



Clothing disposal in Ethiopia: methods and motives

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores clothing disposal in a developing economy. It focuses on how consumers dispose of clothing and what motives influence them to use a specific disposal method.

Design/methodology/approach – Semi-structured interviews, a qualitative research method, were conducted with a purposive sample of 27 participants from diverse demographic backgrounds within the developing economy of Ethiopia. The interviews were coded and analysed using thematic analysis to identify categories and themes.

Findings – The findings reveal various clothing disposal methods, such as bartering, donating, gifting, repurposing and reusing, and discarding. Different motives drive consumers to use these methods, including economic benefits, altruism, and convenience.

Originality/value – The study bridges an important knowledge gap in literature mainly on three aspects, as highlighted by previous research. Theoretically, in addition to proposing a different perspective of bartering as a disposal method, the study investigates the motives behind clothing disposal methods from diverse consumer groups and proposes a conceptual framework to illustrate the link between clothing disposal methods and motives. **Methodologically, the study addresses the call for a more inclusive and diverse sample, considering gender and varied socio-economic groups.** Contextually, while previous research has focused on developed economies, this study explains clothing disposal methods and motives from a developing economy context, specifically Ethiopia.

Keywords Clothing disposal, Disposal methods, Motives for disposal, Socially responsible disposal, Sustainable disposal, Developing economy

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

There has been a recent increase in clothing demand in all economies, including developing economies (Piribauer and Bartl, 2019). This trend is driven by various factors, such as increased consumption, lower production costs, and lower clothing prices (Soyer and Dittrich, 2021). Additionally, the emergent and increasing number of middle- and higher-income consumers has given rise to higher consumption levels in general and clothing in particular (Kumar and Srivastava, 2020; Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2022). This seemingly insatiable appetite for clothing has significant societal implications, including the generation of textile waste, deposits/dumping in landfills, and an adverse environmental impact (Acquaye *et al.*, 2023; Laitala, 2014; Piribauer and Bartl, 2019).

To counteract this environmental trajectory, research and development initiatives in developed economies have focused on promoting and enhancing recycling, second-hand consumption, and collaborative consumption models as potential solutions (Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2022). The effectiveness of these initiatives is anchored on the role of consumers, as their responsible disposal of clothing reflects a socially responsible (SR) and sustainable action, crucial for mitigating the negative effects of clothing consumption (Davis *et al.*, 2017). Consumers' role in the disposal and adoption of these sustainability-related initiatives has served as a focus of previous research (Cruz-Cárdenas and Arévalo-Chávez, 2018). Extant literature concentrates on specific consumer-related issues, including disposal behaviour, disposal options, patterns, destinations, reasons, environmental attitudes, environmental consciousness, recycling, and demographics (Laitala, 2014).

The Bernardes *et al.* (2020) review of 51 studies on clothing disposal behaviour found a focus on behavioural aspects, such as how people dispose of their clothing, without examining motives. Scholarly discussions emphasise pre-purchase and post-purchase stages of consumption, yet a gap exists in exploring post-purchase behaviour, particularly in clothing disposal (Bernardes *et al.*, 2020; Hassan *et al.*, 2022; Patwary *et al.*, 2023). Where methods and motives have been studied, inconsistent findings have been reported, such as environmental awareness not being identified as a motivating factor in clothing disposal (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012). Nonetheless, Joung and Park-Poaps (2013) found that it did play a motivating role. This dissensus across studies highlights a dearth of knowledge regarding consumers' clothing disposal (Bernardes *et al.*, 2020) and the various motives driving it (Dommer and Winterich, 2021).

Earlier studies have focused on homogeneous samples like women, the youth, and college students, resulting in a growing call for further research with a more heterogeneous

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3 population, including men, seniors, and consumers from different socio-economic contexts
4 (e.g., Bernardes *et al.*, 2020; Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2022). Understanding consumer disposal
5 actions within this broader context is crucial due to the community implications of disposal
6 methods.
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10 Furthermore, compared to developed economies, studies in developing economies
11 like Ethiopia have gained little attention (Cruz-Cárdenas and Arévalo-Chávez, 2018).
12 Consumers' clothing disposal in developing economies may differ from developed
13 economies, as they are affected by contextual factors, including a shortage of resources,
14 inadequate recycling infrastructure, demographic diversity, social unrest, and political
15 instability (Kumar and Srivastava, 2020). As Africa's second-most populous nation,
16 Ethiopia has a growing market. East Africa's growing production facilities serve local and
17 international customers (Berg *et al.*, 2015). However, fast fashion dominates in Ethiopia
18 due to its low prices (Khurana and Muthu, 2022), causing sustainability issues for end-of-
19 life clothing items (Bizuneh and Tadesse, 2022). Previous research in Ethiopia has
20 investigated local textile manufacturers' disposal (Bizuneh and Tadesse, 2022), but
21 consumers' perspective is suggested as a new area of research (Khurana and Tadesse,
22 2019).
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32 To address these aspects, our study explores the methods and motives behind the
33 SR disposal of clothing in a developing economy context. More specifically, this study
34 examines: 1) how consumers dispose of clothing; and 2) what motives influence them in
35 using clothing disposal methods.
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41 **Literature review**

42 *Ethiopia as the empirical context*

43 Ethiopia is an important country in the fashion industry as a production and consumption
44 site. As a production site, leading retailers are relocating production facilities to East
45 Africa, particularly Ethiopia, due to low wages (Khurana, 2018). As a consumption site,
46 Ethiopia imports clothing to meet increased demand and positive perceptions of imported
47 clothing over domestically produced ones (Khurana and Muthu, 2022). Imports comprise
48 79% of Ethiopia's clothing (Governing Economic Hubs and Flows Somali East Africa,
49 2019). However, not all imported clothing is new, as 46% of Europe's clothing collected
50 for recycling is exported to Africa (Lingås *et al.*, 2023), raising sustainability issues. This
51 has led to discussions about prohibiting imported second-hand clothing in developing
52 economies (Dissanayake and Pal, 2023).
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Ethiopia's growing population and the youth's fashion interest (Bizuneh and Tadesse, 2022) necessitate a study on clothing disposal practices to address rising consumption. Low-priced imported clothing, mostly from China, and second-hand clothing from illicit channels impact purchasing power and variety (Pankhurst, 2019). These two aspects, in conjunction with overconsumption and the resulting increase in clothing waste, are significant contributors to environmental sustainability challenges.

Ethiopian consumers' clothing choices

In Africa, 80% of people wear second-hand clothing due to limited income (Sumo *et al.*, 2023). In Ethiopia, second-hand clothing outperforms fast fashion, counterbalancing imports and providing economic benefits (Khurana and Tadesse, 2019). However, the rising fast fashion, characterised by low-cost and low-quality materials (Patwary *et al.*, 2023), is changing consumer behaviour and undermining traditional hand-woven clothing (*shemma*) (Pankhurst, 2019). The young and growing clothing market in developing economies like Ethiopia is becoming a relevant target for fast fashion, raising questions of social and environmental implications (Khurana and Muthu, 2022).

The nature of clothing disposal

Disposal is the act of no longer using a product, even when it is still useful (Sandes *et al.*, 2019). Clothing disposal is the clothing's ultimate stage of use under the current owner (Bernardes *et al.*, 2020). It can occur when the clothing has outlived its purpose because of a poor fit (Hassan *et al.*, 2022) or when the consumer stops using an item of clothing (Wang *et al.*, 2020). Disposal is important to society, given the increasing consumption of clothing addressed in consumer social responsibility (CnSR) literature (Davis *et al.*, 2017). Responsible/Sustainable disposal is part of SR consumption, as consumers' disposal methods can limit the negative effects and provide a societal benefit (Mason *et al.*, 2022). Hence, this study views clothing disposal methods and motives from this perspective.

Reasons for clothing disposal

Before disposing, an owner decides to cease using an item (Sandes *et al.*, 2019), requiring physical and emotional detachment (Dommer and Winterich, 2021). Research has investigated why consumers dispose of their clothing and identified psychological, physical, and situational factors. Psychologically, changing fashion trends result in clothing being perceived as being out of date and being disposed of (Mason *et al.*, 2022).

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3 The connection between clothing disposal and consumers' emotional attachment,
4 nostalgia, and symbolic value also impacts clothing disposal (Sandes *et al.*, 2019; Wang *et*
5 *al.*, 2020). Boredom or the gradual decrease in enjoyment from repeated clothing use may
6 trigger clothing disposal and replacement with new items (Kwon *et al.*, 2020). Physical
7 factors, including clothing obsolescence (Degenstein *et al.*, 2020), weight fluctuations
8 (Laitala, 2014), poor fit, and wear and tear (Patwary *et al.*, 2023), contribute to clothing
9 disposal. Situational factors like closet space shortages (Roster and Ferrari, 2022) and life
10 transitions including marriage, divorce, or illness (Cruz-Cárdenas *et al.*, 2019) also
11 influence disposal decisions.
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20 *Methods of clothing disposal*

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22 Once the disposal decision has been made, a disposal method must be chosen (Sandes *et*
23 *al.*, 2019). Researchers have proposed a taxonomy of disposal decisions for products,
24 comprising three primary disposal methods: 1) keeping the product for alternative usage;
25 2) permanent disposal by donating it to charity or giving it away, exchanging, or dumping;
26 and 3) temporary disposal by renting it out (Dommer and Winterich, 2021; Hassan *et al.*,
27 2022; Jacoby *et al.*, 1977; Roster and Ferrari, 2023; Sarigöllü *et al.*, 2021). Contrastingly,
28 Soyer and Dittrich (2021) proposed four types of clothing disposal methods: reusing,
29 recycling, incineration, and landfilling. Reusing involves donating, selling, or swapping
30 clothes; recycling includes discarding items in recycle bins; incineration concerns
31 disposing of clothes with or without energy recovery; and landfilling is throwing items out
32 with regular trash. Thus, consumers can dispose of clothing in many ways, including
33 reusing, donating, recycling, and discarding (Cruz-Cárdenas and Arévalo-Chávez, 2018;
34 Sandes *et al.*, 2019). Unwanted clothing can be sold for cash, swapped for other clothing,
35 rented out (Laitala, 2014), **or upcycled into something valuable (Coppola *et al.*, 2021)**.
36 These disposal methods can be considered at any time, as they are perceived differently
37 and motivated by various factors (Cruz-Cárdenas *et al.*, 2019; Shim, 1995).
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55 *Factors influencing clothing disposal methods*

56 As a multifaceted experience, clothing disposal is affected by economic and environmental
57 factors (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013). Wai Yee *et al.* (2016) identified several factors that
58 influence clothing disposal behaviour, which underpin this study and are discussed next.
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Economic factors. Economic factors are crucial in consumers' choice of clothing disposal methods. Economic crises can drive consumers to dispose of their possessions (Hassan *et al.*, 2022), including clothing, for financial gain (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2010; Degenstein *et al.*, 2020). Economically conscious consumers prefer to reuse clothing to extend its life and avoid spending money (Shim, 1995). Reselling can also provide additional income (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013) and alleviate guilt associated with discarding clothing (Hassan *et al.*, 2022). Consumers may save money when they reuse or modify existing items to create handcrafted substitutes for new purchases. Encouraging economic sensibility can motivate consumers to take more care of their used clothing, leading to responsible disposal (Sarigöllü *et al.*, 2021). However, research on the role of economic factors is limited, especially in developing economies (Cruz-Cárdenas and Arévalo-Chávez, 2018). Therefore, further research is needed to understand these factors.

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Environmental factors. Environmental factors like awareness and concern affect clothing disposal behaviour (Shim, 1995; Wai Yee *et al.*, 2016). Consumers must be aware of climate challenges and the need for alternative disposal methods to show appropriate SR behaviour (Hameed *et al.*, 2022; Hassan *et al.*, 2022). When consumers are aware of the environmental impact of their clothing disposal, they may be more inclined to show pro-environmental behaviour (Wai Yee *et al.*, 2016), impacting their disposal method choice. Examples of such behaviour in the clothing context include recycling, reusing, and repairing, which can reduce the amount of new clothing purchased and decrease the environmental impact of clothing (Acquaye *et al.*, 2023). However, while fashion consumers expressed a favourable attitude to environmental sustainability, this attitude does not consistently manifest in their choices of clothing disposal methods (Park and Lin, 2020; Soyer and Dittrich, 2021).

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Attitudes to recycling. Attitudes are how a person feels about engaging in a specific behaviour (Soyer and Dittrich, 2021). They influence a range of SR behaviour, including recycling and various disposal methods (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012). Recycling in the fashion industry is particularly important in promoting sustainable consumption (Park and Lin, 2020). Research shows that positive attitudes towards recycling drive recycling intentions (Hameed *et al.*, 2022), though intentions do not always translate into actual behaviour (Park and Lin, 2020; Soyer and Dittrich, 2021; Wai Yee *et al.*, 2016). Consumers with favourable attitudes towards recycling tend to dispose of their possessions in environmentally friendly ways, such as donating, gifting, repurposing, and reusing (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013). However, recycling is less

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3 practical in developing economies due to its high cost (Bizuneh and Tadesse, 2022) and
4 less-developed recycling infrastructure (Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2022).

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6 *Philanthropic (e.g., altruistic) factors.* Philanthropic factors stem from the
7 assumption that each consumer's reaction from a humanistic and selfless perspective
8 towards society has a positive societal contribution (Davis *et al.*, 2017). Therefore,
9 philanthropic disposal involves helping other people in the broader community who are
10 impoverished or needy (Hassan *et al.*, 2022). Altruistic factors, such as donations, are
11 linked to SR disposal methods, which may reduce clothing waste and support charitable
12 causes (Kim and Childs, 2021). This is influenced by philanthropic consciousness, which
13 refers to the active involvement of consumers in their local communities as they look for
14 opportunities to help others, give back, show compassion, or promote justice and unity
15 (Davis *et al.*, 2017). Helping the needy is the major reason behind consumers' use of
16 donations to dispose of used clothing in developed and developing economies (Hassan *et*
17 *al.*, 2022; Wai Yee *et al.*, 2016). For example, developing economies tend to have a
18 collectivistic culture, raising a community mindset among consumers, thereby making
19 charitable giving a more suitable disposal method (Cruz-Cárdenas *et al.*, 2019).

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22 *Additional factors.* The availability of disposal infrastructure and nostalgia can
23 influence clothing disposal behaviour (Kumar and Srivastava, 2020). In developing
24 economies, a lack of recycling facilities means lower recycling rates (Hameed *et al.*, 2022),
25 triggering environmental issues like landfills (Khurana and Tadesse, 2019). Improved
26 infrastructure linking textile producers and recyclers could increase sustainable disposal
27 (Laitala, 2014).

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Nostalgia, the emotional attachment to clothing, also influences the choice of
disposal method. Consumers are more inclined to reuse, donate, and recycle than throw
away clothing they have a personal connection to (Wang *et al.*, 2020). Studies indicate that
nostalgia positively impacts clothing disposal by inducing a sense of meaning among
consumers, leading to more meaningful disposal (e.g., Kim and Childs, 2021; Zhang *et al.*,
2021). Older consumers, such as baby boomers and seniors, may be more nostalgic (Zaman
et al., 2019). This sentimental yearning for the past may lead consumers to act without
considering the potential impact on the future (Wang *et al.*, 2020).

[Insert Table II here]

Method

Qualitative research

This study was conducted in a relatively previously unexplored developing economy, thus an exploratory study using a qualitative research method was undertaken. Semi-structured interviews were used because they can provide a deeper understanding of a topic and provide rich detail (Denscombe, 2017). These interviews also permit flexibility and focus (Bell *et al.*, 2022).

Sampling

A judgement (or purposive) sample was used to attain the research purpose (Bell *et al.*, 2022; Denscombe, 2017). Robinson (2014) suggested that a heterogeneous sample helps identify commonalities across diverse groups, ensuring findings are not confined to specific demographic, temporal, or spatial domains. Participants from various backgrounds were included to represent a diverse cross-section of characteristics, such as gender, age, religion, socioeconomic status, and geographic location (Campbell *et al.*, 2020; Denscombe, 2017). Additionally, participants were required to have disposed of clothing within the six months preceding the interview.

This study involved 27 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, each lasting 35 minutes (see Table III). Interviews continued until saturation was attained, resulting in no new information (Denscombe, 2017). Saturation was reached in the 22nd interview, although additional interviews were conducted to confirm this.

The interview guide was developed based on the literature review. It was prepared using indirect questioning to reduce the potential impact of social desirability bias (Bell *et al.*, 2022). It was written in English, translated into Amharic, and reviewed by a language expert. Pilot tests were conducted to identify potential issues with question formulation and the semi-structured questionnaire was adjusted until saturation was reached (Denscombe, 2017).

The study considered the importance of managing language differences in cross-language research to ensure trustworthiness (Mohamad Nasri *et al.*, 2021). The source language was used for transcription and coding of interview data, while themes were translated into English. This method allowed for iterative comparison and evaluation of the translation, and the accuracy of the codes and themes against the original transcript in the source data. This approach is an ideal choice for qualitative research (Esfehani and Walters, 2018).

[Insert Table III here]

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed by one of the researchers. Each interview transcript was carefully observed and read several times to get immersed and familiar with the data (Saldaña, 2021). Open coding was utilised to segment the data into meaningful units. The coding was done manually, line by line, using highlighters to identify initial codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This manual method is a common and effective method that forms the root of electronic coding (Saldaña, 2021). An inductive approach was used to build categories and themes followed by thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Categories were established based on the 25% minimum participation rate (Butterfield *et al.*, 2009).

Several a priori codes were identified from the literature review, but the analysis of the interviews enabled the identification of emergent codes. A coding framework was developed to provide data validity and reduce bias (Marquardt *et al.*, 2017). An independent coder was briefed on the study's purpose and assisted in verifying the coherency and accuracy of the coding (Marquardt *et al.*, 2017).

[Insert Table IV here]

Data quality/trustworthiness

To ensure the findings were trustworthy, the characteristics described by Guba (1981) were used to convey trustworthiness. The interviews also provided evidence of credibility in the coding process by applying the codebook developed based on literature. The quotes provided in the findings illustrate the themes and patterns in the data (Denscombe, 2017; Saldaña, 2021). The coding strategies and data interpretation were cross-checked through peer checking, thereby reflecting transferability (Stahl and King, 2020). Dependability was obtained, as the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then analysed. Confirmability was obtained by reflecting on the possible bias during the research and limiting any effect thereof (Stahl and King, 2020).

Ethical considerations

The study followed all the ethical requirements associated with conducting qualitative research. The participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and their rights before

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3 the start of the interview. All participants gave informed written consent to partake and to
4 the audio recording of their interview. Participants were allocated a number, which is used
5 in the findings to ensure the confidentiality of their responses.
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10 **Results**

11 *Findings – disposal methods*

12 The data analysis showed that clothing disposal methods are important issues in developing
13 economies. Consumers may use five major disposal methods: one emergent theme
14 (bartering) and four a priori themes (repurposing and reusing, donating, gifting, and
15 discarding).
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20 *Bartering.* Bartering is a common practice in Ethiopia, where used clothing is
21 exchanged for household appliances. This is a different mode of bartering, named *liwach*
22 in Amharic. People doing this pass residential areas with vending carts laden with
23 household appliances, proclaiming “*liwach yalesh!*” to mean “anyone in need of
24 bartering”, and individuals with clothing await the arrival of *liwach* to engage in the barter.
25 As F11 stated:
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31 I often get rid of clothing that I don't wear using *liwach*.... I utilise this technique
32 most of the time What is interesting is that they carry a variety of household
33 items for you to choose and take in return.
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37 Similarly, M01 mentioned that bartering was common and stated:

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39 Some individuals would interpret it as being, um, selfish. It is, after all, my
40 possession, and I have the right to handle it however I see fit. Therefore, bartering
41 is the most convenient and effective technique, in my opinion.
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45 *Repurposing and reusing.* Repurposing is the process of using clothing for an alternative
46 purpose, extending its lifespan by redesigning, modifying, **upcycling**, and transforming it
47 into another usable item (e.g., **Coppola et al., 2021**; Degenstein et al., 2020). In Ethiopia,
48 most consumers utilise used clothing as doormats, cleaning rags, and mops. Some
49 consumers turn their used clothing into other items, such as bags or pillowcases, by taking
50 it to a local tailor. The study's participants admitted to transforming different clothing
51 items into various forms, including pants into shorts, skirts into shirts, and t-shirts and
52 skirts into bags and pillow inserts. For example, F04 stated: “I create bags with my designs
53 using the pieces of worn-out sweaters and shorts.”
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3 Similarly, reusing clothing involves using it by the same consumer after storing it
4 for different reasons, such as physical changes during pregnancy, where women
5 temporarily store clothing and reuse it after reducing their weight. Ethiopians keep
6 expensive traditional dresses for holidays and special events, like Epiphany and Ethiopian
7 New Year, while disposing of regular outfits using other methods. F05 shared: “I retain
8 my favourite clothing that doesn’t fit me any more after giving birth in the hopes of wearing
9 them once my body has adjusted.” Similarly, keeping it for a special event even if it is out
10 of fashion was identified by F04, as she “might need it someday for a special event”.

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17 *Donating.* Donating is a common method of clothing disposal in Ethiopia, with
18 most participants donating clothing through third parties like religious organisations,
19 schools, and voluntary youth associations. Ethiopian consumers are highly influenced by
20 their collectivist community, with religious groups and schools setting up charity
21 programmes where members give food, money, used clothing, and other resources.
22 Churchgoers also participate in occasional charity programmes when a call for donations
23 is made by their church, as stated by F01: “The church requested supplies and clothing
24 from us, so we gladly provided them.”

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31 Schools and voluntary youth associations are key sources of charitable donations,
32 serving as intermediaries between donors and recipients, primarily non-governmental
33 organisations. F04 expressed her willingness to donate to these programmes: “Sometimes
34 my children take part in school charity programmes when they are asked by their teachers”;
35 while M03 highlighted that it “is one method of teaching kids to be kind”.

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47 There are also volunteer groups that collect clothing from individuals and distribute
48 it to those who are displaced by war, helpless in prison, or homeless. F08 described this as
49 follows: “Volunteers requested clothing twice this year, and we provided it to them.... If
50 they let us know in advance, we’ll wash and prepare the items for pick-up tomorrow or the
51 following day.”

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Giftng. The participants highlighted the importance of family orientation in
Ethiopian culture, extended family living, and sharing clothing. Younger children often
wear older siblings’ or cousins’ clothing, and giving clothing to those with lower economic
status is common. This cultural aspect is cherished and promotes clothing disposal through
gifting, extending its service life. M05 shared: “My parents and grandparents taught me
the value of generosity. I want this positive culture of giving and coming together to be
passed down to my children.” M10 described gifting in the following way:

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3 I wore two wool outfits a few times, and neither their attractiveness nor their quality
4 had faded. They resemble fresh fabric. Recently, my wife took them out and gave
5 them to my elder brother. He currently has them on. I don't want them to be
6 removed in any other way. But now I am happy he keeps them on longer. He will
7 probably pass them to our uncle or a neighbour after he quits wearing them.
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12 *Discarding.* Clothing depreciates over time, causing its economic value to deteriorate.
13 Repurposed clothing becomes worn and torn, while other items may become stained and
14 faded due to repeated washing and ironing, ultimately becoming useless. Consumers
15 discard ripped clothing with garbage, as suggested by F03: "I toss anything in the trash if
16 it is ripped and not wearable." According to F04:
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22 If it is too old and no longer of any use, it would be discarded with the trash. There
23 are paid people who do the garbage collection job. Two days a week, or perhaps
24 once a week, they come and take up the trash.... They deliver it to the location set
25 up by the local government.
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30 31 *Findings – motives for disposal*

32 Participants reported three motives that guide them in choosing a given clothing disposal
33 method: economic benefits, altruism, and convenience.
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36 *Economic benefits.* The data analysis indicates economic benefits an important
37 motive for clothing disposal, with consumers preferring methods that provide pecuniary
38 benefits. However, participants did not mention the direct selling of used clothing for
39 money, and respondent M04 did not know if there are buyers for used clothing from
40 domestic sources, despite the common selling of imported second-hand clothing. M04
41 further stated that, "If there was a way to sell it for money, the money could be used as
42 needed."
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48 We gather used clothing and trade it for the home goods we most urgently require.
49 For instance, we recently experienced broken coffee cups that fell to the ground. A
50 set of coffee cups used to cost us US\$30-35. But we gathered some discarded
51 children's and adult apparel and traded them via *liwach* for a set of coffee cups.
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54 I get by with giving away used clothing when there is yard labour to be done, like
55 pruning pine trees, without spending any money. (M04)
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Participants reported saving money by repurposing and reusing used clothing. They find alternative uses for used clothing with modifications or redesigns, saving money on other items. For example, F03 expressed her dislike of buying handbags, stating: "I design my own bags from used clothing."

One participant mentioned keeping her traditional clothing for future use due to its high cost:

I don't want to donate or barter my traditional clothes since, among other things, it costs too much.... I prefer to temporarily store them. The price of traditional outfits is rising these days; the average item costs between US\$120 and US\$160. Well, that's my salary [laughter]. (F04)

Altruism. The data show that altruism is an important motive for clothing gifting and donations, particularly to the needy and house helpers. When consumers are driven by altruistic motives, they give used but also new clothing. Participants mentioned feeling happy and satisfied when they helped the needy. Participant F11 emphasised that it is uncomfortable to see herself as a donor for giving clothing that she did not use. She believed what should happen is that the needy be provided with new clothing: "What I deserve, they deserve as well."

Some participants viewed their charitable donation as a religious duty, but emphasised satisfaction over any religious connection.

It feels nice when you encourage someone and observe a positive change in them. For instance, I support a child in an orphanage; I give him 4 000-5 000 ETB [about US\$75-US\$100] annually, and I also visit and mentor him. I feel that by doing this, I am assisting in this child's education and mentoring so that he can use his potential, discover his best self, and achieve the level he is capable of. (M05)

About a fortnight ago on a Sunday ... I was heading to church early in the morning like I always do. I noticed a shivering woman sitting on the side of the road. I glanced at her before moving forward, but after a short distance, I turned around. I was unable to ignore her in such circumstances. I took off my jacket and put it on her. My conscience would not have been at ease if I had left without doing it. (M06)

Our study uncovers that during challenging times, gifting and donating are common methods of disposing of clothing. Participants often choose these methods because what is no longer useful for them may be highly needed by others. (It should be noted that the data

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3 were collected during the war in north Ethiopia.) F06 affirmed this by stating: “Lending a
4 helping hand to the displaced people; sharing meals and clothing is what the time requires.”

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6 *Convenience.* The last motive identified is convenience. Consumers prefer a
7 convenient easy-to-use method for disposing of clothing, avoiding extra effort, time, and
8 labour. They opt for a method that is easily available and convenient in terms of time,
9 place, and effort, and choose the most suitable one based on available disposal options.
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11 Feedback from the interviews included:
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16 If the church didn’t ask us [the family], we would get rid of the clothing most likely
17 through exchanging ... because they take it from our door. (F08)

18
19 Giving to a poor person who couldn’t afford it would be nice, but that can only
20 happen when there is someone who can provide the garments to the needy. I
21 consider the process to be laborious and challenging. (M08)

22
23 I act in a way that suits my needs at the time. I don’t have a set routine that I stick
24 to. I might make a deal if I see *liwach* as I leave my house in the morning. I’ll give
25 it to someone if they can help with some of the work at home. I shred up a rag and
26 use it if I don’t have any more to clean something. But since there is always a
27 solution that takes place in its own time, I don’t want to worry about how to handle
28 used clothing. (M08)

29
30 You know, *liwach* is a feasible choice for me ... of course, for many others.... You
31 see, I don’t need to put in any extra work. They come to my door and take the
32 clothing. That simple. (M01)

33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 **Discussion**

44
45 This study aimed to explore the methods and motives behind the SR disposal of clothing
46 in Ethiopia, focusing on the disposal methods and the motives behind these.

47 48 49 50 *Clothing disposal methods*

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52 Our study identified **five** disposal methods: *bartering, repurposing and reusing, donating,*
53 *gifting, and discarding.* Swapping involves exchanging used clothing for money.
54 Swapping takes place in physical or online events where people socialise and exchange
55 used clothing (Bernardes *et al.*, 2020; Roster and Ferrari, 2023), which is dominated by
56 the social and experiential aspects (Machado *et al.*, 2019). If participants cannot find
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3 suitable clothing for swapping, they can dispose of their old clothing or any leftovers from
4 swapping by donating to charity.
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6 Our study found three differences between swapping and bartering. First, bartering
7 involves exchanging used clothing for other new (non-clothing) items, which have not
8 been identified in developed economies, making this a unique contextual feature. Second,
9 bartering is a door-to-door system where small informal traders come to consumers'
10 residences to trade household appliances. This door-to-door system involves hand-driving
11 a cart full of items for exchange. Finally, bartering does not provide clothing for free,
12 although leftover clothing is given for free in swapping events.
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19 Concerning repurposing and reusing, consumers often find new uses for items they
20 would otherwise discard (e.g., Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013). This mirrors a sense of
21 resourcefulness and understanding of the alternative value of objects beyond their intended
22 purpose. Repurposing contributes to sustainable consumption by reducing waste and
23 extending clothing's lifespan (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013). This disposal method, often
24 seen as **upcycling** and "converting" clothing for different uses (e.g. Coppola *et al.*, 2021),
25 is common in developed economies like the United States and Canada, as it is in the context
26 of this study (Degenstein *et al.*, 2020; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013).
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33 Donating is a widely used disposal method in developing economies, promoting
34 waste reduction and fostering a sense of social engagement and solidarity for the
35 underprivileged (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2010, 2012; Hassan *et al.*, 2022; Joung and
36 Park-Poaps, 2013; Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2022). **Gifting** is another prevalent disposal method
37 in developing economies. It aligns with the close relationship with the recipient (Cruz-
38 Cárdenas *et al.*, 2019). **This practice resonates with** many developing economies owing to
39 their collectivist cultural tendencies and societal norms (Cruz-Cárdenas and Arévalo-
40 Chávez, 2018). For instance, in Ethiopia, the family structure – consisting of three
41 generations (grandparents, parents, and grandchildren) with the possibility of up to four
42 generations (Evason, 2018) – has a tradition of mutual assistance, promoting the practice
43 of gifting.
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51 Lastly, discarding is a disposal method used when clothing is no longer useful
52 (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012; Soyer and Dittrich, 2021). A lack of awareness about other
53 options was also a reason for discarding. Previous studies have found that some consumers
54 choose to keep clothing items due to high purchase prices or emotional attachment (e.g.,
55 Degenstein *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2020), but these were not identified in this study.
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Motives for clothing disposal

Three motives for clothing disposal were identified among the participants: *economic*, *altruistic*, and *convenience*. The study's participants mentioned economic motive as a primary reason for disposing of used clothing, consistent with previous studies (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013). Despite the prevalence of impoverished consumers, our study found that participants did not directly consider reselling used clothing for money, contrary to previous studies (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Shim, 1995).

Our study found that participants had altruistic motives for clothing disposal (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Wai Yee *et al.*, 2016). In developed economies, charity shops are common, enabling this motive (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013). In this study, charity was done directly or through informal means, such as schools, churches, and youth volunteer groups. In developed economies, charity shops collect clothing to reduce textile waste going to landfills (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2010). However, developed economy consumers view altruism from the perspective of environmentalism – accepting responsibility for one's actions and having values concerned with others' well-being (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2010).

Convenience was identified as an important motive for clothing disposal, with participants expressing a desire for disposal to be easier and take less time and effort. This is consistent with previous research. However, in Ethiopia, sustainable (i.e., SR) clothing disposal is challenging due to the absence of second-hand charity shops, recycling facilities, and other relevant clothes disposal infrastructure. Similar results were noted in Malaysia, another developing economy (Hassan *et al.*, 2022). Customers often discard clothing for convenience, as it saves time and effort (Soyer and Dittrich, 2021). Future efforts should focus on encouraging sustainable and SR clothing disposal by making it more convenient for consumers to donate, repurpose, and reuse clothing instead of discarding it.

Contribution and implications

Theoretical contribution

The study contributes to literature theoretically, methodologically, and contextually. Theoretically, the study introduces a unique perspective on bartering as a disposal method, focusing on using clothing to acquire new household items like glassware, rather than exchanging similar used products. This is different from the methods discussed in previous literature (e.g., Machado *et al.*, 2019; Roster and Ferrari, 2023).

Moreover, the choice of disposal method is driven by a range of motives. This paper bridges an important gap in literature (Bernardes *et al.*, 2020) by examining the motives behind clothing disposal methods, resulting in the framework linking the disposal methods and the motives (see Table V). In this matrix, the rows indicate the various disposal methods, while the columns indicate the different disposal motives. The “X” denotes the alignment between a specific disposal method and motive. Accordingly, bartering, repurposing, and reusing align with economic benefits; donating and gifting align with altruism; and bartering and discarding align with convenience.

[Insert Table V here]

Methodologically, the study addresses the need for a more inclusive sample (Bernardes *et al.*, 2020; Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2022) by employing a heterogeneous population, including men and participants from varied socio-economic groups, to deepen our understanding of clothing disposal methods and motives. Contextually, although sustainable consumption is a global agenda, extant literature (Cruz-Cárdenas and Arévalo-Chávez, 2018; Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2022) focuses on developed economies. This study clarifies context-specific methods and motives used by consumers in a developing economy (i.e., Ethiopia) to dispose of their clothing. This is relevant to Ethiopia given the sustainability challenges presented by fast fashion, clothing imports, and the lack of recycling infrastructure.

Practical and societal implications

Understanding motives for SR clothing disposal can encourage sustainable practices. All stakeholders in the fashion sector, including consumers, retailers, manufacturers, and the government, must contribute to these sustainability practices.

At the individual level, the study suggests that practical changes in SR clothing disposal by consumers have crucial societal implications. Consumers can contribute by reducing consumption, disposing of clothing responsibly (i.e., donating to local charities, repurposing, recycling), and making sustainable choices. This translates into tangible behavioural changes affecting the actual clothing disposal practices, including mending and amending used clothing, thereby contributing to a more sustainable/SR consumption.

This has a significant implication for the Ethiopian community by meeting the needs of impoverished ones, reducing textile waste in landfills and rivers, and promoting a culture of sustainability.

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3 At the organisational level, retailers and manufacturers can facilitate sustainable
4 and responsible clothing disposal practices by launching buyback and recycling initiatives.
5 These give customers the choice to recycle and return used clothing to suppliers, thus
6 encouraging the local fashion manufacturers to become more sustainable. Manufacturers
7 can also promote SR clothing disposal practices by linking it with their CSR strategies,
8 organising donation programmes (e.g., launching thrift stores), and creating awareness of
9 SR disposal through marketing communication. **Such initiatives can improve the waste
10 minimisation strategies of Ethiopian fashion manufacturers, considering there is a lack of
11 strategy in this area, as highlighted by Bizuneh and Tadesse (2020).**

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19 At the governmental level, policymakers **in Ethiopia** can play a vital role in
20 sustainable clothing disposal by formulating and implementing appropriate policies. More
21 specifically, they can encourage the sector's players – for instance, through awarding and
22 incentivising more sustainable fashion manufacturers **as well as producers and designers
23 of the traditional handwoven *shemma***, allocating resources like land and finance for
24 recycling facilities, and supporting sustainable initiatives, such as buyback programmes.
25 **While preserving Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage and values**, these collaborative efforts
26 can promote sustainable/SR clothing disposal and a sustainable society in general.
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34 *Managerial implications*

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36 Fashion sector managers can make strategic decisions based on consumer motives for
37 clothing disposal by linking business strategies with SR disposal. This can be achieved,
38 for example, by getting people to donate (altruism) in their marketing and implementing
39 in-store clothing take-back programmes to give economic benefits to participants.
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43 These programmes would require advertisements focusing on their benefits, which
44 may increase consumer trust and result in a positive brand image (Hameed *et al.*, 2022).
45 Collaborating with the *liwach* can create a circular supply chain by collecting used clothing
46 to be recycled, upcycled, or resold. This reduces the purchase of new products, thereby
47 promoting sustainable fashion. This study contributes to strategic managerial decisions of
48 the Ethiopian fashion industry and retailers, enabling them to become more sustainable
49 and SR and contribute to the global Sustainable Development Goals, while respecting the
50 unique socio-economic and cultural context.
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Limitations and future research

This study has typical limitations associated with qualitative research, such as a small sample size and subjectivity bias. The study's focus on Ethiopia's urban areas, particularly Addis Ababa and Hawassa, limits its generalizability, urging the need for research in rural areas and other developing economies. Quantitative research is recommended to obtain a broader perspective, potentially including various developing nations in an inter-regional study. Additionally, further investigation into clothing disposal methods, motives, and their relationships through quantitative analysis is suggested. Unlike prior research, this study does not identify the significance of environmental factors in clothing disposal, which is a point warranting further exploration, given the substantial clothing sales in Ethiopia and across Africa. Future studies may explore if alternative connections between disposal methods and motives differ from those indicated here. Investigating online consumer reporting, such as sharing tips and forming community groups, could be valuable, as this topic holds significance across all economies.

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Data availability

The data that supported the findings of this study are available upon request from the first author.

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Table I. Summary of disposal methods

Themes and Definition	Reference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Donating Giving to charity 	(Laitala, 2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gifting Giving to family/friends 	(Cruz-Cárdenas <i>et al.</i> , 2016)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Repurposing & reuse <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repurposing Transforming or upcycling into useful items • Reuse Reorienting with/without physical conversion 	(Coppola, 2021; Degenstein <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Cruz-Cárdenas <i>et al.</i> , 2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discarding Throwing into as garbage 	(Laitala, 2014)

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table II. Summary of motives for disposal

Themes and Definition	Reference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Economic benefits Saving money directly or indirectly	(Joung and Park-poaps, 2013; Shim, 1995)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Altruism Helping others	(Wai Yee <i>et al.</i> , 2016)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Additional motives 	(Farrant <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Hameed <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Hassan <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Albinsson and Perera, 2009)

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table III. Details of the interview participants

Participant number	Gender	Duration
F01	Female	31:01

F02	Female	33:39
M01	Male	55:53
M02	Male	50:07
M03	Male	37:34
F03	Female	34:04
M04	Male	37:01
F04	Female	33:57
F05	Female	38:33
F06	Female	37:10
M05	Male	46:31
M06	Male	31:25
F07	Female	27:09
M07	Male	33:51
M08	Male	30:29
F08	Female	29:22
M09	Male	31:33
F09	Female	35:40
F10	Female	34:48
M10	Male	31:42
M11	Male	32:34
M12	Male	46:55
F11	Female	38:40
M13	Male	33:40
F12	Female	30:05
F13	Female	28:20
M14	Male	31:45
Average duration		35:41

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table IV. Data structure

First order concepts	Second order themes	Aggregate dimensions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handing it to “liwach” • Exchanging for household appliances 	Bartering	Disposal methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign it into an alternative clothing • Mending and repairing • Transforming into bags, pillowcases • Cutting for rags, doormat, mop, and pillow inserts 	Repurposing & reuse	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving to churches’ • Send out to school • Hand in to volunteer charity clubs • Sharing with the needy • Supporting disadvantaged 	Donating	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give to younger sisters/brothers/cousins • Circulate in the family • Giving to friends & neighbours 	Gifting	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throw it with garbage • Give it to garbage-collectors • Put it in trash 	Discarding	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saving money for other goods • Get new items in return • Changing with usable item • Means of finance 	Economic benefits	Motives of disposal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People deserve more • Sharing is love • Caring for the needy • Giving brings happiness • Cooperating during difficult times • What I don’t need, needed by others 	Altruism	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close by • Effortless 	Convenience	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-saving • Inexpensive 		
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Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table V: Summary of clothing disposal methods and motives

	<i>Economic benefits</i>	<i>Altruism</i>	<i>Convenience</i>
<i>Bartering</i>	X		
<i>Donating</i>		X	
<i>Gifting</i>		X	
<i>Repurposing and reuse</i>	X		
<i>Discarding</i>			X

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Appendix 1 Interview Questions

After the introduction, starting with informal talks about (education, occupation, and trying to know some demographic data)

1. Share your thoughts with me regarding what happens to used clothing when they are no longer used. When choosing which clothing to part with, what are the most important considerations?
2. What do you think about those who sell their clothing? What about providing for street homeless people or to a charity, or giving to relatives?
3. Tell me about your recent experience in handling your used clothing. What did you do with it? Why? and how? Where? When?
4. What inspired you to handle it that way? How did you take that option? Who was with you? How did he/ she/they respond to your decision?
5. How often do you do that (*I.e. the method of disposal*)?
6. Why did you choose one option over another?
7. What do you think about this practice (*i.e. of your family, friends, neighbours*) and how it affects the community, environment etc?
8. Are there any further recommendations you would like to make or anything you think I should have brought up?

Thank you for your time and thoughts.