



Identifying the gap between attitude and behavior of purchasing environmentally-friendly apparel: environmental awareness, attitudes, and products' attributes

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Key words: Environmentally-friendly apparel, second-hand apparel

Apparel consumption has significantly contributed to the causes of environmental change (Hiller Connell, 2011) and has brought to the retailers and consumers' attentions. However, increased environmental consciousness seems conflicting with the rapid changes in fashion where consumptions are encouraged (Kim & Damhorst, 1998). Thus, in this study, we aimed to explore the paradox between environmental issues and fast-changing fashion. The purposes of this study were to (a) identify the reasons for purchasing environmentally-friendly apparel (EFA) in regard to environmental awareness and products' attributes, (b) examine the relationships among such factors, and (c) verify whether the attitudes and behaviors are consistent.

Much research assumed that a consumer's environmental concern is a pre-condition for purchasing behavior (Lin, 2010) and has consequently focused on closing the gap between consumer's environmental concern and their purchasing behavior (Meyer, 2001). Dickson and Littrell (1996) have reported that societal attitudes have significant relationships with intention to purchase from societal-centered companies. However, it has been shown that a product's environmental attribute is usually not the most important variable in decision-making process (Sriram & Forman, 1993). Meyer (2001) has suggested that businesses should close the gap of the cost-benefit (e.g., price, search cost, visual appearance) of environmentally-friendly products. Based on literature, three propositions (Ps) were derived in this current study: 1) The environmental concern is positively related to the intention of purchasing EFA, 2) the attitude about EFA is positively related to the intention of purchasing EFA, and 3) The perception of EFA's attributes is positively related to the intention of purchasing.

A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit 16 participants for in-depth interviews. Content analysis was conducted by two trained coders for finding themes from the raw data. The relations between the motivations and the product attributes were analyzed and presented in a hierarchy value map by applying means-end theory.

The results show that (1) the majority of participants had limited knowledge about EFA, the relationship between apparel production and its impact on the environment, and the differences between EFA and regular apparel. Most participants only consider environmental friendly fiber content and production process as the components of EFA. Given the lack of knowledge of EFA, participants were not aware of their other EFA consumptions, such as

buying/wearing second-hand apparel, donating/giving/reselling apparel, wearing home-sewn apparel, purchasing based on needs, and using apparel as long as the conditions of the apparel permit. (2) A gap exists between the environmental concepts and a consumers' willingness of consumption. Whether participants consider themselves environmentalists or non-environmentalists, their shopping behaviors were rarely influenced by their environmental concerns. Most participants agreed that EFA is beneficial, but the environmental benefits alone will not motivate them to purchase EFA because they thought that organic cotton is merely a marketing strategy (e.g., over-priced); EFA is against fashion and consumption; buying EFA cannot save the environment; and EFA is not available in their local market; (3) Participants indicated the same or at least similar standards when they considered between EFA and regular apparel. They would never purchase EFA only based on environmental reasons. They consider other factors, including economic benefits, hedonic benefit, utilitarian benefit, and consideration about personal style, social image, and health. Economic benefit was the most important reason that participants purchase second-hand apparel (cheap) and did not purchase organic cotton (expensive). Hedonic benefit was only associated with purchasing second-hand apparel, which was described as fun, exciting, and treasure hunting. (4) Participants' attitudes toward second-hand apparel changed depending on the previous owner: they were more willing to wear second-hand clothes if they got them from friends or family members rather than from a thrift store. Our analysis suggested that the enhancement of consumers' knowledge about EFA may not only lift consumers' doubts on EFA (e.g., on organic cotton), but also may encourage buying EFA through the EFA consumption they already have (e.g., wearing second-hand clothing given by friends/family members). Furthermore, it is better to reinforce EFA's attributes to meet consumers' needs rather than convince them give up personal benefits in order to consume EFA.

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