

Abstract for working paper and finalised mobile app concept

Redress App: Deepening the connection with our clothes through repair

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Background and research aim

Through bridging theory and practice, this paper discusses the conceptual response and development of a fashion resale and repair mobile application. The app promotes longevity and slow fashion consumption amongst Gen Z and Millennial consumers by teaching and connecting through repair practices to ultimately reduce textile landfill and waste. The Fixing Fashion report by the Environmental Audit Committee (UK Parliament, 2019) predicts longevity, repair and durability as a promising strategy towards sustainable consumption, therefore craft and repair present a pertinent opportunity to minimise fashion's environmental impact.

During the Covid19 lockdowns in the UK, we realised that anything besides our basic needs is unimportant and that everything else seems excessive and hedonistic (Tewari, 2021). Crafting surged throughout the pandemic (Gale Smith, 2021), making things at home was practical and became a remedy for digital fatigue. During lockdown, neighbourhoods quietly adorned their homes with crochet rainbows and handmade bunting in solidarity within their communities and it was during this covid craft renaissance that we proved that we are capable makers and fixers. It was also during this time that we saw an increased backlash against UK fast fashion businesses where their unethical and opaque supply chains were published and brought to light. In return and post pandemic, consumers are purchasing with greater thought and treating fashion items carefully to extend their lifespan. The 'fashion haul' movement on social media has also seen a decline, with the hashtag #AntiHaul reaching 21.5m views on TikTok, an ever-growing popular social media platform amongst Gen Z users (WGSN, The Repair Economy, 2022).

Fletcher and Tham (2014) report that professional repair services are marginalised in town centres and secluded from fashion retail stores, therefore isolating the business of caring for garments. The decreasing quality of textiles and workmanship has changed the way we connect with clothes and presents a disregard for their maintenance (Neto and Ferreira, 2020). If we can extend the life of clothing through repair and reduce machine washing by an extra nine months we could reduce carbon, waste and water footprints by around 20–30% (WRAP, 2017). A growing economy is emerging through a new make-do-and-mend attitude and with pressures on consumer's ever-increasing sustainability concerns, more shoppers than ever before are looking to repair and rewear their clothes, but do they have the appropriate skills to do so?

Study Design

The pilot study comprised of a total of N=127 social surveys through online distribution with both Gen Z and Millennial consumers based in London, England and Swansea and Cardiff, Wales. The data was analysed using cross tabulation analysis (Malhotra et al. 2017) and later with graphs for visualisation.

Findings

Regarding the care process for damaged clothes, 25% of the respondents either disposed damaged clothes into non-recyclable household waste or disregarded their clothes to be stored away and forgotten. Most respondents claimed that they would take damaged clothes to a clothes bank, although a sustainable approach, it does not adhere to a circular economy. Regarding repair services, 49.5% of respondents were not aware of the repair or alternation services within their local communities.

Value – Monetary

Feedback indicates that the respondents were more likely to pay for garment repair if the item was expensive. The results indicate that if the garment was cheap, then it was not worth repairing.

Value – Sentiment

Respondents claimed that if the item holds meaning, evokes emotion or is significant to the user, then they would invest in repair.

Conclusion

The value one places on their garment is a driving factor for whether it is worthy of repair and it is argued that the lower the value, in terms of the garment composition and value, the more unlikely it is to be repaired if damaged. Similarly, the results indicate a lack of awareness amongst Gen Z and Millennials regarding the seamsters and repair services within local communities, suggesting an opportunity for a platform that aggregates the essential repair services in one, familiar online application.

The Redress repair app enables users to teach, repair and connect with specialists within their local communities to extend the lifespan and strengthen their relationships with the clothes that they own. The app concept aims to achieve new ways of living lasting and meaningful lives with the objects that we own in a shared phygital community and thus reducing textile waste and diminishing a linear economy.

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