

Can a Connection with the Past Influence Environmental Concern and Attitude toward Slow Fashion?

Swagata Chakraborty and Amrut Sadachar, Auburn University, USA

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Background and Setting

People have always had a connection with nature since the ancient times, through their cultural values, folklores, and religious rituals (Greenberg, 2015). Before the inception of religious sects, people worshipped nature within an umbrella of pantheism (i.e., identifying God with universe and its creations) (Mellert, 1999). Even today, the cultural values of Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Judaeo-Christianity reflect the importance of worshipping nature (Bintley, 2016; Cusack, 2018; Dafni, 2007; Garreau, 2010; Hestmark, 2000). However, people have severely affected nature through their consumerism. Textile waste alone formed 10.5 million tons of municipal solid waste (MSW) in 2015 that accounted for 7.6% of the total landfilled MSW in the U.S. (Environmental Protection Agency, 2015). While slow fashion (i.e., slow consumption and production) fosters sustainability, consumers' need for style and self-expression leads to unsustainable apparel consumption (McNeill & Moore, 2015). How then sustainable apparel consumption be encouraged? Despite the apparent connection between culture and protecting nature (Garreau, 2010), there is dearth of empirical support on how connection with indigenous cultural values can translate into positive environmental concern and attitude toward slow fashion for conserving natural resources. Therefore, the purpose of our study was to explore how (i) consumers' connection with indigenous cultural values may influence their environmental concern and attitude toward slow fashion; (ii) environmental concern may influence attitude toward slow fashion and; (iii) if the environmental concern mediates the relationship between connection with indigenous cultural values and attitude toward slow fashion.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

As indigenous cultural values are hard-wired with the idea of nature veneration universally, people highly connected with their cultural values will have high concern for their respective culturally represented sacred elements of nature (e.g., trees, animals, rivers, etc.) (Dafni, 2007; Fowler-Smith, 2018; Garreau, 2010; Haberman, 2017; Hiebert, 2001; Mellert, 1999). As such, it could be expected that these people who are highly connected with their cultural values will protect nature by the virtue of their cultural belief systems, rituals, and rites (Fowler-Smith, 2018; Garreau, 2010; Haberman, 2017; Hiebert, 2001; Mellert, 1999). Given that positive attitude toward environment can form positive concern for environment (Ghazali et al., 2018), people highly connected with their indigenous cultural values can form high concern for environment. A strong connection to indigenous cultural values implies an individual's perceived importance for traditions, moral values, localism, and love for nature (Cusack, 2018; 2007; Hiebert, 2001; Keswani, 2017). Slow fashion too, imbues the elements of tradition, moral values, localism, and sustainability (Jung & Jin, 2014). Therefore, it could be expected that a strong connection with indigenous cultural values will positively relate to the attitude toward slow fashion. For example, slow fashion thrives on slow production and consumption thereby minimizing exploitation of natural resources (Jung & Jin, 2014). It resonates with indigenous cultural values that encourage self-transcendence and identification of oneself indistinguishable from nature, protector of nature, and contributor to nature, while discouraging exploiting nature for individual benefit (Johnson et al., 2017; Perera & Hewege, 2018). Based on this discussion, we proposed the following hypotheses:

Connection with indigenous cultural values positively influences environmental concern (**H1**) and attitude toward slow fashion (**H2**). Environmental concern positively influences attitude toward slow

fashion (**H3**) and; Environmental concern mediates the relationship between connection with indigenous cultural values and attitude toward slow fashion (**H4**).

Method and Data Analysis

An online Qualtrics survey was administered on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to collect the data ($n = 300$). The national sample of U.S. millennials (born between 1981-1996), who were knowledgeable of their indigenous cultural values, were recruited to participate in the survey. Extant measurement scales were adapted to measure environmental concern (Davis, Green & Reed, 2009; Ghazali et al., 2018), attitude toward slow fashion (Jung & Jin, 2014), and connection with indigenous cultural values (Ghazali et al., 2018; Sharma, 2010). All the variables were measured in 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Confirmatory Factor Analysis was performed in Mplus (version 8.4) which fitted the data well ($\chi^2 = 847.68$, $df = 372$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2 / df = 2.28$; RMSEA = .07; CFI = .95, TLI = .94, SRMR = .07). All the measurement scales were valid (Average Variance Extracted > .50) and reliable (composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha > .80). The hypotheses were tested in Structural Equation Modelling as a comprehensive model in Mplus. The model fitted the data well ($\chi^2 = 614.22$, $df = 322$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2 / df = 1.91$; RMSEA = .06; CFI = .97, TLI = .96, SRMR = .06). **H1** ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), **H2** ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$), **H3** ($\beta = .64$, $p < .001$), and **H4** ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$, C.I. = [.08, .20]) were supported. The variance explained in attitude toward slow fashion ($R^2 = 64.7\%$, $p < .001$) was significant and environmental concern ($R^2 = 4.8\%$, $p = .055$) was marginally significant. Additional analysis through independent samples t-test indicated that mean scores of environmental concern ($M_{\text{Female}} = 5.52$, $SD_{\text{Female}} = 1.22$, $M_{\text{Male}} = 5.17$, $SD_{\text{Male}} = 1.24$, $F(298) = 1.81$, $p = .02$) and attitude toward slow fashion ($M_{\text{Female}} = 4.86$, $SD_{\text{Female}} = 1.08$, $M_{\text{Male}} = 4.52$, $SD_{\text{Male}} = 1.24$, $F(298) = 3.59$, $p = .01$) among the female respondents were significantly higher than that of the male respondents.

Discussion and Conclusion

We filled some important gaps in the literature by providing empirical evidence that the connection with indigenous cultural values can indeed positively influence environmental concern and the attitude toward slow fashion. More importantly, we found that environmental concern mediates the relationship between connection with indigenous cultural values and the attitude toward slow fashion. Therefore, while a high environmental concern can translate into a positive attitude toward slow fashion, connection with indigenous cultural values forms an important variable that can further foster the positive attitude toward slow fashion. Based on these findings, we emphasize on the potential of connection with indigenous cultural values and recommend the policy makers and sustainable apparel brands to consider this variable while developing advertisements and marketing strategies to foster intentions for sustainable apparel consumption. However, we did not test the influence of the aforementioned variables on a behavioral outcome (e.g., intentions for sustainable apparel consumption), which could be addressed in future research. Also, we found that the females scored higher on their environmental concern and attitude toward slow fashion. In similar lines, Bulut et al. (2017) and Brough et al. (2016) suggested that intentions for sustainable apparel consumption is higher among females than males. Therefore, it could be that gender is a potential moderator in the aforementioned relationships, which could be investigated in future research.

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