

Training and Marketing of Fashion Upcycling Products in Local Communities

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(Received May 4, 2023; Revised May 18, 2023; Accepted May 19, 2023)

Abstract

This article focuses on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12), about responsible consumption and production, particularly the fifth target of reducing waste production through prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse. The study explored and evaluated the results of the product upgrading performed in a community empowerment activity, which involved upcycling denim waste into A-line skirts and tote bags, and adding decorative materials using sewing techniques such as decorative stitches, tie-dye, and macrame. The article also discusses the importance of producing goods with greater value in terms of sustainability in natural resource utilization. On-site surveys were conducted to evaluate the results of the product upgrading, and the survey results were analyzed qualitatively for further sustainability efforts related to upcycling. Overall, 15 buyers participated, and the results showed positive perceptions about the use of products from fashion waste and there is interest in participating in similar activities in the future.

Keywords: *fashion upcycling, local communities empowerment, Sustainable Development Goals*

How to Cite:

Hartanti, M., & Wianto, E. (2023). Training and Marketing of Fashion Upcycling Products in Local Communities. *Journal of Innovation and Community Engagement*, 4(2), 78-91.
<https://doi.org/10.28932/ice.v4i2.6474>

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Introduction

One of the United Nations' (UN) biggest agendas since the Sustainable Development Summit held on September 25-27, 2015, was the establishment of a roadmap for ending global poverty, building a life of dignity for all, and leaving no one behind (United Nations, 2015). To achieve this, the agenda centered on human beings, was universal in nature, and involved an integrated transformation, agreed upon by the UN's 193 member countries, in the form of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have been implemented and are still being pursued for fifteen years, starting from January 1, 2016, until the end of 2030.

This text aims to focus on the implementation of SDG 12, which is Responsible Consumption and Production, involving the use of resources, waste and pollution reduction, and the creation of a new circular economy (Sekretariat Nasional SDGS, n.d.). Among the 12 targets of SDG 12, the evaluation in this article is directed towards its fifth target, which is to reduce waste production through prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse.

There are several types of fashion waste. Fashion waste is classified based on its generation as pre-consumer textile waste, post-consumer textile waste, and industrial textile waste. Pre-consumer waste refers to the leftovers from the production process in the industry, including raw materials up to finished products ready for sale. This includes cuttings, trimming, selvedge, rejected materials, grade-B garments, homogenous and clean export surplus for use in other purposes. All of these waste materials can be sold at a low price to agents dealing with these materials or may be sent to landfills. Waste under this category has great potential for reuse and recycling.

Post-consumer textile waste can take the form of products that have completed their life cycle and are no longer useful to consumers, either functionally or aesthetically. Consumers no longer need the products and decide to dispose of them because they are old, damaged, outdated, or no longer fit their needs. In most cases, good-quality garments or products can be restored and used as second-hand clothing and sold to third-world countries that host a large market for second-hand clothing. Unused products are shredded and transformed into raw materials for further use in production.

Industrial textile waste is the by-product of the manufacturing process and is commonly referred to as "dirty waste". The collection and contamination of this waste pose significant challenges and make it impossible to recycle. A common example of the negative impact of such waste on health and the environment is the pile-up of solid waste at textile dyeing industries that is ready to be disposed of in landfills. All institutions involved in activities aimed at preventing the accumulation of such waste have a significant opportunity for research (Radhakrishnan, 2017). In the context of community service activities, a fashion upcycling was carried out, and the participants were able to obtain pre-consumer waste from PT. Multi Sandang Tamajaya, in the form of small denim scraps and moderately large denim scraps. If left untreated, this waste would have been shredded and sold as filling material for dolls. PT. Multi Sandang Tamajaya provides a social impact by offering low-value waste to communities that can process such waste into more useful products. For these communities, the waste serves as free raw material, reducing the required capital expenditure. By means of fashion upcycling education conducted by the community service team, these two parties can be brought together to generate innovative fashion products.

The term "recycling" refers to the general process of reprocessing raw materials or utilizing waste materials to produce materials that reduce the volume of waste generated. Recycling, within certain limits, is believed to be capable of reducing pollution, land degradation, greenhouse gas emissions, and even reducing energy consumption. However, in the context of more "creative" recycling, the term "upcycling" was introduced by Reiner Pilz, whose idea was then quoted by Thornton Kay (Kay, 1994). This explicitly distinguishes between two types of recycling; downcycling, which typically involves reusing materials to create lower quality products, and upcycling, which also attempts to reuse materials, but to create "better" products (Kurinji, 2023; Upcycle That, 2017).

The concept of upcycling aims to prevent material or raw material waste by utilizing existing materials, and this activity can reduce various types of pollution produced by fashion production processes, such as air or water pollution (Yu & Chun, 2020). There are three upcycling techniques, namely combining two or more materials, changing the model or shape, and adding decorative materials (Handayani et al., 2022). In a previous community service activity, participants were trained to transform denim waste models into A-line skirts and tote bags. Then, decorations were added using sewing techniques such as decorative stitches, tie-dye, and macrame on used clothing made of cotton.

In Indonesia, there is a growing trend of local fashion brands embracing environmentally friendly fashion concepts. Brands like Setali, Alexaalexa, Jenahara, and Sebel 1as have begun producing products using upcycling strategies. Jenahara and Sebel 1as target consumers with high purchasing power, showcasing their collections at Jakarta Fashion Week 2021. In contrast, SukkhaCitta brand is committed to implementing the concept of farm-to-closet, which involves a supply chain system that incorporates regenerative agricultural raw materials and the use of high-quality materials with long lifespans. Consumers can expect high-quality fashion products that value the processes involved, thereby reducing deforestation, air pollution, and electricity consumption as contributors to global warming (Komunikasi LCDI, 2022). In addition to brands, both individual and community fashion influencers have started posting Instagram content highlighting the appealing aspects of fashion upcycling, such as Dianarikasari and Berdayakain. Wegener emphasized the importance of producing products with greater value in terms of sustainability in natural resource utilization (Wegener, 2016). However, as far as the author knows, the aspects of the upgraded products produced in the training project for selected communities (in this case, at one church in Bandung) have not been evaluated in terms of what can be appreciated by the local community to attract attention and encourage purchasing decisions.

The purpose of this study is to explore and evaluate the results of the product upgrading produced in the community empowerment activity. Recycling products must go through three stages: collection, design development, and production. Collection: Companies engaged in recycling and resale must repurchase used, damaged, and reusable clothing, which can be recycled, especially denim products. This process can be done as a repurchase campaign; transactions can be made in various ways, such as offering gift cards, vouchers, coupons, and based on the weight and quality of garments regardless of the brand to clients in exchange for their old denim and cotton clothes. Design development: The most important stage in recycling. After collection, all parts must be sorted, finished, and recycled. Designs must be developed only from collected pieces by adapting various recycling techniques such as manipulating patterns and creating other design plans. Production: Processed waste products must be thought of in terms of their business model. This can be quite complicated, especially if each product requires special care. Proposed business models need to be considered to support production, thus making the production exclusive. It is also necessary to consider how to offer custom designs. Recycled fashion producers can develop recycling plans according to customer demand and offer personalized accessories made from recycled materials (Reddygari, 2021).

Methods

The community service, which was conducted through training and subsequent evaluation of its results on a limited community, began with the following training method: Pre-prepared learning videos and fashion waste materials packaged with necessary tools and materials were provided for the participants. After re-registering and joining the WhatsApp group for fashion upcycling participants, the service team explained the negative impact of fast fashion and demonstrated the easy way to make fashion upcycling, using the training videos (Figure 2 to Figure 5) and pre-grouped training packages to shorten the training time (Figure 6). Participants were then allowed to choose the upcycling product they wanted to create.

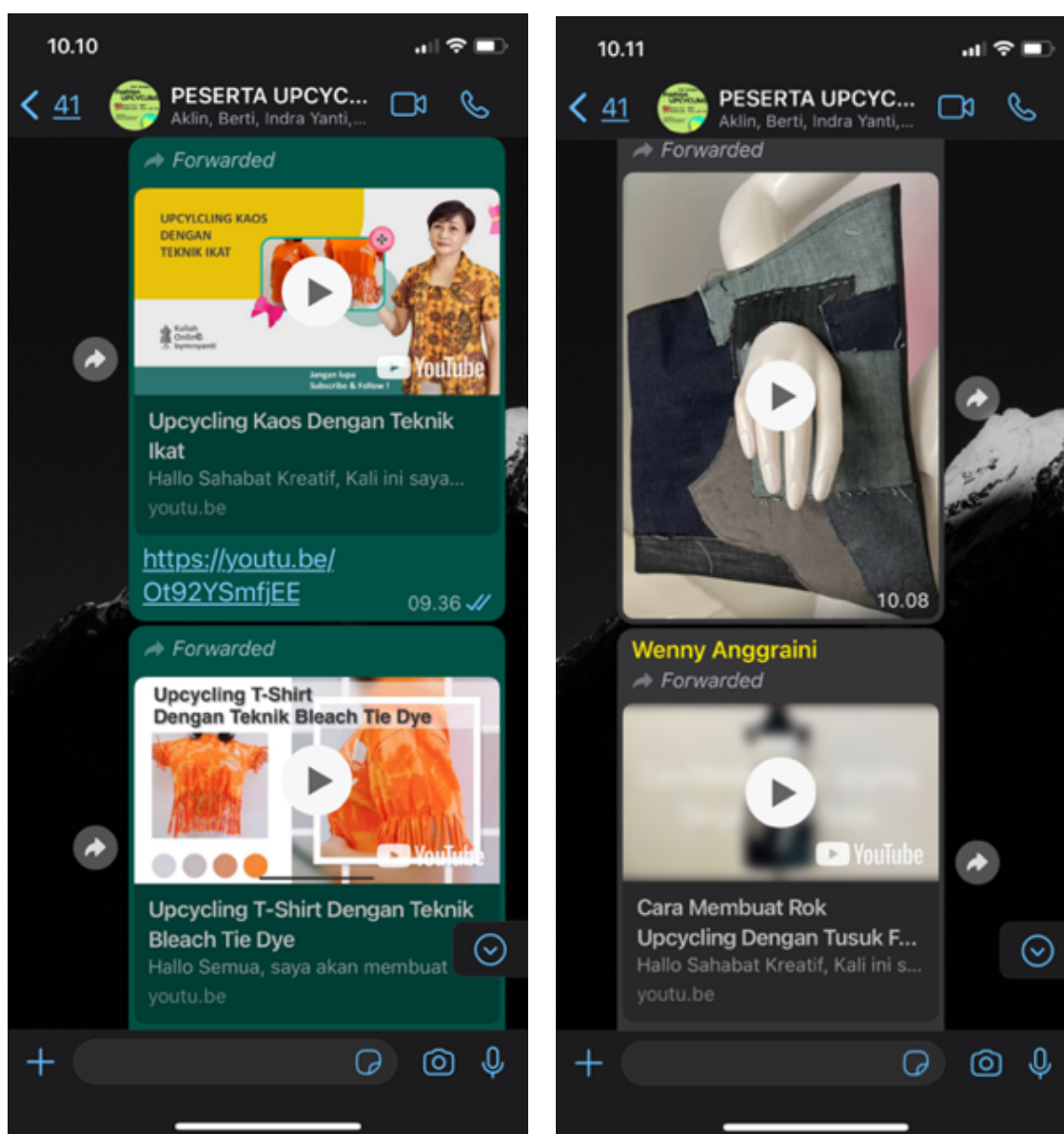


Fig 1. WhatsApp group for upcycling activity participants
Source: Community service documentation

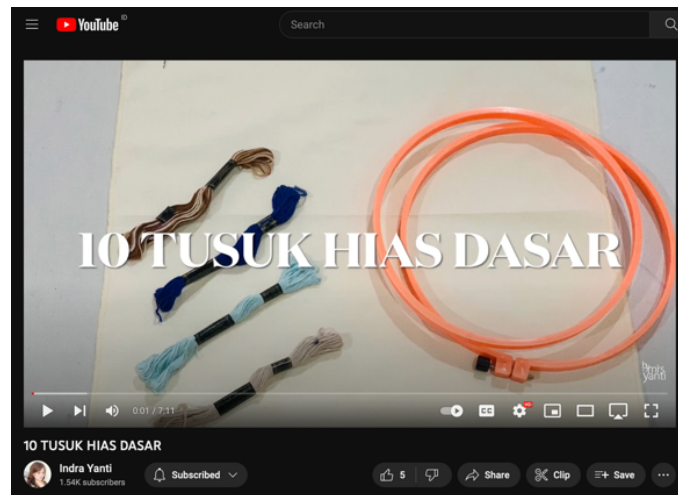


Fig 2. Video tutorial ten decorative stitches

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeO_t0eP99M (Yanti, 2023a)

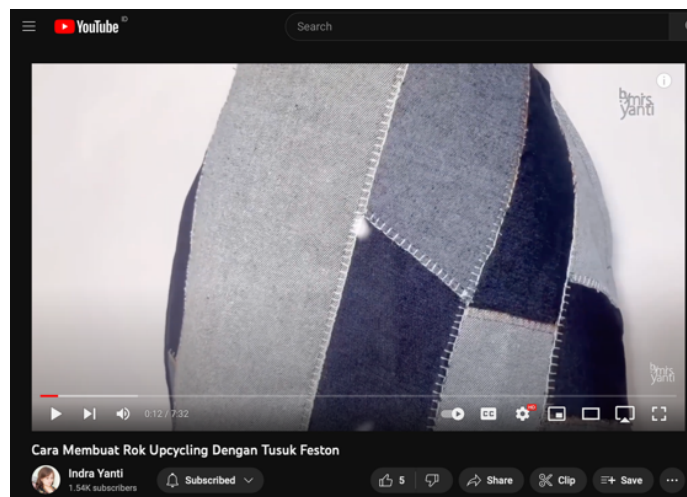


Fig 3. Video tutorial how to make upcycling skirt with feston stitches

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_wpC2_Vilc (Yanti, 2023b)



Fig 4. Video tutorial how to create macrame cotton shirt

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyEOJv6_yY (Yanti, 2022)



Fig 5. Video tutorial to create tote bag by Wenny Anggraini Natalia
 Source: Community service documentation



Fig 6. Community service sewing package for A-line skirt, tote bag and tie-dye shirt
 Source: Community service documentation

Previously, upcycling training activity was attended by 32 participants, consisting of adults (women, by 10%) and the rest were teenagers who were all members of GKP Bandung congregation. The workshop was held on March 19, 2023, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm. All participants who joined the community service program were provided with training and

voluntarily worked on several pieces of upcycled fashion items that were designated. Further work was done individually at home by the congregation members. To review and provide more detailed guidance, the training videos could be re-watched, and a WhatsApp group was formed by the service team as a means of two-way communication (see Figure 1).

The total number of upcycled fashion items produced was 48, consisting of 20 pieces of A-line skirts, 17 pieces of tote bags, and 11 pieces of tie-dye macrame t-shirts (examples of which can be seen in Fig 7). The service participants were informed that after the training, their works would be expected to be marketed at the local church bazaar.



Fig 7. Upcycling product example from community service activity

Source: Community service documentation



Fig 8. Fashion upcycling products to be sold on local community bazaar

Source: Community service documentation

Subsequently, with the aim of exploring and evaluating the market, all the products were sold at a local community bazaar on April 16th, 2023, for approximately three hours, from 9:00 to

12:00 WIB (local time), and all proceeds from the sales were donated to the church community management.

On-site surveys were conducted and filled out by visitors who purchased the training products. As additional information, the bazaar also sold food products, held competitions for Sunday school children, and was visited by the local church community after two church services were held. The survey consisted of the following questions:

Table 1. Questionnaire for on-site surveys

No.	Questions/ Opinion related to:	Justification
1	demographic questions such as age, gender, and occupation	To classify respondents answers if necessary.
2	Type of purchased products	Divided into macrame shirts (IDR 20,000); A-line skirts (IDR 55,000); and tote bags (IDR 25,000)
3	Asking respondent's prior information related to the source of products	products were made from fashion waste (yes or no answers)
4	Respondent's perceptions about the use of products from fashion waste	Opinion related to the usage of fashion waste
5	Respondent's purchasing considerations	Motivation to buy
6	Respondent's interest in participating in similar training	Considering further training
7	Respondent's experience in participating in similar training	Considering popularity of similar training in community

The survey results were to be processed qualitatively and then to be developed for further sustainability efforts related to upcycling.

Results and Discussions

During a single opportunity bazaar event held for 3 hours in a community of one of the churches in Bandung (the bazaar event is shown in Figure 9), all buyers of training products were willing to fill out a brief survey provided. Overall, 15 buyers with an age range of 10 to 60 years old (2 of them are teenagers, while the others are adults or over 20 years old), 1 man, and 14 others are women, with various occupations such as students, employees, entrepreneurs, teachers, lecturers, and housewives, successfully bought 22 pieces of products, with details as follows: 8 pieces of A-line skirts, 7 tote bags, and 7 pieces of macrame shirts, so that the total revenue given to the GKP Bandung bazaar division was IDR 755,000.

All respondents stated that waste-based fashion products are still good to use, although almost half of them stated that they did not know that the products they bought were initially made from fashion waste materials (6 people did not know, 9 people knew). As an evaluation material for the training activity, it was found that the top three considerations for buying were because they liked the principle of environmentally friendly product making (13 respondents), liked the design and/or the size is suitable (12 respondents), and respected the congregation that made the products (11 respondents). Furthermore, other considerations for buying were also because of the cheap price of the products (9 people) and the desire to participate in the bazaar (8 people). An additional question was regarding their interest in participating in similar training, which was divided into not interested answers (marked with 1-2 Likert scale answers, consisting of 5 people) and interested answers to participate in similar training (marked with 4-5 Likert scale answers, consisting of 6 people). The last question regarding the experience of ever participating in similar training was answered as never attended by 11 people, and 4 people have attended it.



Fig 9. Local church bazaar event
Source: Community service documentation

The limited number of respondents is acknowledged to potentially influence additional opinions from a larger population. However, due to the time constraints of the bazaar and the limited production capacity, the exploration of the preliminary survey results serves as a reference for the author in evaluating the training that has been conducted.

As the products offered were fashion products for women, only one male respondent purchased the products, with the majority of the buyers being women who, when asked, admitted that the majority of their purchases were for themselves or as gifts for others. The respondents who purchased the training products were divided into two age groups, namely teenagers and adults. Although the number of teenage buyers was trivial, the response regarding the consideration of purchasing based on the principle of environmentally friendly product creation was the highest among the buyers, indicating that understanding of the environmentally friendly principle may not have been introduced to young consumers. Furthermore, approximately only one third of the total respondents indicated that they were interested in participating in similar training programs, suggesting that sewing training, although of interest to them, still has limitations in terms of participants due to varying skill levels and interests.

About half of the buyers who admitted that they did not know that the products they purchased were made from fashion waste have a strong correlation with their lack of interest in participating in similar training programs, raising the suspicion that these respondents purely bought the products due to their interest in the design and/or respect for the makers who were members of the church community or students who participated in the training.

It is interesting to note that the expectations for the resulting product regarding its selling price are an up-to-date design, comfort, affordability, and suitability for production. The use of environmentally friendly materials makes it attractive (Handayani et al., 2022). The uniqueness of the upcycling product in terms of sales is that consumers are willing to pay 3-4 times more than the original garment price as the ideal price for upcycled products, and the factors influencing it are meaning, familiarity with sustainable products, and product quality improvement (Parung & Viviany, 2022). Furthermore, if this assumption can be proven in a more comprehensive evaluation, it is necessary to consider the influence between purchasing decisions and attachment to the product maker and/or the design preferences offered.

Considerations for participating in a bazaar (including contributing to charity) and affordable product prices, although not ranked as high as other considerations, were answered by more than 50 percent of the respondents. This implies that for products that attract attention and result in purchasing decisions still need to consider intangible factors such as product valuation or branding that guarantee a product standard. Patchwork design has been widely used for fashion upcycling; therefore, upcycling fashion makers need to think about developing more

unique products. The use of Instagram being the most preferred social media platform for receiving local product information. It is also the platform most chosen by respondents to discover Indonesian local clothing brands through Instagram ads and influencer posts. It is also known that Shopee is the most preferred platform for buying clothes online, with websites being the second most preferred. Audience interaction is an important aspect to consider in online communication to increase sales. There are several types of content or important information for upcycling clothing brands to communicate with the audience in conveying brand values and products that can increase audience interest in buying. These include styling or ways of wearing the product, product photos and videos, customer reviews, paid promotions through influencer support, and the product-making process.

This insight is useful for providing guidelines for marketers in the recycling industry, especially for new companies to focus on promotional activities (Hanadhyas & Wulandari, 2022). It is acknowledged that this cannot be guaranteed in the resulting training products but can be one aspect of education that can be emphasized in future training.

Conclusion

The improvement of product quality or value through upcycling is one of the opportunities for the creative industry to utilize the circular economy momentum established by the government as one of the ways to revive the economy post-Covid-19 (Wijaya & Fasa, 2021) that needs to be supported by the private sector (Syarif, et al., 2022). Therefore, community empowerment trainers need to pay attention to several aspects beyond just broadening people's horizons, such as efforts to see that potential buyers can be initiated by their attachment to the closest community, efforts to conduct brand valuation and product standardization. In addition, based on the evaluation results, an understanding of sustainability principles such as environmentally friendly products can also be introduced early to young students while they still have a high interest in learning something new.

Acknowledgements

A heartfelt gratitude goes to the Research and Community Service Institute of Universitas Kristen Maranatha (Maranatha Christian University) for funding this community service

program. Special thanks also go to PT. Multi Sandang Tamajaya and Gereja Kristen Pasundan, SMAK BPPK Bandung for their valuable contributions towards the success of this program.

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