**Tell the Consumers How Sustainable Apparel Meets their Needs and They will Buy it!**

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**Introduction and Literature Review**

Sustainable apparel is expensive, making it difficult for the price sensitive consumers to buy them (Harris et al., 2016). While recycling/reusing apparel aids in sustainability, consumers often anticipate or experience social disapproval for buying or wearing recycled/used apparel (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Consumers consume products sustainably when they have high environmental concern, higher affordability, or want to project their environmentally/socially/ ethically responsible image to others (Becker et al., 2014; Onwezen et al., 2014). Despite the obvious role of consumers’ concerns in influencing the purchase intentions for sustainable apparel, the sustainable apparel brands (e.g., Patagonia, TenTree) are focusing on environmental cues in their advertisements rather than conveying how sustainable apparel can meet consumers’ concerns. We used Desmet’s (2003) multilayered model of product emotions to hypothesize how sustainable apparel could be appraised evoking specific emotions after they are exposed to user-centric advertisements (UCAs) incorporating concerns for affordability, social desirability, and environment protection. When an individual has the concern for accomplishing a goal and an object facilitates goal accomplishment, the object is appraised as motive compliant evoking instrumental (e.g., satisfaction) emotions (Desmet, 2003). When an individual has a concern for being appealing, an object is appraised in terms of its intrinsic pleasantness evoking aesthetic (e.g., liking) emotions (Desmet, 2003). When an individual has concerns about meeting up to certain standards, they appraise objects to see how they can meet up to those standards. An object aiding in meeting up to those standards is appraised as legitimate evoking social emotions (Desmet, 2003). Since price-sensitive consumers appraise sustainable products in terms of their value for money and the potential consequences of buying it (de Barcellos et al., 2011), it could be implied that when consumers appraise sustainable apparel as compliant to their motive of buying affordably, they can evoke positive instrumental emotions (e.g., satisfaction), leading to positive purchase intention. Individuals make more sustainable choices when they are in front of others, than when they are in private (Onwezen et al., 2014) indicating the role of consumers’ concern for social desirability in predicting sustainable consumption. When individuals can make their purchase decisions by complying to their personal norms for ethical consumption, they feel proud, encouraging future purchase intentions (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014). Thus, based on the extant literature, we hypothesized that: **H1:** Concern for affordability in the UCA will result in a higher appraisal of motive compliance in the sustainable apparel, as compared to intrinsic pleasantness or legitimacy; **H2:** Concern for social desirability in the UCA will result in a higher appraisal of intrinsic pleasantness in the sustainable apparel, as compared to motive compliance or legitimacy; **H3:** Concern for environment in the UCA will result in a higher appraisal of legitimacy in the sustainable apparel, as compared to motive compliance or intrinsic pleasantness; Appraisal of sustainable apparel as motive compliant in terms of perceived benefits **(H4a)** and perceived barriers **(H4b)** from affordable sustainable apparel will positively and negatively influence instrumental emotions, respectively; Appraisal of sustainable apparel as intrinsically pleasant and legitimate will positively influence aesthetic **(H5)** and social emotions **(H6)**, respectively; **H7:** A higher positive instrumental, aesthetic, and social emotion will positively influence purchase intention for sustainable apparel; **H8a:** Appraisal of sustainable apparel as motive compliant will mediate the relationship between affordability related concerns in the UCA and instrumental emotions; **H8b:** Appraisal of sustainable apparel as intrinsically pleasant will mediate the relationship between social desirability related concerns in the UCA and aesthetic emotions; **H8c:** Appraisal of sustainable apparel as legitimate will mediate the relationship between environment related concerns in the UCA and social emotions.

**Method**

We conducted a 3 (UCA concern: affordability vs. social desirability vs. environmental protection) x 2 (Message modality: textual vs. textual with visual) between-subject online experiment by using Qualtrics. Millennials of the U.S. (*n =* 392) were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk and were randomly assigned to one of the six treatment groups. The UCAs were created in Adobe Photoshop in the context of a fictitious brand, PineCone. All the variables were measured in 7-point Likert scales, by adapting extant measurement scales.

**Data Analysis and Results**

All the scales were reliable and valid. The hypotheses were tested through structural equation modeling (SEM). We ran SEM Model 1 (χ2 = 831.16, *df* = 359, *p* < .001; RMSEA = .06; CFI = .94, TLI = .92; SRMR = .089) and Model 2 (χ2 = 831.16, *df* = 359, *p* < .001; RMSEA = .06; CFI = .94, TLI = .92; SRMR = .09) to test H1-H7 and H8, respectively. Concern for affordability resulted in a higher appraisal of motive compliance in the sustainable apparel in terms of perceived barriers for consuming sustainable apparel affordably (β = .16, *p* < .05), as compared to intrinsic pleasantness (β = .10, *p* < .05) or legitimacy (β = .15, *p* < .001). Concern for social desirability resulted in a higher appraisal of intrinsic pleasantness in the sustainable apparel (β = .17, *p* < .05), as compared to motive compliance in terms of perceived benefits (β = .01, *p* > .05) or perceived barriers for consuming sustainable apparel affordably (β = .12, *p* < .10), and legitimacy for protecting environment (β = .11, *p* < .05). Concern for environmental protection resulted in a higher appraisal of legitimacy in the sustainable apparel (β = .37, *p* < .001), as compared to motive compliance in terms of perceived benefits (β = .21, *p* < .001) or perceived barriers for consuming sustainable apparel affordably (β = -.07, *p* > .05), and intrinsic pleasantness (β = .27, *p* < .001). Appraisal of sustainable apparel as motive compliant in terms of perceived benefits (β = .90, *p* < .001) and barriers (β = -.89, *p* < .001) positively and negatively influenced instrumental emotions. Appraisal of sustainable apparel as intrinsically pleasant and legitimate positively influenced aesthetic (β = .35, *p* < .001) and social (β = .51, *p* < .001) emotions. Instrumental (β = .22, *p* < .001), aesthetic (β = .33, *p* < .001), and social (β = .14, *p* < .05) emotions positively influenced purchase intention for sustainable apparel.Perceived barriers mediated the relationship between concern for affordability and instrumental emotions (β = -.14, *p* < .05, C.I = [-.26, -.03]) but perceived benefits did not (β = .01, *p* > .05, C.I = [-.08, .09]). Intrinsic pleasantness mediated the relationship between concern for social desirability and aesthetic emotions (β = .06, *p* < .01, C.I = [.03, .09]). Legitimacy mediated the relationship between concern for environmental protection and social emotions (β = .19, *p* < .001, C.I = [.14, .24]). Thus, H2-H7 and H8b and H8c were supported. H1 and H8a were partially supported.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Individual concerns in the UCAs are appraised in specific ways (e.g., motive compliant, intrinsically pleasant, legitimate) evoking specific classes of emotions (e.g., instrumental, aesthetic, social) toward sustainable apparel; all classes of emotions encouraged purchase intention for sustainable apparel; appraisal of sustainable apparel mediated the relationship between the concerns presented in the UCAs and the specific classes of emotions. Thus, instead of focusing only on the environmental concern, the sustainable apparel brands should focus on how sustainable apparel could meet consumers’ concerns.

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