

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254085631>

Do Transparent Business Practices Pay? Exploration of Transparency and Consumer Purchase Intention

Article in *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* · July 2011

DOI: 10.1177/0887302X11407910

CITATIONS

71

READS

1,384

2 authors:



[Gargi Bhaduri](#)

Kent State University

23 PUBLICATIONS 94 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



[Jung E. Ha-Brookshire](#)

University of Missouri

74 PUBLICATIONS 566 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Clothing and Textiles Research Journal

<http://ctr.sagepub.com/>

Do Transparent Business Practices Pay? Exploration of Transparency and Consumer Purchase Intention

Gargi Bhaduri and Jung E. Ha-Brookshire

Clothing and Textiles Research Journal 2011 29: 135 originally published online 23 May 2011

DOI: 10.1177/0887302X11407910

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://ctr.sagepub.com/content/29/2/135>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



[International Textile and Apparel Association](http://www.itaa.org)

Additional services and information for *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://ctr.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://ctr.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://ctr.sagepub.com/content/29/2/135.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Jul 3, 2011

[OnlineFirst Version of Record](#) - May 23, 2011

[What is This?](#)

Do Transparent Business Practices Pay? Exploration of Transparency and Consumer Purchase Intention

Clothing & Textiles
Research Journal
29(2) 135-149
© 2011 International Textile &
Apparel Association
Reprints and permission:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0887302X11407910
http://ctrj.sagepub.com



Gargi Bhaduri¹ and Jung E. Ha-Brookshire¹

Abstract

Information transparency has mostly been associated with financial institutions, and little is known about its application in the apparel supply chain. The aim of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors that may influence consumer attitude and purchase intention with respect to apparel products from businesses that are transparent about their supply chain. An interpretive analysis, through interviews with consumers, revealed that attitude and intention seemed to be affected by prior knowledge about the apparel industry, distrust on the business' efforts, values (hedonic and social responsibility value) gained by consumers by consuming transparent products, as well as price and quality of the product. The study uses the theory of reasoned action to explain the relation between attitude and intention and combines with the concepts of consumer value and price and quality. Implications, limitations and scope of further research are also discussed.

Keywords

apparel industry, Fishbein model, global trade, manufacturing, purchase intention, social responsibility, value, sourcing, theory

Introduction

Today's global business environment is complex, turbulent, and competitive with accelerating business cycles (Dyer & Ha-Brookshire, 2008). Thus, businesses compete on multiple competitive bases, such as cost, quick response, and quality, to meet fast-changing consumer needs. However, these are not the only factors that consumers consider for their purchases. Today's consumers are conscious about their society and environment, demanding transparent and sustainable products. The market for such products is expected to grow by as much as 19% by 2014 (Slavin, 2009). This trend leads businesses to openly communicate their operation sites and sustainable business activities to maintain legitimacy and build reputation.

¹Department of Textile and Apparel Management, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO, USA

Corresponding Author:

Gargi Bhaduri, Department of Textile and Apparel Management, University of Missouri, 137 Stanley Hall, Columbia, MO, USA
Email: gbgx2@mail.missouri.edu

Transparency is defined as “visibility and accessibility of information especially concerning business practices” (Merriam-Webster, 2010). The demand for transparency, especially in the global supply chain, has been heightened, in part, by the increased awareness of the environment and the advanced technology in communication. Thus, maintaining the secrecy of corporate wrongdoings has become very difficult and extremely risky (Carter & Rogers, 2008). Specifically, for consumers who are concerned about the environment and society, information of business transparency can be important for their purchase and consumption choices.

This study focuses especially on transparency in the global apparel supply chain. The apparel industry is the most globalized of all modern industries; multiple countries are involved in manufacturing a single garment (Dickerson, 1999). This globalization of the apparel manufacturing industry has made it almost impossible for consumers to know all the suppliers involved in apparel manufacturing. Because of this, if a business wants to establish a relationship of trust with consumers, it is up to the business to supply finished goods with visible and accessible information on the global manufacturing processes. Some businesses, such as Patagonia[®] (2010), have been very proactive in furnishing such information and have become leaders in socially and environmentally responsible apparel business practices. Yet, little is known regarding such information on transparency truly affecting consumers’ apparel purchase and consumption choices. Given this immense market potential, it is important to understand the relationship of supply chain information transparency with consumer purchase intention. The purpose of this study is to build a conceptual model and emphasize the factors that are associated with consumers’ purchase intention with regard to transparency of sustainable supply chains. It also adds to the existing literature on supply chain information transparency.

Literature Review

Sustainable Supply Chain Management

There is a growing concern about the manner in which businesses perform in today’s world. Environmentalists and other nongovernment organizations have been actively spreading awareness about the gradual depletion of the earth’s resources. Therefore, businesses are under immense pressure to adopt sustainable modes of operation (Carter & Rogers, 2008). The term sustainability first began to appear in the management and operations literature. Over time, businesses have increasingly opted to be sustainable. By 2004, approximately 68% of the Global 250 businesses generated a separate annual sustainability report which included information on the environmental, social, and economic impact of their businesses, building from a primary emphasis on environmental reporting in 1999 (KPMG, 2005). In addition, 80% of the reports discussed sustainability as a part of supply chain related issues (KPMG, 2005).

One of the well-adopted definitions of sustainability is given by the Brundtland Commission (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 8): “developments that meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” Different genres of the literature describe sustainability with different emphases. The definitions of sustainability in the organizational management literature incorporate social, economic, and environmental aspects of business management as sustainability requires “a wise balance among economic development, environmental stewardship, and social equity” (Sikdar, 2003, p. 1928). Activities such as reducing packaging, improving working conditions in warehouses, using more fuel efficient transportation, and requiring suppliers to undertake environmental and social programs are a few examples of how businesses can reduce costs while improving their corporate reputation (Carter & Rogers, 2008).

According to Lambert, Croxton, Garcia-Dastugue, Knemeyer, and Rogers (2006, p. 2), supply chain management is “the integration of key business processes from end-user through

original suppliers, that provides products, services, and information that add value for customers and other stakeholders.” In response to the recent demand for sustainable business practices, Carter and Rogers (2008) defined sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) as the strategic, transparent integration and achievement of social, environmental, and economic goals in the systemic coordination of key interorganizational processes. SSCM aims to improve long-term economic performance of the business and its supply chains. SSCM performance is often associated with the stakeholders’ perception about its performance (Lambert et al., 2006).

Transparency in SSCM

Despite growing interests in sustainable business practices in global supply chain and the advanced technology in communication via the Internet and satellite television, today’s consumers seem to have insufficient access to information about sustainability efforts carried out by businesses. More and more companies are now faced with calls for detailed information on the social and environmental impacts of their business activities by consumers (Burchell & Cook, 2006). For example, Singh, de los Salmones Sanchez, and del Bosque (2008) showed that there is a strong need for transparency between the business and consumers regarding sustainable business practices. In their study, consumers were found to be interested in obtaining information about the origin or manufacturing processes of a business’ products and, therefore, they concluded that a business could benefit from continual communication about how the product is made to satisfy consumers’ quests for knowledge.

Given that transparency relates to visibility and accessibility of business information, Vishwanath and Kaufmann (2001) identified the five dimensions of transparency as access, comprehensiveness, relevance, quality, and reliability of information in the areas of banking/accounting policies. Strutnin (2008) added that maintaining a transparent supply chain is important for building customer loyalty and brand image, and for assuring product quality and safety standards. He recommended that businesses have a traceable supply chain that shows the movement of source materials through various processors, manufacturers, and distribution channel members to the end user. Carter and Rogers (2008) also suggested that businesses need to be transparent with their operations to maintain business legitimacy and to build reputation.

Transparency and Consumer Purchase Intention

Several studies measured the impact of corporate sustainability or transparency on attitude and purchase intention of consumers. Creyer and Ross (1996) measured sustainable practice by businesses. Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999) evaluated corporate credibility or transparency based on its community involvement and environment protection efforts. They also found that consumers were more favorable toward and more likely to purchase from brands with transparent business practices than those that are not. Overall, previous research indicated that information on businesses’ sustainable or transparent practices can have a significant impact on purchase intentions as well as consumers’ evaluations of products, brands, and companies.

In the apparel industry, transparency is also an important yet challenging topic. The apparel industry is highly fragmented and globalized and order fulfillment is controlled not only by a single business but also by a number of decentralized businesses collaborating together from all over the world. This makes it extremely difficult to know the origins of components as well as the finished products (Dyer & Ha-Brookshire, 2008). Also, today’s consumers have a need-to-know mentality, demanding information on the product and business practices (Feitelberg, 2010). They not only want sustainable products to minimize or eliminate any harmful effects and to maximize the long-term beneficial impact on society and environment (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009) but are also

concerned about the way companies communicate business practices. Some apparel businesses, such as Levis Strauss & Co.[®] (2011), have already allowed consumers to track the products' environmental impact from design through delivery. Although these studies generally support a positive relationship between transparency and consumers' purchase intention, the factors that are related to attitude about and intention toward transparency have not been explored thoroughly. To address this gap, this study was designed to explore consumers' attitude toward and purchase intention for apparel products made with transparent business practices.

Theoretical Perspectives for Transparency and Consumers' Purchase Intention

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) and consumer value perspectives were used for the study's theoretical framework. In this study, consumer purchase intention is defined as "the buyer's self instruction to purchase the brand (or take another relevant purchase related action)" (Rossiter & Percy, 1998, p. 126). According to TRA, a person's intention to perform an action is a function of his/her attitude and subjective norms. Attitude toward a behavior is personal in nature and is the individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing the behavior. Furthermore, attitude is a function of behavioral beliefs. This means that a person who believes that performing an action will have positive outcome(s) will be more likely to perform the action than one who does not. These beliefs can be formed by direct observation, by indirect acceptance of information, and/or by self decision-making.

While the TRA focuses on attitudes and beliefs, Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009) proposed that the TRA can be integrated with consumers' perceived values in the context of used clothing donation behavior. Hedonic values are more psychological and are mostly derived from a pleasurable or satisfying experience while utilitarian values are mostly rational and task-oriented, measuring the effectiveness or efficiency of an experience (Carpenter, Moore, & Fairhust, 2005; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Recently, Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009) explained that consumers seek social responsibility values in their used clothing donation behavior, in addition to hedonic (feeling better by reducing guilt) and utilitarian (getting a clean empty closet) values. Transparency is essential for evaluating the sustainable practices of today's apparel businesses and it is also highly sought by today's consumers who are often socially and environmentally conscious (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009). Thus, both TRA and consumer perceived value perspectives might be useful in understanding the relationship between transparency and their purchase intentions.

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to explore the factors that are associated with consumer attitude and purchase intention with regard to apparel products from businesses having a transparent supply chain. To gain a detailed, in-depth understanding of the research topic, the study was designed to be interpretative in nature. Interpretive inquiry is described as "a systematic search for deep understanding of the ways in which persons subjectively experience the social world" (Hultgren, 1989, p. 41). Interviews, especially, allow researchers to access the interpretations of informants in their real world (Walsham, 2006). Language shared through interviews helps the researchers understand other human beings' experience and emotions, which are often represented and communicated through and in the form of language (Gadamer, 1975; Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009). Therefore, to obtain an in-depth understanding of consumers' experiences in their real world, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. The text data from the interviews were supported with a demographic and psychographic questionnaire adapted from Dickson (2000). These techniques are considered to be effective and suitable for generating and building a new theory in the initial stage of the research cycle (Wengraf, 2001).

Data Collection and Analysis

After approval from the Institutional Review Board, participants were identified in a three-step approach. First, the potential participants were contacted either through personal contacts or through the snowballing technique. Second, the lead researcher contacted the potential participants and explained the study. Third, when the participants showed an interest in this topic and wanted to be part of this research, they were selected as the study sample. This approach which resulted in a purposive sample was chosen because it was appropriate for the study's objectives by supporting researchers in generating conceptual models in an exploratory research context (Mason, 1996). A total of 13 individuals participated in this study, all of whom were residents of a university town in the mid-west United States. Although 13 may seem to be a relatively small sample size, a detailed review of the interview transcriptions showed recurrence of the themes, indicating information saturation (Spiggle, 1994). This saturation of the themes was an indicator that the interview process was sufficient for the interpretive analysis and further interviews were unlikely to generate new information.

Interviews were conducted in various places where participants agreed to be and each interview lasted for approximately 20 min. Before the interviews, participants were briefed and with their consent, the entire interviews were audiotaped. Interviews were recorded for a "truer record of what was said" compared to taking notes during the process (Walsham, 2006, p. 323) and then transcribed by the first author immediately after each interview to capture the "tacit non-verbal elements of the interview" (Walsham, 2006, p. 323). Also, the transcribed text made it easier to refer back for alternative forms of analysis (Walsham, 2006).

Interviews were semistructured in order to focus on consumer perspectives about supply chain transparency, specifically, the factors that are related to attitude and purchase intention. Semistructured interviews made it possible to probe and understand reasons for "depth realities" which are often different from "surface appearances" (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009, p. 74; Wengraf, 2001, p. 6). Questions such as "Have you heard of *Dolphin Safe*[®] Tuna [tuna caught by methods that do not harm dolphins], *Legally Logged Timber*, or *Crop to Cup*[™] [coffees that are traceable to farmers]?" were included to assess their general knowledge of transparency in product categories that currently offer transparent information from the growers/producers to the consumers. To estimate participants' intention to purchase products produced by apparel businesses that are transparent, the questions, "If available, would you like to purchase and consume such products over others, even if they are more expensive? Why or why not?" were asked. Questions, such as "Would you like to know similar points or practices that are done to make clothing?" "What kind of process or activities of making clothing would you like to know more about?" "If available, would you like to purchase and consume such clothing over others, even if it is more expensive? Why or why not?" helped the researchers to understand participants' attitudes toward supply chain transparency with regard to the apparel industry in particular and their purchase intention for the same. To get an idea about supply chain transparency as a whole and its relation to consumer behavior, participants were asked questions such as "Have you heard of supply chain transparency?" "Is this important for you as a consumer?" "What do you recommend apparel businesses to do for this issue?" Participants' responses were further probed in order to extract a deeper understanding of the factors influencing their attitudes or intentions (McCracken, 1998).

Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire before the interview. The questionnaire was used to collect demographic information, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and occupation. The participants' age ranged from 23 to 60 and occupations included college student, administrative assistant, professor, marketing representative, and others. Three out of 13 participants were male and the rest female. Ethnicity of the participants included Caucasian White, Asian, Indian, and Hispanic. Table 1 shows demographic information in detail.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Participants

Participant ^a	Age	Gender	Occupation	Ethnicity
P1	24	Female	Graduate student	Caucasian White
P2	27	Male	Information technology professional	Indian
P3	23	Female	Graduate student	Caucasian White
P4	35	Male	Advertising professional	Caucasian White
P5	29	Female	Graduate student	Asian
P6	27	Female	Graduate student/instructor	Latin American
P7	51	Female	Administrative associate	Caucasian White
P8	49	Female	Administrative associate	Caucasian White
P9	60	Female	Bookkeeper and gardener	Caucasian White
P10	46	Female	Distance education coordinator	Caucasian White
P11	24	Female	Marketing representative	Caucasian White
P12	38	Female	Professor	Caucasian White
P13	27	Male	Graduate student	Asian

^a Reference to each participant is indicated by a number.

In addition to demographics, before the interviews, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to find out whether they were informed about issues in foreign clothing manufacturing businesses, businesses' transparency efforts, and global working conditions. The questionnaire was used as a supporting means of understanding participants' perceptions about global apparel supply chains. The questions were adopted from Dickson (2000) to understand the association of personal values, beliefs, knowledge, and attitude with intention to purchase socially responsible apparel. Although 12 out of 13 of the participants felt that they were not informed about issues in foreign apparel manufacturing business, all of them believed that buying products from businesses which are transparent about their supply chain is a good practice. In addition, all of the 13 participants believed in the policies of the businesses which are transparent about their supply chain. Also, a majority of them expressed concern about issues affecting workers in foreign countries. Only 3 out of 13 participants agreed with the statement, "Clothing businesses that advertise their policies concerning workers in foreign countries are insincere with their claims," and 2 were unsure of their answer. However, this opinion changed during the interviews as participants had opportunities to think in-depth about this topic. They realized that businesses' claims are not necessarily always trustworthy without third-party certifications or investigations. As a result, 5 out of 8 recanted their opinion by the end of the interviews, and said that there might be lack of sincerity in companies' advertisement about their foreign labor practices.

The transcribed data and questionnaire were interpreted thematically and then holistically to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the factors that are related to attitude and purchase intention of the research participants (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009; Spiggle, 1994). Data interpretation started from the finest details of the transcription and graduated to the more broad observations. For example, "Seen documentary films," "the more information one has about the product" were details of the interviews that finally led to broad observations that having prior knowledge might influence the participants' purchase intention as one participant mentioned, "... because I have the knowledge ... I will be willing to pay more." This process was repeated by both researchers until prominent themes were generated from the interview data (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009). For example, "Feeling better by paying ..." was interpreted as hedonic value.

Themes were grouped into categories based on their relevancy (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). For example, social responsibility and hedonic values were grouped to form the theme category "Values gained from purchase." The final step of data analysis consisted of analyzing the individual

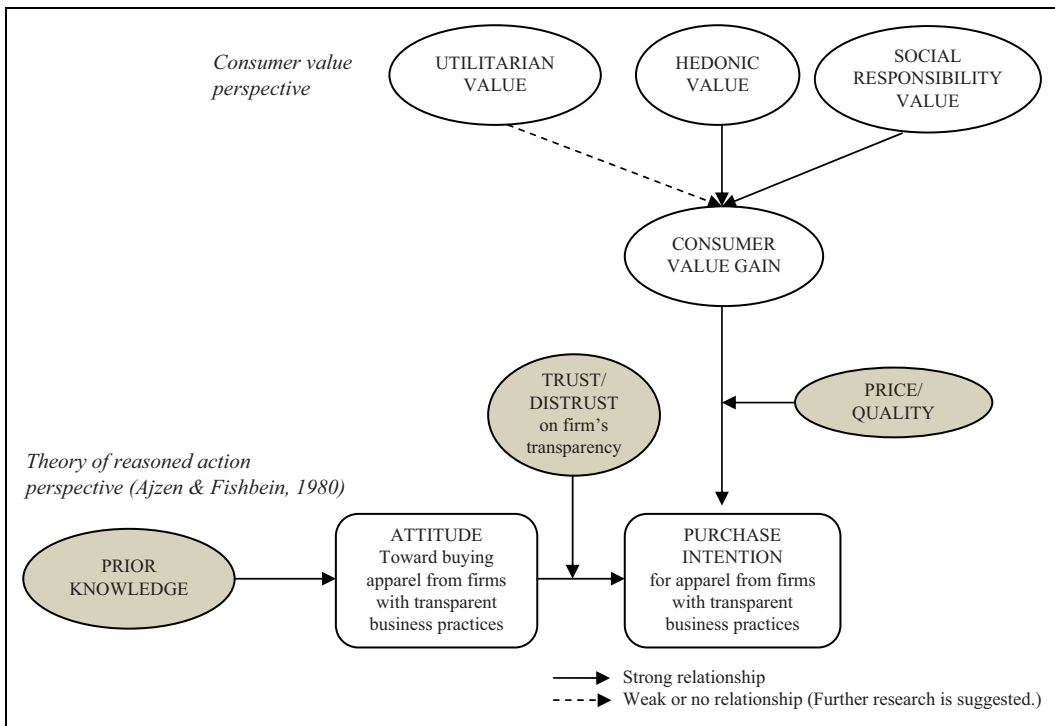


Figure 1. Conceptual model proposed for consumer purchase intention regarding apparel products from businesses with transparent practices.

Note. Conceptual model was adopted from Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009) and modified according to study data. Highlighted portions indicate modifications based on study data.

themes and formulating the relationship among themes and theme categories by both researchers over a considerable period of time. This final step resulted in Figure 1.

Interpretation

Interpretation of the interview data and analysis of questionnaire revealed several factors influencing consumers’ attitudes and intentions with regard to buying from businesses having transparent supply chain information. Data interpretation gave rise to themes which were grouped into the four theme categories: (a) association of prior knowledge with consumers’ attitudes toward transparency; (b) relationship with distrust; (c) values gained by consumers; and (d) power of price and quality.

Association of Prior Knowledge With Consumers’ Attitudes Toward Transparency

Existing research indicates that prior knowledge and concern about the issues in the apparel industry are related to consumer purchase intentions (Dickson, 2000). The TRA also explains that this knowledge may affect attitudes toward certain products (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Moreover, according to a study conducted by King and Workman (1996), students who were more knowledgeable about environmental issues in the textile and apparel industry were found to be more concerned about their purchase decisions and made greater efforts to ensure that their purchases did not result in any harm to the society or environment.

Supporting the previous research, the study data also suggested that prior knowledge might be associated with participants' attitudes toward products produced and delivered transparently. According to the questionnaire, only 2 out of the 13 respondents believed themselves to have knowledge about issues in the foreign clothing manufacturing business. The study data revealed that participants' knowledge about the global apparel manufacturing industry seemed to be associated with their attitude toward products produced by apparel businesses with transparent business practices. According to participants, having a positive attitude toward such a product was the result of having "more awareness" (P11), and they would not have favorable attitude if they "didn't really know about" the cause or transparent activities (P11). Particularly, global working conditions were "a big deal" for P11. Because she knows so much about business practices of a certain retailer, she has become an "antimegastore" person, changing her attitude toward that store completely. P10, too, agreed that more knowledge is needed, and she has formed an opinion that problems exist in today's marketplace due to the lack of knowledge:

I know that one person can't change anything but the more information one has about, especially the situation in which the products are made, . . . that is why I am a big anti-megastore [a large chain retailer in the United States] person because I have seen documentary films. I have seen several films about the conditions of people having to make or assembling these products and that is a big deal for me . . . (P11).

Because they are ensuring that the product is what you think it is, you have knowledge; you have information about the product. I will be willing to pay more. I would know where it came from, how it is processed, where it is processed. I think once people hear about it more often, it will be an important issue for more people rather than "oh, it is cheap, let us get it." To know where the items come from, who makes it and under what condition—all of that, I think it is becoming more important. There are issues from casually buying without knowing where the things come from (P10).

Although knowing about transparency efforts of businesses is important, how to access such information was another concern that the participants shared. Advertising and spreading awareness about a business' transparency efforts were found to be related to the attitudes of consumers with regard to purchasing apparel that is transparently produced. Participants wanted to make an educated decision and felt that having adequate information about business efforts would help them make better decisions. They, however, did not seem to "research it all" or "seek it out," although they were willing to purchase products from apparel businesses having transparent practices if they have the power of knowledge (P11). Some participants preferred such information at the point of purchase. Since consumers generally try on products before buying them, hangtags and care-labels are two places where consumers wanted information to be present. For P12, providing information on the care-labels would be "easy to do and an obvious place to search for information." P10 prefers information at the point of purchase while, for P6, it is more convenient if information is present specifically on the hangtags.

It is always good to have it displayed at the store while purchasing, what it means to be fair trade. I mean to have it on the label is fine, but I think advertising it [transparency efforts] there [in the store] is the most important for you to even think about purchasing . . . I mean you can put it on the label, but you have to "get" people to buy it, especially if it is a bit more expensive, coz [sic] they are handmade, hand-packed or whatever the situation is, that definitely requires some advertising to tuck in people to buy it (P10).

I would like it if they have tags saying organic cotton. So, I think, if they had more information on the tag about the clothes, it doesn't have to be a very pretty tag. I am more interested in knowing what the company does. The company could put all the information I want to know on the tag with a link to the website, saying "to know more about our supply chain, go to . . ." (P6).

Participants' Distrust About Businesses' Transparency Claims

Even with a positive attitude toward buying apparel products from businesses with transparent practices, participants seemed to be held back from having a positive purchase intentions due to lack of trust regarding the businesses' policies. Throughout the interviews, participants constantly questioned the legitimacy of the claims made by the businesses with regard to their transparent supply chain practices.

Participants suggested "a standard seal" or a "seal of approval" which would certify businesses' transparency efforts to ensure that the businesses are living up to a particular standard of operations and, thereby, giving consumers the confidence to make an educated decision. P12 explained that she is willing to purchase apparel from businesses with transparent practices provided it is certified by a third-party authorizing agency. When probed if there is any distrust issue that she is suffering from, she emphasized that she could only rely on certain standard certifications and not any "home-made sign:"

I think I would buy products from apparel businesses with transparent practices, if there was some sort of certification process, say, you know, like the Fair-trade, Organic label on coffee products, or something like that (P12).

Do you have a sort of trust issue? (Interviewer)

Yes, a recognizable label where I am not relying on a home-made sign, but issued by a third party that has some kind of standard and can issue those kinds of certificates (P12).

Though a third-party certification was deemed desirable by all participants, some of them raised questions about the legitimacy of the certifying businesses' business activities. According to P13, the true motive of any economic organization is to reap profits and the certifying agencies are no exception. Therefore, the intention of the certifying businesses might be to acquire an increasing number of businesses to be certified as their clients and might lower their standards to achieve that goal. He was willing to purchase apparel from apparel businesses with transparent practices. However, he expressed a great concern about any privately owned third-party certifying agencies on this matter:

I am willing to have a try but again I have two concerns. You claim to have organic cotton but how can you prove it? Do you have 1% organic cotton and, as a consumer, am I capable enough to make a decision? I don't think there are any government certification programs being introduced as of yet. All of these programs today are so called third party certifications but how do they operate? How they sustain themselves? They receive fees from the companies and this is a question. In order to have more customers, they [the businesses that are issuing certificates] are probably willing to lower their standards It makes no sense for consumers to believe in such certificates (P13).

With an increasing number of businesses opting to have a transparent supply chain, some participants seemed to lack trust in many certification claims that are found in today's marketplace. Also, with more than one certification agency in practice, it is not easy to track information about all of them. P13 claimed that it would be beneficial for consumers, manufacturers, and retailers to resort to one universal standard, such as a government-approved standard. P4 supported this idea and suggested it could even be made global:

So, I truly believe that in future there should be a sort of government certification, at least, sponsored or affiliated with the government agencies in some nations to introduce a government program or quasi-government programs. It could be an authority consumers can trust. First of all, the standard of social responsibility! Who is the authentic standard? I don't think there is anyone out there. I wish there could be more consensus out there. This could help the consumers. If there was only one standard for

the consumers, it is also easier to trace. I think it is also in the interest of manufacturers and retailers to comply with such a standard (P13).

It would be nice to know if there is a standard approval saying that these things met these criteria—like we don't employ children or we are not trafficking human beings with our shipment. Or, we reuse or try to be as green as shipping as possible, we do not employ people under the age of 16, or we have standard working conditions as approved by some international government (P4).

Values Gained From Buying Apparel From Businesses With Transparent Practices

According to the study, participants did not seem to gain any utilitarian value from purchasing apparel manufactured by businesses that are transparent unlike consumers' used clothing donation behavior described by Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009). However, participants expressed hedonic values as they would "feel a lot better" if the products have transparent information even if they would have to pay a premium for such products. This hedonic value seemed to be centered on personal pleasure, the pleasure being achieved by buying something that has not caused any harm to the society, such as death, as P4 expressed:

So, if you can have that label, you feel a lot better by spending that extra 5–10 dollars. You know that someone has not died because of this garment or somebody is not forced to work and that would definitely matter (P4).

On a slightly different note, social responsibility value seemed to be a stronger factor for the participants than pure hedonic value in influencing their purchase intention. Unlike in used clothing donation behavior, where both hedonic and utilitarian values were primarily concerned with personal pleasures (feeling better by reducing guilt) and achievement (getting a clean, empty closet; Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009), in this study, it seemed that helping society and the environment was the primary focus and, thus, much more important for the participants. For this reason, this study distinguished hedonic value from social responsibility value. If participants focused on personal pleasure or relief, such as "feeling better by spending extra 5–10 dollars," the study categorized it as hedonic value, whereas if their focus was on the environment and/or society at large, such as "feeling responsible to help a small child in Bangladesh," the study classified it as social responsibility value. In this light, P2 explained that she would pay extra dollars for products with transparent information as she would know that she is "helping some small child in Bangladesh or India."

Social responsibility includes both social and environmental aspects. However, regarding their purchasing behavior, participants seemed more concerned about the impact on human beings, rather than on the environment. Most of the respondents rated "manufacturing" to be the most important phase of apparel production about which they were concerned. P8 expressed that manufacturing has "more likelihood of having problems or hurting people" because it puts "a face" to the apparel industry. She argued that she could "picture people being abused, people working in sweatshops, being underpaid and all." The participants explained that this is because apparel manufacturing involves "the largest amount of human labor" (P12) and the majority of these processes is "done in developing countries" with unfair labor practices (P9). P4 expressed that it "hits" him most when people are abused:

It hits more to me when a human being is involved, especially when somebody is taking advantage of kids. Some people are animal people. If an animal is abused, the world is ending to them, like my wife. To me, I think the opposite. If the humans get exploited, that weighs way more than an animal (P4).

In addition, both hedonic and social responsibility values seemed to be increased by the level of trust that the participants may find in apparel products from apparel businesses with transparent practices. As P4 put it, "If you have the label, you feel a lot better," indicating that the presence of the standard

seal is related to his hedonic value as he can trust the business. Similarly, P13 explained that if there are standard working conditions as approved by some international governments, it would be less “usual for him to feel responsible for humans.”

Power of Price and Quality

Previous research suggests that price and quality are important determinants of shopping behavior and product choice (Bishop, 1984; Dickson & Sawyer, 1986). The study participants were not an exception to this. Though all of the participants preferred to purchase apparel from businesses that are transparent, most of them put a priority on price and quality over transparency. According to P4, he is favorable toward products from apparel businesses with transparent practices only if he is satisfied with both price and quality.

All things being equal, if I see one shirt that is made ethically and the other one is not, I am going to choose the first one, absolutely, every time. But if there is a price difference or a quality difference, it will affect my purchase decision (P4).

For some participants, quality of apparel is too important to sacrifice under any circumstances, including transparency. P3 expressed that “I am a big person on quality. If the quality was better I would be willing to pay more but if it is the same garment, of which one is made in a sweatshop-free organic of the same quality, I am not going to pay more” (P3). However, to others, if there were two products of similar quality, they were willing to buy the one that is from a transparent apparel business. P13 explains his willingness to purchase:

It (transparency) is not the most important thing but I would say if the other factors are equal, I would give more preference to those companies who are more fair and transparent. The first would be the quality of the product. But if it is the same quality or trend, I would support the company who is more transparent (P13).

The same seemed to be true for price. Though participants were generally willing to pay more, ranging from 15 to 100%, for a product from an apparel business with transparent practices, each had their own perception of price which they deemed appropriate and affordable, explaining their own “limits of purchasing power” (P13). However, it was also found that the more knowledge about the problems of the apparel industry the participants had, the higher the premium they were willing to pay for a product from a business with transparent practices. A person aware of “people being exploited” and “sweatshops” was willing to pay a higher price to ensure that they are not harming society by buying a piece of clothing than those who had very little knowledge. P10, who was aware of the evils associated with apparel production, was willing to pay more and did not have an attitude, such as “. . . Oh. It is cheap, let’s get it” (P10). Similarly, P8, who considered herself to be a socially responsible person and had knowledge about people being underpaid, working in sweatshops, and being abused, explained, “I am all about keeping people safe. Spending more? That’s fine with me.”

Conceptual Model of Consumer Purchase Intention and Supply Chain Information Transparency

Over time, a conceptual model was developed to explain consumer purchase intention for apparel products with transparent supply chain information (see Figure 1). The study data suggested that first, participants’ attitudes toward apparel from transparent businesses seemed to be related to their prior knowledge about the global apparel manufacturing industry. This attitude, in turn, seemed to be related to their purchase intention. Participants gained hedonic and social responsibility values through their

purchase. However, the study data did not support the presence of any utilitarian value influencing participants' purchase intention. Even with a positive attitude toward buying transparent apparel products, participants seemed to be held back from having a positive purchase intention by a lack of trust regarding the businesses' policies. Finally, though participants were motivated to purchase from transparent businesses, their purchase intention seemed to be associated with the price and/or quality of the product.

Conclusions and Implications

With the growing complexities in today's global apparel manufacturing industry and consumer demand for information about the product they are purchasing, this study sought to analyze the factors that are associated with consumer purchase intention for apparel products from businesses that have a transparent supply chain. The dearth of research on supply chain transparency in the apparel industry and more specifically on purchase intention and transparency led the researchers to adopt an interpretive analysis approach using interviews. Analysis of the interviews and data analysis gave rise to four main factors related to attitude and purchase intention, namely prior knowledge, participants' distrust of businesses' transparency claims, value gained from purchasing transparent apparel, and power of price and/or quality. The study findings were further analyzed and found to be supportive of TRA and partially supportive of Ha-Brookshire and Hodges' (2009) model for used clothing donation behavior.

The study findings revealed that prior knowledge about the global apparel manufacturing industry and the transparency efforts of businesses seemed to be associated with attitudes toward the intention to buy clothing manufactured using transparent production processes. Participants were willing to purchase if the business' transparency effort was familiar to them, or if they were aware of it, and were often found to be disinterested in supporting a business if they did not know about the business' transparency effort. Participants also wanted the information to be available conveniently, through different forms of advertisement rather than having to search for it actively. Hangtags, care labels, and point-of-purchase were some of the desired locations for having information displayed for consumers to make an educated purchase decision.

Although knowledge seemed to be associated with attitude toward transparent businesses, distrust in the businesses' policies seemed to keep participants from having a positive intention toward purchasing apparel from businesses with transparent supply chain information. Participants demanded a standard authorizing agency to verify the claims of the transparent businesses. Further, some of the respondents expressed concern about the legitimacy of the certificates and demanded the existence of one single consolidated universal standard like a government certification. Participants also expressed that trust was related to their perceived value of the product, making them feel better for supporting a legitimate social/environmental cause. Their trust also seemed to be associated with their social responsibility value when they knew that their purchase was of help to society or the environment.

Participants often received certain values from making a purchase. In this study, respondents who expressed hedonic and social responsibility values said that they would purchase products made by companies with transparent business practices. Hedonic value is focused on personal pleasure or relief whereas social responsibility value is concerned with benefit to the environment and/or society at large. The study data was not supportive of any utilitarian value. Finally, participants' purchase intentions seemed to be associated with price and quality as each had his/her own perception of the amount that he/she can afford or are willing to pay for a product. People who perceived a higher value in purchasing a product from an apparel business with transparent practices were, however, willing to pay a higher price, or compromise with the quality "a bit" if they knew that they could trust the business or there was a standard "label." Consumers have different perceptions of value—"value is low price", "value is whatever I want in a product", "value is quality I get for the price I pay," and "what I get for what I give" (Zeithaml, 1988). Accordingly, participants were willing to pay according

to their budget and what they deemed appropriate for a product, taking into account that products from apparel businesses that are transparent are more expensive than normal ones (Tran, 2007).

This study has several contributions and implications to consumer behavior research and apparel businesses. First, it explored the area of supply chain information transparency in the apparel industry and its relation to consumer purchase intention, thereby filling a gap in consumer behavior literature. Information transparency is usually associated with financial institutions and is considered to be the disclosure of economic information. This study applies information transparency with respect to the clothing industry, thereby venturing into a new avenue. With the global apparel industry becoming more complex, it is essential to maintain transparency in corporate activities in order to build and ensure consumer trust and loyalty to create a niche for themselves. As media grows stronger, it is beneficial for corporations to ensure that they have a clean image and have not been attacked for any wrongdoings; therefore, being transparent is becoming all the more important, if not essential.

Second, the findings on consumers' distrust indicate a strong need for authorizing agents to certify the legitimacy of businesses' transparency efforts. Also, the study data suggests that consumers felt the need for one standardized authority, like the government, whom they can trust. This implies that apparel businesses seeking to enhance business image or reputation related to global supply chain practices may want to consider using third-party certifications or inspection reports as consumers often distrust businesses' promotional information from businesses.

Third, according to the study data, having prior knowledge about the global apparel industry seemed to be related to participants' attitudes toward businesses with transparent supply chains. The convenience of obtaining the information was also of concern to the participants. Therefore, businesses willing to be known for their transparency initiatives could promote their efforts and inform consumers about the workings of the global apparel industry through proper advertisement campaigns. They could also have information easily available to consumers through hangtags, care-labels, and various forms of in-store display options.

Fourth, the study findings reinforce the need to integrate consumer values (hedonic and social responsibility) within the TRA so that it can be used to understand consumer purchase intention toward products from apparel businesses with transparent practices. Consumers buy a particular product only when they feel that it is worth the money they are paying for it. In today's world of intense competition, businesses can take advantage of transparency by making it an added value for their product. Businesses, by being transparent, might enable consumers to gain hedonic and social responsibility values, thereby creating a niche in the market.

This study has certain limitations. Broad application of this study should be done with care due to its small sample size with limited geographic and ethnic diversity in the sample. In order to generalize the results, further study involving a larger number of participants across different geographical areas and different ethnic backgrounds is needed. Also the qualitative nature of the study limits the quantitative measurement of "prior knowledge" and "social consciousness" which can be done through further research. However, the findings of the study can be utilized for the benefit of society and the environment. Since consumers are positive about buying from transparent apparel businesses, this consumer demand might lead to more businesses adopting transparent practices, thereby improving the working conditions of laborers and reducing the environmental impact of clothing production processes. Also, by publicizing their transparency practices, businesses may help increase consumer awareness, which will not only benefit the businesses but will benefit the industry in general. Moreover, this study is not free from social desirability bias and future research to address this issue will be useful.

The study provides several research opportunities for the future. First, research can be done investigating the relationships among each of the constructs in the proposed model. This would provide a deeper understanding of the factors that motivate purchase intention. To be specific, the relations that can be explored are: the association of knowledge with consumer buying behavior, and the

impact of consumer trust and consumer values on intention. Also, it was beyond the scope of this study to explore the relationship between social pressure and consumer purchase intention toward transparent apparel manufacturing practices. Second, further research is needed to understand the reasons why consumers lack trust in the businesses. This could improve understanding of consumer behavior by businesses and build and maintain consumer loyalty.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bishop, W. R. (1984, March). Competitive intelligence. *Progressive Grocer*, 63, 19-20.
- Burchell, J., & Cook, J. (2006). It's good to talk? Examining attitudes towards corporate social responsibility dialogue and engagement processes. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 15, 154-170.
- Carpenter, J. M., Moore, M., & Fairhurst, A. E. (2005). Consumer shopping value for retail brands. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 9, 43-53.
- Carter, C. R., & Rogers, D. S. (2008). A framework of sustainable supply chain management: Moving toward new theory. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, 38, 360-387.
- Creyer, E., & Ross, W. T. (1996). The impact of corporate behavior on perceived product value. *Marketing Letters*, 7, 173-185.
- Dickerson, K. G. (1999). *Textiles and apparel in the global economy* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Dickson, M. A. (2000). Personal values, beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes relating to intentions to purchase apparel from socially responsible businesses. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 18, 19-30.
- Dickson, P. R., & Sawyer, A. G. (1986). *Point-of-purchase behavior and price perceptions of supermarket shoppers*. Report No. 86-102. Cambridge, MA: Marketing Science Institute.
- Dutton, J. E., & Dukerich, J. M. (1991). Keeping an eye on the mirror: Image and identity in organizational adaptation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34, 517-554.
- Dyer, B., & Ha-Brookshire, J. (2008). Apparel import intermediaries' secrets to success: Redefining success in a hyper-dynamic environment. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 12, 51-67.
- Feitelberg, R. (2010). Fashion's new order: Transparency. *Womens Wear Daily*, 199, 16.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1975). *Truth and method* (2nd rev.) (J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Eds. & Trans.). New York: Crossroad.
- Ha-Brookshire, J. E., & Hodges, N. N. (2009). Socially responsible consumer behavior? Exploring used clothing donation behavior. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 27, 179-196.
- Holbrook, M., & Hirschman, E. (1982). The experiential aspects of use: Consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun. *Journal of Business Research*, 3, 281-295.
- Hultgren, F. H. (1989). Introduction to interpretive inquiry. In F. H. Hultgren & D. L. Coomer (Eds.), *Alternative modes of inquiry in home economics research* (pp. 35-42). New York, NY: State University of New York.
- King, J. E., & Workman, J. E. (1996, August 1-4). *Socially responsible consumption behavior, perceived consumer effectiveness and textile knowledge*. Poster presented at the annual conference of the International Textile and Apparel Association, Banff, Canada.

- KPMG. (2005). *KPMG International Survey of Corporate Responsibility Reporting 2005*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.
- Lafferty, B., & Goldsmith, R. E. (1999). Corporate credibility's role in consumer attitudes and purchase intentions when a high versus a low credibility endorser is used in the ad. *Journal of Business Research*, *44*, 109-116.
- Lambert, D. M., Croxton, K. L., Garcia-Dastugue, S. J., Knemeyer, M., & Rogers, D. S. (2006). *Supply chain management processes, partnerships, performance* (2nd ed.). Jacksonville, FL: Hartley Press.
- Levis Strauss & Co. (2011). *Product impact information*. Retrieved March 23 from <http://levistrauss.com/sustainability/product/product-impact-information>
- Mason, J. (1996). *Qualitative researching*. London: SAGE.
- McCracken, G. D. (1988). *The long interview*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
- Patagonia. (2010). *Environmentalism: The footprint chronicles*. Retrieved August 09 from <http://www.patagonia.com/web/us/patagonia.go?assetid=23429>
- Rossiter, J. L., & Percy, L. (1998). *Advertising communications and promotion management* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Sikdar, S. K. (2003). Sustainable development and sustainability metrics. *AIChE Journal*, *49*, 1928-1932.
- Singh, J., de los Salmones Sanchez, M. M. G., & del Bosque, I. R. (2008). Understanding corporate social responsibility and product perceptions in consumer markets: A cross-cultural evaluation. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *80*, 597-611.
- Slavin, M. (2009). Commentary: Transparency increases firms' credibility. *Daily Journal of Commerce*, p 5.
- Spiggle, S. (1994). Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *21*, 491-503.
- Strutnin, R. (2008, September–October). Managing brands through supply chain visibility. *China Business Review*, *35*(5), 30-33.
- Tran, K. T. L. (2007). Green movement shines at L.A. textile shows. *Women's Wear Daily*, *194*, 12.
- Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. (2010). *Transparency*. Retrieved February 18, 2010, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transparent>
- Vishwanath, T., & Kaufmann, D. (2001). Toward transparency: New approaches and their application to financial markets. *World Bank Research Observer*, *16*, 41-57.
- Walsham, G. (2006). Doing interpretive research. *European Journal of Information Systems*, *15*, 320-330.
- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative research interviewing*. London: SAGE.
- World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Our common future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zeithaml, V. (1988). Consumer perceptions of price, quality and value: A means-end model and synthesis of evidence. *Journal of Marketing*, *52*, 2-22.

Bios

Gargi Bhaduri is a graduate student in the Department of Textile and Apparel Management at University of Missouri. The areas of her research interests include global sourcing supply chain management in the textile and fashion industry, sustainability, information transparency, and consumer behavior.

Jung E. Ha-Brookshire, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Textile and Apparel Management at the University of Missouri. The areas of her research interests include firm/industry identity issues, global sourcing strategies, corporate/consumer social responsibility practices in textiles and apparel market places, and experiential learning.