

Bangladeshi Young Consumers and Sustainable Apparel

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Keywords: Man-nature orientation, sustainable apparel, sustainability, young consumers

Introduction and Literature Review

The textiles and apparel industry is one of the most significant contributors to global environmental pollution and social issues. With the booming textile and apparel production in Bangladesh, sustainability is becoming very relevant to consumers in Bangladesh. In 2016, Bangladeshi textile and apparel industry discharged around 217 million m³ of wastewater due to their production of 1.80 million metric tons of fabric, and by 2021, the discharged wastewater will reach around 349 million m³ (Hossain et al., 2018). As apparel companies are taking sustainability initiatives, consumers' involvement is also imperative because consumers' cordial engagement in the sustainable apparel supply chain can make a sustainable loop (Fontell & Heikkilä, 2017).

An abundance of past studies supports the influence of values on consumers' attitude and purchase intention of sustainable apparel (Nguyen et al., 2019; Park & Lin, 2020). However, our literature review suggests that most studies have ignored values from a cultural perspective (Sreen et al., 2018). One of the cultural values is the man-nature orientation (MNO) developed by Kluchhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), indicating individuals' intention to live in harmony with nature (Chan, 2001). Very few studies have used this value orientation to understand consumer attitude and purchase intention. Another critical gap in the literature associated with attitude-behavior towards sustainable apparel is a lack of research from developing countries. Most of the literature has primarily focused on Western countries and emerging countries (Rahman & Koszewska, 2020; Su et al., 2019). Hence, research on sustainable apparel consumer behavior in developing countries such as Bangladesh is necessary to establish communication between apparel brands and consumers to raise awareness of environmental and social issues in the global apparel industry. Bangladeshi young consumers (18-35 years old in 2020) are considered the goldmine of market as they constitute about 31% of the total Bangladesh population (US Census Bureau, 2021). Thus, the purpose of this study is to fill the literature gaps by surveying young consumers in Bangladesh to examine their perception of and attitude toward sustainable apparel.

Fishbein's attitude theory and theory of reasoned action (TRA) provide this study's theoretical foundation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The fundamental proposition of Fishbein's attitude theory is that certain determining beliefs form attitude, and changes in those salient beliefs mediate the changes in an individual's attitude (Mitchell & Olson, 1981). The TRA postulates that attitudes to behaviors and subjective norms determine individuals' behavioral intention (e.g., purchase intention), and subjective norms depict the influential social aspects that affect individuals' behavioral intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Thus, in this study, MNO, defined as an individual's interaction with the environment (Chekima et al., 2016; Chan, 2001), is considered to form consumer attitude towards purchasing sustainable apparel. Consumer attitude and social influences together impact consumer intention of making an effort to purchase sustainable apparel. Figure 1 illustrates the model and the relevant hypotheses that examine Bangladeshi young consumers' perception of and attitude toward sustainable apparel consumption.

Research Methodology

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Data were collected through an online survey from 12 Bangladeshi Colleges. A structured questionnaire was designed based on pertinent literature. Measures for MNO (2 items), social influence (4 items), and intention of making an effort to purchase sustainable apparel (2 items) were adapted from Chan (2001), Diddi and Niehm (2017), and Sweeney et al. (1999) respectively on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Three items of measuring consumer attitude were adapted from Chan (2001) on a five-point semantic differential scale. A total of 1049 responses were collected. After data screening, 387 valid responses were used for the study, with 73% of male participants and 24% of female participants. About 53% of participants were 21-23 years old; 27% were 24-26 years, and 9% were 18-20 years. About 69% were undergraduate students, and 28% were graduate students. Majority of the respondents (66%) reported that their total household incomes before taxes in 2019 were less than 250,000 BDT (\approx 2500 US\$), while 18% between 250,000 (\approx 2500 US\$) and 500,000 BDT (\approx 5000 US\$).

Results, Discussion, and Implications

Data were analyzed using a two-step approach of structural equation modeling. Firstly, evaluation of the measurement model was conducted using confirmatory factor analysis. Multiple fit indexes were used to examine the model fit. A satisfactory fit and an acceptable level of measurement reliability and validity were achieved for the measurement model (see Table 1). Secondly, the model's structural relationships were examined by structural equational modeling. The analysis of the structural equation model (see Figure 1, which includes the standardized parameter estimates and the t-values) shows that the three hypotheses proposed are all supported.

The results demonstrate the applicability of the TRA framework in this study context. Young consumers' belief in living in harmony with nature positively affects their attitude towards sustainable apparel products. The positive attitude backed by their MNO suggests that young Bangladeshi consumers perceive the importance of preserving nature. Therefore, marketers should focus on highlighting nature preservation while promoting sustainable apparel. Furthermore, the results support the critical role of attitude and social influences in developing consumers' sustainable apparel purchase effort. Brands and retailers should focus on strategies and campaigns to nurture Bangladeshi young consumers' favorable attitudes towards sustainable apparel. Bangladesh reflects a collectivistic culture; hence, marketers who intend to promote sustainable apparel in developing countries with collectivistic culture should prioritize the function of social influences. This study provides insights into how individuals' nature preserving beliefs can be utilized in promoting sustainable apparel and how brands and retailers can promote sustainable apparel to young consumers in emerging and developing economies.

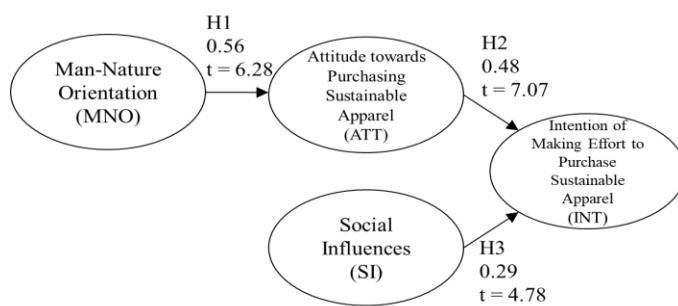


Figure 1 Research Model

Fit Indices		Value		
Chi-square / degrees of freedom		2.78		
Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation		0.068		
Normed Fit Index		0.92		
Goodness of Fit Index		0.95		
Comparative Fit Index		0.94		
		CR	MNO	ATT
MNO	0.68	0.51	0.15	0.29
ATT	0.72	0.31	0.46	0.29
SI	0.82	0.006	0.012	0.53
INT	0.71	0.068	0.25	0.096
		INT		
		0.56		

Note: 1. CR=composite reliability
2. The elements on the diagonal (bold) are the average variance extracted (AVE).
3. The elements below the diagonal are squared inter-factor correlation estimates.
4. The elements above the diagonal are the upper bound of the 95% confidence interval for the inter-factor correlation.

Table 1 Measurement Model Results

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