewe 2003, p. 8). Whilst many second-hand shoppers were happy to incorporate ‘green’ consumption practices, this did not mean that conventional consumption practices were boycotted.

Motivations to shop second-hand
The motivations to shop second-hand were seen as a direct measure of the relationship between second-hand shopping and incorporation of ‘green’ principles. Frugality, fashion, environmental and ethical concerns have each been highlighted as the main motivations to
shop second-hand in past research, and so these values were given the greatest focus in this research (Cervellon et al. 2012). In this research, the garment’s uniqueness, its price and the shopping environment were dominant motivators for shopping. Women were more likely to be strongly motivated by uniqueness of garments, highlighting the relationship between second-hand shopping and fashion involvement. That the garments were cheaper than store-bought items was the greatest motivation for almost 80 per cent of second-hand shoppers. The strong motivation to search for the ‘unique’ has overcome negative connotations associated with second-hand clothing, giving it greater fashion acceptability. Second-hand shopping channels have become widely accepted, but the thrill of a bargain and the search for the ‘unique’ dominate consumption choices over environmental or ethical concerns.

Whilst shopping second-hand with the intention to be frugal was a clear motivation for some respondents, both the spatial analysis and the increase in cheaper mass-produced clothing suggests that the likelihood of shopping second-hand for necessity is very low. More likely is the combination of ‘unique’ fashion value in second-hand clothing and that one can find it for a ‘bargain’ price. The combination of the ‘unique’ fashion value and environmental and ethical awareness may have aided the acceptability of second-hand clothing in the main stream, but environmental and ethical awareness plays little part in the motivation to shop second-hand.

Ethical and environmental awareness has opened up second-hand clothing channels to fashion conscious and frugal consumers, but not necessarily increased their incorporation of ‘green’ principles. Interview data showed that most market owners stated an ethical or environmental aspect to their customers’ motivations to shop second-hand, but the explanations of these motivations demonstrated a deviance from a solely green shopping agenda in some cases:

*I would estimate that the ... ethically conscious make up 95 per cent of the customers in the Newtown Markets* (Newtown Markets, 24 August 2013).

*I would say that about 50 per cent of customers are environmentally and ethically motivated. They will have their own cloth shopping bags and want to hear the origins of the products. The other 50 per cent don’t care one way or the other...* (Rozelle Markets, 22 August 2013).

*Most people appear to be environmentally aware... [they] do not concern themselves with the history of goods they are buying but seem to enjoy information if you have any to give them* (Rozelle Markets, 1 September 2013).

The final comment resonated with the survey data; participants were asked whether they seek information on the sustainability or ethical origins of products they purchase. Only three respondents do so with every, or almost every, purchase. The majority of respondents indicated that they did not seek out this information, however they believe it is a bonus if it is more ethical/eco-friendly. Most respondents see preferable product origins as an added beneficial feature rather than a determining factor in a purchase (Green & Peloza 2011, Pookulangara & Shephard 2013). This sentiment was echoed by one interviewee, who stated:

*All through school [we] have learnt about ... how to be ecologically sound ... it was beaten into [them]. So we are causing change, and we are changing, and in green respects ... it’s so overt with [the younger generations], that they walk in the gates here,
and they are ready to purchase, and want to have signs saying that the product is green ... but, they may behave superficially still (Glebe Markets, 31 August 2013).

Previous studies have found that ‘green’ consumption gives the added benefit of a feeling of consumer sovereignty and alleviation of guilt from unethical purchasing, but does not automatically suggest an abandonment of less-principled consumer values (Guiot & Roux 2010; Roberts & Bacon 1997). While second-hand consumerism promotes recycling practices, in this research there was no suggestion that buying second-hand clothing was solely motivated by ethical or environmental principles. The consumer actions in this research revealed shoppers who were taking the opportunity to participate in cheaper and potentially ‘unique’ or fashionable clothing consumption with the added bonus of contributing to sustainable practice.

Conclusion
This research has helped to explain the motivations behind purchasing second-hand clothing in select inner Sydney locations. Second-hand or recycled clothing avenues are now fashionable, shown by the fashion-focused demographic groups participating in this form of consumption. Ethical and environmental behaviours are becoming increasingly more acceptable and desirable, opening up the second-hand shopping market to the large population who seek the ‘unique’ item and an opportunity to be frugal. Whilst environmental and ethical awareness has raised the acceptability of shopping through second-hand channels, fashion value in ‘unique’ clothing and the opportunity for a ‘bargain’ remains the dominant motivations to shop second-hand.

Fashion involved or frugal second-hand consumers are less likely to use second-hand channels for ‘green’ principles, with their values following the fluctuation of trends and prices. This research calls for more attention to be paid to the motivations of this consumer group. Although the level of acceptance of sustainable principles and sustainable actions undertaken was high, the main motivations to shop second-hand were not associated with sustainable or ethical principles. More fashion motivated second-hand consumers are less likely to be committed to second-hand channels if they lose their fashion value, however those more environmentally or ethically motivated will be more committed for the long term. To prolong recycling practices, second-hand shopping needs to be promoted for environmental and ethical benefits, with the fashion trends being the added bonus, rather than the other way around.

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References


