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## IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS ON YOUNG FEMALE CONSUMER ATTITUDES IN SELECTION AND PURCHASE OF ECO-FRIENDLY APPARELS IN SELECTED CITIES OF UTTARAKHAND

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### ABSTRACT

*Around the world, growing numbers of consumers are purchasing supposedly eco- friendly products such as organic clothing, energy- saving light bulbs, and reusable shopping bags. Interest in "being green" and purchasing green- friendly products continues to grow. Apparel consumption is a contributing cause of environmental change, and environmental integrity requires the encouragement of eco-conscious apparel acquisition. Unfortunately, among consumers, there is limited engagement in this behaviour. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to expand the environmental awareness and knowledge base of eco-conscious apparel consumption and question the limited participation by identifying barriers that constrain consumers. The study is conducted to explore young female consumers' existing level of environmental awareness and knowledge and whether it is reflected in the evaluation and selection of apparel. The target group is selected using non- probability sampling techniques from two cities of Uttarakhand , Dehradun and Haridwar. The results also highlight the product attributes important to the participants while selecting apparels such as price , aesthetics and functionality of the garments along with certain environmental attributes which did not feature high in the consideration. Environmental awareness was low and also did not have much of impact on the consumer attitudes leading to the purchase of green apparels even though participants indicated that they do care about the environment but to a limited extent.*

### KEYWORDS

eco – friendly apparel, environmental awareness, consumer attitudes, consumer behaviour.

### INTRODUCTION

Concerns related to the environment are evident in the increasingly environmentally conscious market place. Over the years, a majority of consumers have realised that their purchasing behaviour had a direct impact on many ecological problems.

The harmful impact of the apparel, the raw material, its manufacturing and the supply chain is highly felt on the environment and is becoming a global reality.

Consumer environmental awareness of the environmental problems caused by this industry is not always obvious in their apparel buying decisions.

Textiles and clothing comprises the world's second largest industry and have a significant impact on our planet's natural resources (Moore and Ausley, 2004). Every stage of the apparel supply chain including the manufacturing, distribution, consumption and eventual disposal of apparel products has environmental implications ( Reay , 2007).

Throughout the life cycle of apparel , everything from fibre manufacturing to garment disposal contributes towards environmental degradation (Myers and Stolton ,1999; Allwood et al., 2006).

Within developed economies concern for the environment is apparent in the more ecologically aware market places (Laroche et al., 2001). Recently progress has also been made in understanding consumers' willingness to purchase eco-friendly apparel (Jin Gam et al.,2010).Unfortunately research indicates limited engagement among consumers in eco- conscious apparel consumption (Butler and Francis, 1997; Kim and Damhorst , 1998).

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

*The following are the objectives of the present study:*

1. To study the concept of green/ eco-friendly apparel, environmental awareness, green consumer attitudes and consumer behaviour.
2. To study the level of environmental awareness in young female consumers of selected cities of Uttarakhand.
3. To study the impact of environmental awareness on consumer attitudes of these young female consumers in selection and purchase of eco-friendly/ green apparels.
4. To state the limitations and give desired suggestions for further research.

### WHAT ARE ECO-FRIENDLY APPARELS?

Eco-friendly garments could mean many things, but overall, it is about using as much natural resources as possible and as little synthetic and fossil, and an emphasis on using less for more. Eco clothing could refer to those that are made using natural dyes, and natural fabrics such as cotton and linen. A variety of clothing is manufactured using organic cotton, recycled fibres and bamboo, and these could be classified as green as well. On the "waste less" part of it, garment manufacturers are experimenting with the residual waste in the production process to spin a recycled fabric. Besides, the retailers are also encouraging manufacturers to opt for a production cycle using less water, leading to water conversation.

Eco- friendly clothing is not just for high end clientele, but for everyone who recognises the need of sustainability, and appreciates the fact that eco-friendly clothing is best for the skin.

Eco-friendly , is a part of the growing design philosophy and trend of sustainability, the goal of which is to create a system which can be supported indefinitely in terms of environmentalism and social responsibility.

Yet another related term eco-fashion is part of the larger trend of sustainable design where a product is created and produced with consideration to the environmental and social impact it may have throughout its total life span, including its "carbon footprint".

According to the May 2007 Vogue, eco fashion appears not to be a short-term trend but one which could last multiple seasons. While environmentalism used to manifest itself in the fashion world through a donation of percentage of sales of a product to a charitable cause, fashion designers are now re-introducing eco-conscious methods at the source through the use of environmentally friendly materials and socially responsible methods of production.

According to Earth Pledge, a non-profit organization (NPO) committed to promoting and supporting sustainable development, "At least 8,000 chemicals are used to turn raw materials into textiles and 25% of the world's pesticides are used to grow non-organic cotton. This causes irreversible damage to people and the environment, and still two thirds of a garment's carbon footprint will occur after it is purchased."

### SOME INDIAN, GREEN APPAREL BRANDS

Eco-friendly is the buzz word among apparel makers worldwide and also in India.

Top apparel brands like Woodland, Wills Lifestyle, Van Heusen, Benetton are betting big on eco-friendly lines to woo the environment-conscious consumer.

Arindam Saha, Associate VP-Fashion & Textiles at Technopak explains "Eco friendly clothing is a relatively new trend for apparel industry. Worldwide, retailers and brands are coming up with line of clothing that is eco friendly, without compromising on the style and fashion quotient."

In India too there has been increased consumer awareness about 'sustainability' and 'eco-friendly' nature of products and processes. According to Energy Alternatives India, the share of eco friendly clothing in India will rise from current 1 per cent of the total market to 5 per cent in 2015, reaching Rs 1,500 crores – that's almost 40 per cent CAGR for the next five years.

Some other Indian eco- friendly apparel brands are: Indi green, Anita Dongre's grassroots, Bhu:sattva, Do U Speak Green, Fabindia, Samtana, Mother Earth. Some other brands seen in India are Levi's and Killer jeans offering green jeans among others.

### CONCEPT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

Environmental awareness refers to the individual's perception of the impact of human behaviour on the environment (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Some researchers have found a positive association between the individual's degree of awareness of environmental problems and the environmental behaviour of the adults and children in their samples ( Barr, 2003; Grob, 1995; Strong, 1998 ). (McGuire,1985) in his input/output matrix model of the persuasive effect of communication shows that the message awareness of individuals is a necessary precondition if social marketers are to succeed in changing the attitudes and behaviour of those individuals.

Thus, an individual's awareness of environmental problems might act as a first step, giving rise to various forms of environmentally sensitive behaviour including green purchase behaviour. (A. J. Roberts, 1996) has found in his study that a high degree of environmental awareness, distinguishes green consumers from non green consumers.

Environmental Awareness can be further studied in terms of another important parameter environmental knowledge.

Consumers' preferences and prioritization of environmental attributes in relation to their decisions as a consumer is highly influenced by their environmental knowledge, awareness and understanding of environmental issues (Pantzar et al., 2005).

### GREEN CONSUMER ATTITUDE

According to Wesley, "attitude of environmental concern are rooted in a person's concept of self and the degree to which an individual perceives him or herself to be an integral part of the natural environment." (Schutz et al., 2000).

Consumers' product purchasing decisions are often based on their attitude, (Irland, 1993; Schwepker and Cornwell, 1991) favourable to the environment. As feelings of connection increase, environmental concern increases.

Consumer attitude are a composite of a consumer's (1) beliefs, (2) feelings, (3) behavioural intentions, towards some object. These components are viewed together since they are highly interdependent and together represent forces that influence how the consumer will react to the object.

Similarly, if an attitude is "an enduring set of beliefs about an object that predispose people to behave in particular ways toward the object" (Weigel, 1983); one may expect people with a pro environmental attitude to act in ways consistent with that attitude, (eg. to recycle household waste or to support environment initiatives).

Consumer attitude that drive the desire to act in environmentally responsible manner resulting in purchase behaviour therefore can be defined as 'a learned predisposition to respond consistently in favourable manner with respect to the environment by buying environmentally sustainable products / green products' Attitude can be broadly classified as cognitive and emotional. Environmental consciousness and environmental concern talked earlier are specific attitude that lead to environmental behaviour like buying of green products, products with eco labels and recyclable packaging.

"Environment consciousness" corresponds to the cognitive dimension of environmental attitude and "environment concern" refers to the emotional disposition (Hartmann and Ibanez, 2006).

In the case of the variable attitude, the attitude of green consumers must by definition express environmental concern (Kinnear et al., 1974). Environmental concern may be defined as an attitude that is related to environmental consequences (Antonides and Van Raaij, 1998). This attitude is influenced by direct personal experiences, by the experiences of other individual and by the communication produced by the media.

### THE ATTITUDE-BEHAVIOUR LINK

It has always been believed by consumer behaviourists that an individual's actions can be predicted by their attitudes. There have been a number of attempts to improve the ability to predict an individual's actions and a variety of factors have also been suggested to involve factors which can be classified as either dispositional or situational.

(Spruyt, 2007) indicate that prediction of behaviour is directly dependent on attitude of the consumer which is found to be associated with knowledge and personal experience they have (Davidson et al., 1985). The impact of beliefs and attitude on consumer buying habits has been studied extensively (Fazio & Zanna, 1981; Ajzen, 1989).

Furthermore research in this area has indicated that if attitudes are to be used in predicting the consumers behaviour's then there are a number of methodological issues that have to be sorted out. According to (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977) behaviour and attitudes have to be measured at the same correspondence level.

There are a number of theories that have been put forth to explain the process by which attitudes predict behaviour.

According to (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) theory of reasoned action, "people consider the implications of their actions before they decide to engage or not engage in a given behaviour". Thus according to the above theory, people's attitudes play a significant role when it comes to their forming an intention to act in certain behaviour.

The model primarily argues that people engage in processing that leads to the formation of attitudes, norms and intentions prior to performing the behaviour.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The importance of awareness and knowledge in addition to various other factors as informational inputs in consumers' decision making process can not be ignored ( Swinker and hines, 2006).

The past research depicts consumer decision making as a system with inputs, a transformation process and outputs.

Environmental awareness and knowledge may represent an input in consumers' apparel decision making. Transformation occurs when the consumer cognitively interprets such input to reach a decision.

The potential outcome in this process would be the choice to either purchase or not to purchase eco- friendly apparels.

Feedback and experience from past purchases, also influence the purchase decisions.

### METHODOLOGY

The research question called for an enquiry into young female consumers' existing level of environmental awareness and knowledge and whether this has an impact on the consumer attitudes leading to the purchase of eco-friendly apparels. A detailed study was required of these consumers' green apparel purchase behaviour.

Rich and detailed data was thus required and was collected by focus group discussions.

The unit of analysis for this study comprised young female consumers' between the ages 19 and 22 years, from the city of Dehradun and Haridwar, in Uttarakhand, a state in India.

For current purpose a relatively young sample was appropriate as they represent future decision makers.

Apparently past research also show evidence that young educated women also pursue information on apparel items to a large extent. (Taylor and Cosenza, 2002). Non-probability purposive sampling was used as the intention was to gain insights about the process rather than to generalise.



Participants were recruited on the basis of gender, age and educational status criteria set out earlier.

Focus groups were formed with the willing participants for data collection purpose.

A sample of 30 participants was shortlisted.

Qualitative data collection methods were used to explore the phenomenon from participants point of view. Each participant was asked to write an essay before the start of the focus group. The essay was about what they considered as the major environmental problem in India, the causes and the consequences of these problems. This was to assess their environmental awareness. They were also asked about their awareness and knowledge about eco- friendly apparels and knowledge of green brands.

Focus group discussions commenced after completion of the essays. Four to five participants took part in each focus group session so that opinion and discussion could be held.

During the discussions they were asked about the brands of eco-friendly apparels. Also there knowledge of raw materials etc. The other attributes like price, brand , fabric etc. was also observed.

The qualitative nature of the study produced a large amount of raw data .Hand written data derived from the essays and recorded focus group discussions were converted to electronic format.

Data analysis was done by organising and interpreting the data and drawing conclusions from it.

Data was analysed in broad categories based on the research objectives and literature. The main categories included environmental problems, the causes and consequences of such problems as well as the product attributes used in apparel evaluation. Data was further reduced through dividing main categories into subcategories.

The process used to refine the initial data into more specific categories was done through means of coding, which entailed finding similarities and differences within the data. The process of coding is an important part of qualitative research and provide labels used to allocate meaning to the collected data (De Vos,2002).

## RESULTS

Themes that emerged from the data analysis are presented as subheadings in the following section. The results obtained from the various data collection techniques are presented and combined as they apply to each of the identified themes.

Discussions are supported by quotations from the focus group discussions and certain projective techniques in addition to statements derived from the essays.

Quotations are labelled according to the participants (numbered one to five ) and the specific focus group session (listed A to H) from which it originated.

### LEVEL OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

The majority of participants were able to recognise major environmental problems such as pollution, waste generation, depletion of natural resources and global warming both at local at national level.

Participants were able to further recognize a number of underlying causes of environmental problems. These included population growth, urbanisation, excessive consumption and production, indifference, ignorance and a lack of education.

It was found that sample of participants taken were well informed and showed a high level of environmental awareness.

In summary findings illustrated a broad knowledge base among participants regarding general environmental problems however none of the participants were able to identify specific environmental problems, causes or consequences related to the textile and apparel supply chain and showed a normal level of awareness related to the raw material and the manufacturing of eco- friendly apparels.

### ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND CONSUMER ATTITUDES

To explore whether participants applied their awareness and knowledge of broader environmental issues in their apparel buying decisions, they were asked to name at least five brands that manufactures and supplies eco-friendly apparels.

They were also asked to rate the factors on which they select the garments.

Of these rated parameters selection and evaluation including purchase of apparel was mostly based on price, followed by comfort and durability. Aesthetic features, which refer to how the product will satisfy the consumers' needs in terms of appearance, fashion preferences and styling also featured in participants' assessments. The same was seen in the study conducted by Brown and Rice, 2001.

Only five participants selected environmentally friendly attributes of the garments as an important parameter of apparel purchase and selection. A willingness to pay more for a product seemed subject to the limited price variance between the sustainable and less sustainable options. Participants also highlighted functional performance criteria such as tactile quality and comfort as reasons for choice.

These participants who selected eco-friendly apparels also seemed less concerned about the aesthetic appearance of the apparel.

Others simply noted that environmental attributes would not matter, mainly due to lack of understanding regarding sustainable qualities.

## DISCUSSION

According to Haron et al. (2005), environmental awareness is defined as 'ability to recognise environmental problems, the causes and consequences of such problems including facts and concepts necessary for explanation of it.' Based on this definition, participants had a substantial degree of general environmental awareness/ knowledge as they were able to identify most of key environmental problems in our country, including the causes and eventual consequences of such problems.

Moreover, consumption-filled life styles to which a large segment of Indian population aspires compel an increased supply of goods and contribute to further environmental deterioration.

Despite participants' ability to identify key environmental problems, causes and consequences their awareness and knowledge pertaining to the actual production and supply of eco-friendly apparels was very limited. Further- more, it was apparent that general environmental awareness would not necessarily translate into sustainable apparel decision making. Although participants varied somewhat in their prioritization of product features , the majority agreed that price was the most important attribute and not the eco-friendly qualities and features.

The importance of price indicates some degree of price sensitivity, which is a significant factor in consumers' willingness to purchase eco-friendly apparel (Jin Gam ei al.,2010). According to Brown and rice (2001), consumers use various dimensions to assess apparel items including physical properties, functional performance measures as well as aesthetic performance criteria, in spite of the awareness and knowledge we have.

Colour, pattern and style are the characteristics that initially attract consumers to specific items (Eckman et al.,1990). From the participants' essays and discussions it is seen that eco-friendly apparels / green apparels lack of aesthetic appeal is an important factor in their evaluation.

Even if the consumers have environmental awareness it is clear that garment should meet other criteria as well when it comes to the selection and evaluation criteria.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study resemble those of Joergens(2006) and Haron et al. (2005) that suggest that although consumers have environmental awareness and knowledge , it is only general and this awareness doesn't necessarily reflect in their buying decisions.

A distinction should therefore be drawn between a general environmental awareness and more specific task- oriented awareness/ knowledge that includes an understanding of products' sustainable attributes.

The lack of task oriented awareness is attributed to the inadequate provision of information by the relevant stake holders within the fashion- textile supply chain and limited supply of these garments in India.

The acceptability of a eco-friendly apparel product is therefore subject to the ability to fulfil the aesthetic, functional, physical and price requirements of a consumer.

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