
An Institutionalized Latent Concept, Cosmopolitan Consumer Orientation, as a
Predictor of Sustainable Apparel Consumption

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Cosmopolitanism can sometimes be used as a loose term to communicate interaction with products, cultures and individuals from foreign countries. This latent concept is scarcely used in the study of the apparel and textiles context. It has been argued that a cosmopolitan approach incorporates a more ethical, citizenship perspective, thus more responsible contribution in a global community that is not limited by country borders (Holton, 2009). To explore the potential of identifying a cosmopolitan consumer segment with positive disposition towards sustainability, this study proposes a conceptual framework to position the concept of consumer cosmopolitanism in the apparel context as a predictor of intention to purchase sustainable apparel.

Literature depicts the cosmopolitan consumer orientation as the “extent to which a consumer exhibits an open-mindedness toward foreign countries and cultures, appreciates the diversity brought about by the availability of products from different national and cultural origins, and is positively disposed toward consuming products from foreign countries” (Riefler, Diamantopoulos, & Siguaw, 2012, p. 287). As per cosmopolitan consumer profiling, the better education and financial status found in cosmopolitans (Riefler, et. al, 2012) tends to show increased knowledge of environmental issues (Stern, 2000). Additionally, the across-border consumption lifestyle is expected to enhance awareness of environmental degradation and protection (Egan & Mullin, 2012), therefore cosmopolitans are more exposed to and know more about environmental issues (Grinstein & Riefler, 2015), including apparel sustainability issues. Sustainability is built on three dimensions. The social dimension of sustainability refers to the well-being of people and communities (Elkington, 1998), the environmental dimension to the compromising of natural resources and the economic dimension to value creation and financial performance (Bansal, 2002).

The theoretical foundation for the model derives from Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1980) theory of planned behavior. Cosmopolitan consumer orientation not only impacts consumer’s apparel sustainability knowledge, which then impacts attitude towards sustainable development, but also directly impacts attitude towards sustainable development. That is, cosmopolitan consumer orientation has direct and indirect effects on attitude towards sustainable development. Cosmopolitans are early adopters of technology, including green technology (Riefler, et. al., 2012). They take risks and are less influenced by subjective norm. The level of usage and familiarity with technology has a moderating effect on both relationships as shown in the model (Figure 1). Finally, attitude towards sustainable development impacts purchase intention of sustainable apparel positively.

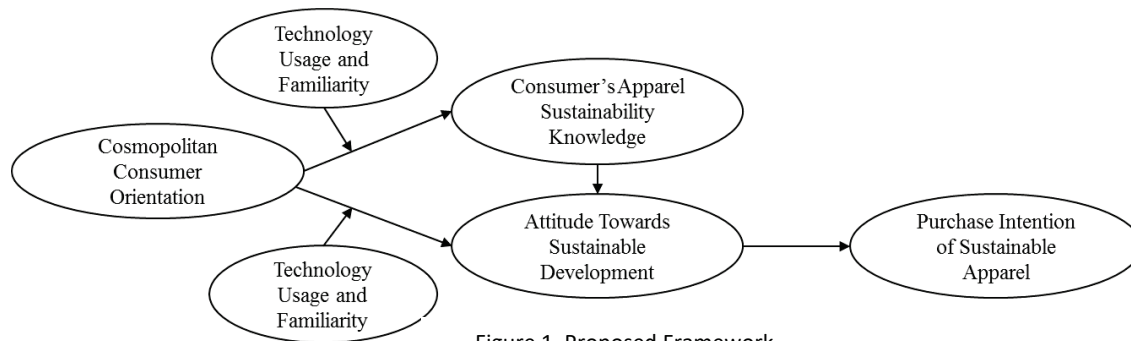


Figure 1. Proposed Framework

To the authors' knowledge this is the first model that studies the effect of the cosmopolitan consumer orientation on the purchase intention of sustainable apparel. This model has the potential to provide a cross national framework to compare countries, cultures and/or create clusters with similar attributes/interests to enable better understanding and better management of the sustainable apparel offer to consumer segments. Firms could benefit from the knowledge that this framework provide in order to adjust consumer messages and supply chains as trends indicate that sustainability is a launch pad to reach environmentally conscious consumers and to enhance the overall brand image in developed countries (Faisal, 2010). From an academic perspective, an analysis of clusters of cosmopolitan consumers in BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) or CIVETS (Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa) countries, for example, would provide insights on sustainable apparel consumption

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