

Investigating Sustainable Apparel Consumption among Indian Consumers

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Introduction: Indian apparel industry contributes greatly to the country's gross domestic product (Khare & Varshneya, 2017). Likewise, Khare and Varshneya (2017) contented that in emerging economies, green products, organic clothing, etc. are novel concepts. However, in recent years, green or sustainable products are paving their way in to emerging marketplaces. One such market is—India, which is increasingly emphasizing on green consumption (Saxena & Khandelwal, 2012). But, studies that focus exclusively on Indian population are limited (e.g., Khare & Varshneya, 2017). Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to investigate Indian consumers' purchase intentions towards organic clothing.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses: Organic clothing is defined as “clothing that is designed for long lifetime use; it is produced in an ethical production system, perhaps even locally; it causes little or no environmental impact and it makes use of eco-labelled or recycled materials” (Niinimäki, 2010, p. 150). In the present study, the focal constructs were: organic clothing knowledge, materialism, perceived availability of organic clothing, clothing involvement (i.e., product and consumption), and organic clothing purchase behavior. These constructs were selected for Indian organic clothing context based on extant literature related to Indian market (e.g., Khare & Varshneya, 2017) as well as theoretical frameworks (e.g., theory of planned behavior, Ajzen, 1991; value-behavior consistency theory, Manchiraju & Sadachar, 2014). Based on aforementioned constructs, a conceptual framework was proposed for purchase behavior towards organic clothes among Indians. Due to parsimony, only the proposed hypotheses, which were tested are listed below:

H1_{a-b}: Organic clothing knowledge positively influences: (a) organic clothing [product] involvement, and (b) organic clothing [consumption] involvement.

H2_{a-b}: Materialism positively influences: (a) organic clothing [product] involvement, and (b) organic clothing [consumption] involvement.

H3_{a-b}: Perceived product availability of organic clothing positively influences: (a) organic clothing [product] involvement, and (b) organic clothing [consumption] involvement.

H4_{a-b}: (a) Organic clothing [product] involvement and (b) organic clothing [consumption] involvement positively influences organic clothing purchase behavior.

Methods: Data were collected through an online survey administered by a market research firm located in India. The survey instrument consisted of 7-point Likert type scales measuring research variables: organic clothing knowledge (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999), materialism (Richins, 2004), perceived availability of organic clothing (Manchiraju, Fiore, & Russell, 2012), organic clothing (product) involvement and (consumption) involvement (O'Cass, 2000), and

organic clothing purchase behavior (Kim & Damhorst, 1998). Demographic items such as age, gender, education, and income were also included. At the beginning of the survey, a definition on organic clothing (Niinimaki, 2010) was provided. A variety of statistical analysis including descriptive, reliability, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) were employed. SPSS 22 and MPlus 7 were used for statistical analyses.

Results: A total of 351 useable responses were collected. The convenience sample representing Indian nationals consisted of male (84%) and female (16%) with an average age of 34 years. The Cronbach's α for all variables ranged from .70 to .97 indicating the required internal consistency. Measurement model tested through CFA had an acceptable model fit. Subsequent SEM also had an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2 = 1729.54$, $df = 768$, $p < .001$; CFI = .93; RMSEA = .06, SRMR = 0.05). SEM analysis supported the hypotheses *H1a*, *H1b*, *H2b*, and *H3b*. Organic clothing knowledge positively influenced organic clothing (product) involvement ($\beta = .63$, $p = .000$) and organic clothing consumption involvement ($\beta = .27$, $p = .000$). Materialism positively influenced organic clothing consumption involvement ($\beta = .10$, $p = .05$) but did not influence organic clothing (product) involvement ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .365$). Perceived availability of organic clothing positively and marginally influenced the organic clothing consumption involvement ($\beta = .10$, $p = .08$) but had a negative significant influence on organic clothing (product) involvement ($\beta = -.15$, $p = .001$) contradictory to expected positive relationship. Organic clothing (product) involvement ($\beta = .06$, $p = .333$) and organic clothing consumption involvement ($\beta = -.11$, $p = .118$) did not influence the organic clothing purchase behavior.

Conclusion/Implications: The present study has some interesting findings, implications, and limitations. For example, our findings are consistent with Kumar and Ali's (2011) findings, which found that knowledge about organic food drives consumption. Our study suggests that emerging economies are still at nascent stage, and need to educate consumers regarding organic clothing consumption. The limitations of the study include: skewed sample (male = 84%), cross-sectional study, and geographic-bound sample, among others.

Key References: (Other references available upon request)

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