

# MKTG45262: The Customer Experience

## Critical Self Reflection Of My Own Ethical Clothing Consumption

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# Introduction

In this essay, I will be discussing my own clothing consumption and how ethical it is. As a 24-year-old female with an interest in fashion I am most likely within the segmentation most high street brands target the most. My segmentation variables are:

Demographic	Geographic	Behavioural	Psychographic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 24-year-old Female</li> <li>- White British</li> <li>- Non religious</li> <li>- Social class – lower middle</li> <li>- Education level – Masters level</li> <li>- Student &amp; Waitress</li> <li>- Under £18,000</li> <li>- In a relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Suburban</li> <li>- East Midlands</li> <li>- England</li> <li>- British climate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Purchase Occasion: Frequent Shopper</li> <li>- Purchase Behaviours: Evenings, relaxing online or daytime socialising offline</li> <li>- Media: iPhone X, MacBook Pro and instore</li> <li>- Usage: Heavy</li> <li>- Brand Loyalty: High</li> <li>- Price Sensitivity: High</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Values – Eco-friendly, Ethical, Equality</li> <li>- Lifestyle – Innovator experienter</li> <li>- Personality Attributes: Fashion conscious</li> </ul>

My fashion style is quite bold in colour but not over the top. I like to be different and unique but not feel ridiculous or uncomfortable. This is something I think about when choosing what to wear in certain situations. For example I have a big purple faux fur coat that I try to avoid wearing when I meet people for the first time as I worry that people will think it's real fur or that it's a little extravagant which I fear could create a bad first impression.

I mostly buy clothes in store however, I will spend hours online, scrolling through websites looking at clothes that I like. I tend to find clothes online and try them on instore. I also enjoy shopping as a social engagement with friends, especially when I was younger.

I have a few favourite items, but my dress collection is what I'm most proud of. I am particularly "girly" when it comes to clothes as I love appealing dresses because they are comfortable, easy to wear and make me feel attractive. Figure 1 shows my favourite dress however, I don't often wear it as it is a party dress and I like to save it for special occasions.



Figure 1: Red V-neck Skater Dress

I would consider myself to be eco-conscious as I am aware of environmental issues, but I don't think I do enough as I could to be more ethical. Within Defra's (2008) Pro environmental behaviours framework (see appendix 1). I would consider myself as between sideline supporter and cautious participant. As I know that climate change is a global problem, I complete various activities that help combat climate change but I probably could do more however, I justify this by not having the time or money.

## Methodology

The benefits of conducting research into myself are that I know my own consumption habits and my own behaviours and attitudes better than anyone else. This is why subjective personal introspection (SPI) has been chosen as the method in which I can research and examine my own data, which is easily available to me as I am both the researcher and subject of this data.

However, I feel that a SPI on my own consumption has restraints such as I am biased about myself. This is an issue that Rod (2011) discusses, as I want to be seen as positive both consciously and unconsciously so the accuracy of my ethical habits may not be completely accurate. There is also the problem with memories not being accurate and being misleading. To counter these issues, I will be doing a wardrobe audit which gives me tangible evidence of my purchases and therefore not relying solely on memories of purchasing. I also think a look back at photographs on social media will benefit this self-reflection as my social media page is almost a precise documentary of my life including my clothing style and consumption. However this too brings up bias as the images on social media tend to be our digital self and therefore not concurrent with our true identity.

## My Own Consumption

The main shops I use are:

- New Look
- Topshop
- H&M
- Boohoo
- Nasty Gal
- Asos
- Little Misstress
- Urban Outfitter

As a young female interested in fashion with little disposable income, I tend to shop in the shops listed above as I meet the criteria for their target markets. My segmentation drives these shops have constant sales as they know their customers are students who need discounts in order to purchase. I also use these shops as I am familiar with them and have grown up with them, so I visit these shops by habit especially when I'm back in my hometown with friends. I try to budget myself to a maximum of £40 a shop as currently I have limited funds however, I have always been fairly financially prudent. I believe I have developed my careful spending from my mother who I often went shopping with as a child and teenager. She also taught me a lesson about purchasing for necessity and budgeting.



*Figure 2: Welcome to my Wardrobe*

My style is not particularly unique, but I do choose to wear colour as much as possible again something that my mother has been an influence. We see so much grey and black through in our environment within cities, that I feel that wearing a bit of colour can just brighten up the world a little especially when the weather is grey and miserable. I also feel that my style has developed a lot since I was a young adolescent who was obsessed with the vintage style but now, I feel I'm just more normal due to my desire to fit in. As a young person I always wanted to stand out but now I have matured I don't have as much of a need to be so individual, but I still feel that colour communicates my identity through my clothing.

Music has had a profound influence on my life and my identity. I have been majorly influenced by bands such as Kasabian and The Kaiser Chiefs. However, not being a boy, I only had one jacket that was more like their clothing style funnily enough I named my Kasabian Jacket. Here is an image of me wearing my Kasabian jacket and meeting one of The Kaiser Chiefs. The singers in these particular bands influenced me a lot and this jacket is a reflection of still being feminine but similar to what they would have worn too. My love for music came from a young age and runs in my family, both parents took me, my brothers to see concerts from a very young age. The particular style of music I listen to is called Indie which was introduced to me by my family.



*Figure 3: Me in the Kasabian jacket meeting one of The Kaiser Chiefs 2009*

I feel my style of clothing has moved on from the uniformity of band following now that I have grown older. Today, I am more influenced by my friends clothing choices and maybe one or two celebrities such as Jameelia Jamil whose style is attractive flowing dresses which I really admire. I feel I am also influenced by her as a person though her activism regarding body dysmorphia and that she started as a music presenter interested in similar genre of music to me. Instagram is a good platform for sourcing clothing ideas as I can see what my friends are wearing and even get advertisements for similar clothes from the brands I like.

The main factors that concern me when making a purchase are firstly style and fit followed by price. I look for items that are in keeping with my personal style. I also prefer comfort over fashion. For example, I don't tend to wear high heels anymore, but prefer my daily shoes which are block heels and extremely comfortable. When I am going out, I love to dress up in a fancy dress but the uncomfortable heels I used to wear have been left on the shelf for a while now. I also prefer to be warm and so will wear my big thick coat out everywhere.

Shopping convenience is the next factor on my clothes purchasing list as I enjoy the actual activity of going shopping and will frequently go to my local shopping centre. Sometimes I will go further away and make more of a social occasion of a shopping trip when with friends. As a teenager shopping was most definitely a social experience as my friends and I would meet in town and go shopping for pleasure over necessity, something I do less frequently now, but I still enjoy going shopping even by myself. I do find myself spending hours online browsing now which is very convenient.

Ethics is a real after thought when it comes to clothes shopping. I did spend a little time boycotting Primark however their low cost goods have tempted me back.

As I have a low source of income, the biggest contradiction to my economic spending is my phone which cost £1000. I would class my phone as a fashion item much like Katz and Sugiyama (2006), who see technology as an extension of self and fashion symbol before functionality. Being an apple iPhone X, it says much about me; for example, it is a status symbol and it says I'm keeping up to date with technology. The consumer culture theory shows how a product such as this can be symbolic of status and shows how I have transformed the meaning of it to fulfil the goal of being successful adding to my identity. I would say my main reason for buying it was to be the first to have it. The phone is a status symbol showing that I have wealth to afford such a luxury item which at the time I did. Being Apple, it went with my laptop and together showed my professionalism as Apple is known to be good within the design industry. This need for these products to be part of the cultural group I wanted, meant I had to purchase them. Part of the consumer culture theory Arnould and Thompson (2005) suggests that this product would allow me to be in a cultural group that I aspired to be in creating this identity of professionalism.

I have also previously tried to make my own clothing which contradicts my need for convenience. However, the dress I made, I have never worn as I was unable to create an acceptable standard of finish. Other contradictions come from the more expensive dresses and coats I have bought however, I have others buy these items for me or I wait for a large discount so that it doesn't hurt my budget too much.

# My Awareness Of Ethical Issues

As a young teenager I have watched the evening news on a daily basis with my parents something that I still do to this day so I do have a general understanding of current affairs and what is happening in the world. For example, the collapse of the factory in Bangladesh which of my understanding belonged to Primark so I took it upon myself to not shop there. I have also watched documentaries by the reporter Stacy Dooley who presented a program on fast fashion and the tremendous amounts of water consumed by the industry which had almost completely drained a sea in Kazakhstan. This has led me to become interested in how and where products are made and the ethical aspect of the clothing industry.

More recently, there has been tragic news of the loss of a lorry full of migrants. People who have been human trafficked across countries and have sadly died. An issue not necessarily caused by the fashion industry but an unacceptable and unethical issue caused by our demand for consumption.

Other issues I am aware of are animal rights issues including the use of animal testing by companies such as L'Oréal, another company I have boycotted due to this unnecessary cruelty. I have also boycotted Dove for the racist issues their advertising campaigns have created. Racism is something I cannot tolerate at all and so clothing such as Katy Perry's shoes and Gucci's jumpers (see appendix 2 and 3) which were widely interpreted as racist are something I find appalling and as such I will never use any of their companies either. Having watched the film Blood Diamond years ago, I am also aware of the issues with diamonds, jewels and expensive metals that are mined unethically by people kept in slavery and killed for such materials. There is also the gender pay gap issue that is evident across all sectors that I am aware of as well as discrimination against women in terms of the Me Too movement which had famous women say Times Up on sexual harassment in their industry.

Other than clothing, the ethical practices I have tried to incorporate into my life are things such as recycling and buying local produce such as Morrisons local eggs and I have also recently begun to compost my left over food scraps. I try to avoid plastic entirely by reusing shopping bags and I have a metal water bottle and reusable coffee cup. I have also attempted to sew my own clothes and repair items that have broken on occasion. I have recently moved in to a new flat and decided to buy most of the furniture second hand, this made for good ethical consumption however, this was not my main priority which was to source cheap furniture.

## Critical Reflection

Some of my consumption of fashion can be classed as impulsive more accelerator impulsiveness as I occasionally buy clothing unnecessarily with the idea in mind that it will be useful for certain occasions. For example, I have several party dresses that have been bought without a party to go to. However, I would also say that these dresses could be considered compensatory impulsiveness as they make me feel better upon purchase.

Compensatory consumption would be an activity My Mother and I would primarily do especially when I was living at home. However, a lack of purchase could lead to a feeling of a failed outing creating the opposite outcome of actually feeling worse rather than better which the activity was meant to do. Which leads to a problematic repetitive behaviour spiralling downwards, contradicting the ideas of Parker-Pope, T (2005) who believes that compensatory compulsion brings a happier feeling however also agreeing with this idea as the failure to consumer brings about the feeling of unsatisfaction.

This impulsive purchasing can occasionally come with a cognitive dissonance after purchasing a wisdom that perhaps I didn't need to buy another dress as I have many that are already hanging in the wardrobe unworn. Other forms of cognitive dissonance I have considered whilst writing this essay are from exposure to new information such as that of ingredients of Mica mined for in the use of shimmering eye shadows have been done by child labour leading to feeling of guilt an emotional reaction to the discomfort of this new information. As a result, I researched to see if any of my eyeshadows use this child labour in order to reduce the dissonance however, upon finding they do, I had to find another way to feel better about this. Pandey and Jamwal (2016) suggest the use of ways to reduce discomfort such as the belief of no escaping it was comforting to me. The idea of being a bad person due to using unethically sourced materials causes discomfort to me but the inescapability of this unethicalness is an easy excuse to use to reduce dissonance.

My most instrumental value in life is equality Shaw et al (2005) Refers to this as Universalism; The belief that all people should be treated equally. This is a guiding principle of my life. It is something I have developed from the examples my parents have set for me such as my mother constant struggle for equal treatment for my Autistic brother and my dyslexia and both of their anti-racist and anti-sexists views.

As someone who has a political outlook and wants equality, I feel that studying this module has opened my eyes to the world of fast fashion and how unethical it can be. This has led me to really consider my consumer behaviour and practices more thoroughly. For example, my attitudes towards ethical consumption have changed due to the new information I have researched such as the issue with Mica mining and the idea of child labour. This horrifies me and so I have developed an attitude of concern over the ingredients however, my behaviour has failed to change as I still use these products creating an attitude behaviour gap. The belief that there is no way to avoid this comes under the feelings of powerlessness and that one person can't make a difference, issues that Jorgens (2006) encountered with participants feeling that they won't make a difference. Upon the realisation that such behaviour is apparent from the writing of the essay my attitudes change again to produce feelings of shame and guilt which may very well create a change in my behaviour.

A major issue with ethical consumption is this attitude behavioural gap and the idea that by myself I cannot do enough is further propelled by the expense of ethically sourced goods making it harder to change my own behaviour to be more in line with my attitudes as I simply cannot afford to be as ethical as I would like. Price is a major factor to me when purchasing products and so justifies my unethical behaviour and therefore a denial of my responsibility (Johnstone and Tan, 2014) however making



me feel like it is acceptable because I cannot afford to be ethical which is the type of behaviour the corporations such as those implicated in unethical behaviour want us to do so that they can continue to profit from the wrong they are doing.

The practices I am already doing such as recycling has issues facing it such as is it really getting recycled? This is a cynical view that could be a barrier to changes in behaviour to close the gap between attitude and behaviour. (Johnstone and Tan, 2014) However, even with evidence that our recycling isn't actually being recycled (Parveen, 2018) I believe that if I don't at least try then at least it is no longer my responsibility and it should fall to the government to be responsible in what they do with my recycling.

Another barrier to the change in behaviour is the complexity of choice when it comes to shopping. I am aware of practically no shops whose USP is being ethical and so once researching new shops the complexity of choice becomes an issue. Suddenly trying to change a habit and the overload of too much choice makes it impossible to decide where to shop and in actual fact I end up not bothering because it's too confusing. Along with there being so much misleading and confusing information available it makes being ethical almost impossible, Jägel et al (2012) points this out in their study of complexities in ethical clothing consumption.

My attempts at making my own clothing have issues with the fact that I don't have the skills, time and are the sources of material ethical either? Leading me to just go back to the habits of buying from the shops I know through habit and like Bray et al (2011) discussed a brand loyalty to these shops.

All of this leads to the difficulty of being able to consume ethical products and so the ease of making affordable and uncomplex decisions that are habit mean that I as a consumer continue to be unethical. (Johnstone and Tan, 2015) Upon now realising these barriers I feel that the knowledge I have gained means I can tackle these barriers and attempt to be more ethical in my future purchases.

A look at the shops I use ethical policies show that perhaps being an ethical consumer may not be as far away as I thought. High street brands like New Look have commitments to policies (New Look, 2019) that reflect my values of equality as well as protection against slavery and environmental issues policies which show that the big companies are trying but are they really or are they trying to influence perception? Again, this is my cynicism and lack of trust. (Johnstone and Tan, 2015)

Other values I hold are that we should protect the environment for future generations and therefore take responsibility for our actions now. This value is more of a terminal value as it is something I strive towards and is why I try to avoid plastics, have begun to compost and take public transport when possible. Efforts in which to reduce my environmental impact on the planet. This green part of my identity may however be just a facade to impress my social circles as it is always documented on social media. This Digital Identity is fractured from my true identity as it is only the better side of myself. This is a way in which I am cynical about my own ethical behaviours, am I doing good for the sake of doing good or am I showing off?

My identity of being a good human and upholding the values I believe in has changed through the course of this essay. I feel that the issues discussed in this

essay have widened my understanding of ethical issues within the fashion industry more towards that of issues in the third world countries such as child and slave labour and illnesses created from pesticides used in such places that has been displayed to me through the documentary (The True Cost, 2015). This has left me to question whether I fulfil the value of equality I hold. I believe all people should be given the same opportunities and treated fairly but now knowing how some of these people are treated perhaps my behaviours need to change to act upon these issues to uphold my dearest values.

## Conclusion

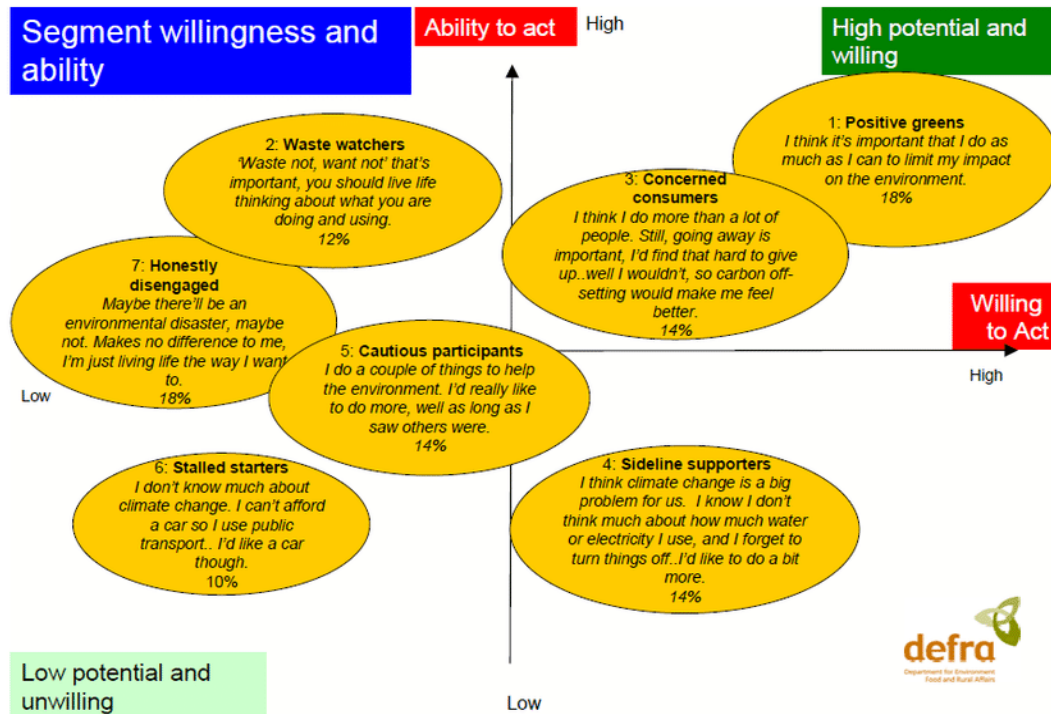
From the issues covered in this essay I can draw the conclusion that there are many barriers to change our behaviour to become more ethical even though attitudes towards it are increasingly positive creating a bigger behaviour attitude gap. We know that people want to be increasingly ethical as shown in Eurobarometer survey (2011) but their behaviours are not in line with their attitudes due to barriers.

Barriers include:

- habit
- price
- cynicism
- complexity of choice.
- ease

To reduce these barriers, companies could do much more. For example, high street brands could shout about their ethics rather than keep them hidden away making it common knowledge that they are doing something helping the consumer to reduce the complexity of knowing who is doing what making it easier to be an ethical consumer. They could also be more ethical as well by reducing plastic packaging, increasing recycling and reducing fast fashion which would reduce cynicism in consumers along with reducing pricing to help consumers such as myself who want to do something but can't afford to. My advice to the marketing manager would be to really show the consumer the ethical ways they are trying to help by posting on social media, running campaigns and just making it common knowledge to all consumers what their ethical policy is.

# Appendix



Appendix 1: (Defra's 2008) Pro environmental behaviours



Appendix 2: Katy Perry Shoes



*Appendix 3: Gucci Jumper*

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