



Made in the USA and the Pandemic

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Introduction Made in the USA emerged as a phenomenon of interest in the apparel industry, in large part due to the rise of ethnocentrism and global events. Consumer ethnocentrism refers to consumers' propensity to prefer domestic products based on a sense of national pride (Suh et al., 2016). Due to the Great Recession of 2008, interest in purchasing products made in America has increased among consumers to support American manufacturing jobs (Zatepilina-Monacell, 2014). The recent Coronavirus pandemic increased the Made in the USA label marketing power (Simonite, 2020). Terrorism, the Great Recession, and the Coronavirus pandemic have led to renewed isolationism that upsurges Domestic Manufacturing across the globe. The US apparel industry is particularly isolationist and protectionist about its operations (Kincade & Annett-Hitchcock, 2021). This high ethnocentrism is particularly of interest to the US apparel industry, as the heritage of Made in the USA products continues to be present among consumer perceptions (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2015). The purpose of this study is to investigate antecedents of Purchase Intention of Made in the USA Apparel from a consumer perspective.

Literature Review This study used the Extended Theory of Planned Behavior (ETPB) as the basis for the research hypotheses. The ETPB predicts behavior in terms of three beliefs, which are Attitude (ATT), Subjective Norms (SN), and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC). ETPB aids in predicting Purchase Intention, in our case, Made in the USA apparel (Ajzen, 1991). Figure 1 shows the total ETPB Model for Made in the USA apparel. ATT refers to the appraisal of the behavior of interest. SN refers to the pressure people feel to engage in the behavior from family, friends, social media influencers, and others whose opinions they value. PBC refers to the extent people feel they have control over participating in the behavior. The current study added CE, which is “the beliefs held by American consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products” (Shimp & Sharma, 1987, p. 280). ATT, SN, PBC, and CE are all hypothesized to be positively related to Purchase Intention (PI) toward Made in the USA apparel. These positive relationships are labeled H1 through H4 in the figure.

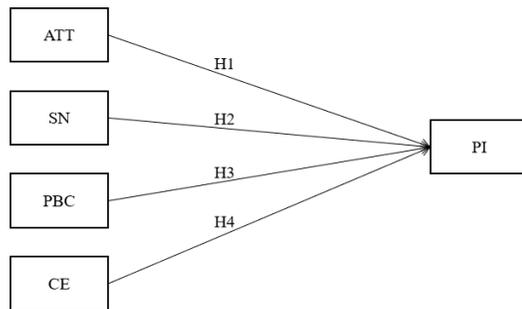


Figure 1. Adapted ETPB Model for Made in the USA; adapted from Past Student 2021.

Method Data were collected using an online survey. Convenience samples were taken of undergraduate and graduate students at a large southeastern university. The questions are from Past Student (2021) and adapted from survey questions used by Paul et al. (2016) to investigate predicting green product consumption. All questions are demographic or use a 7-point Likert scale. Data were collected before the pandemic in late 2019/early 2020 and again in March 2022. For the 2019/2020 survey, there were 288 respondents. To date, for the March 2022 survey, there are 135 respondents. Data from 2019/2020 were analyzed using structural equation modeling. Due to the smaller sample size in March 2022, the data were analyzed using multiple regression.

In 2019/2020, of the 288 respondents, 63% were female, 35% male, 0.3% non-binary and 1.4% preferred not to answer. 56.9% were undergraduates, 22.6% Masters students, 19.8% PhD students and 0.7% responded Other. In 2022, of the 135 respondents, 54% were female, 42% male, 3% non-binary and 1% preferred not to answer. 68% were undergraduates, 13% Masters students, 18% PhD students and 1% Other.

Results Factor analysis revealed five factors: Attitude (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$), Social Norms (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$), Perceived Behavior Control (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$), Consumer Ethnocentrism (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$), and Purchase Intention (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$). These were the factors used for both the 2019/2020 and 2022 surveys.

Pre-pandemic Late 2019/Early 2020 Survey. This is the same data set and analyses presented in Past Student (2021). The analyses found that Attitude, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Consumer Ethnocentrism toward Made in the USA apparel were all significantly positively related to Made in the USA apparel products Purchase Intention. PBC was the greatest predictor of PI with a β of 0.79, followed by ATT with a β of 0.69, and lastly, CE with a β of 0.23. The model did not support H2, meaning the Subjective Norm towards Made in the USA apparel was not related to the intention to purchase Made in the USA apparel products.

Current March 2022 Survey This is a novel survey and dataset, following-up on the findings of Past Student (2021). The current data collected in 2022 were analyzed using multiple regression due to the small sample size. There was a significant positive relationship between Attitude and Purchase Intention with a β of 0.53, supporting H1. There was no support for H2, H3, and H4. Figure 2 shows the results for both 2019/2020 and 2022. On the paths, the 2022 β s are in parentheses.

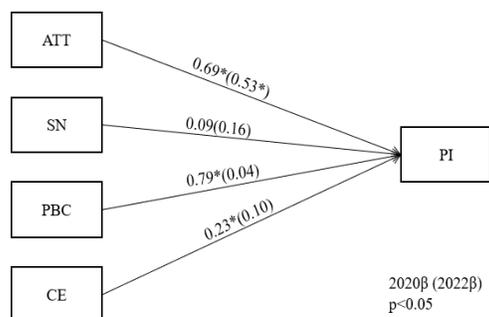


Figure 2. Path Model for Purchase Intention

Conclusions and Discussion This current 2022 study finds that consumers with a favorable Attitude toward Made in the USA apparel have a higher Purchase Intention for Made in the USA apparel than those with less favorable attitudes. Data collected with this same pre-pandemic survey found a significant positive relationship between Purchase Intention and (1) Attitude, (2) Perceived Behavior Control, and (3) Consumer Ethnocentrism, but not Social Norm. Perhaps post-pandemic people feel they have more access to purchase Made in the USA apparel. They might also report less Consumer Ethnocentrism given the current state of America. A practical implication of this finding is that companies should continue to create more positive attitudes through marketing, such as commercials, branding, and product descriptions that highlight Made in the USA. A limitation of the current 2022 study at this point is the small sample size. Consumer Ethnocentrism ($p = 0.110$) and Social Norms ($p = 0.057$) are trending in the hypothesized directions. We are currently in the process of collecting more data to solidly understand the relationship between these variables and Purchase Intention in the post-pandemic population.

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