



What Drives Green Apparel Consumption? “We” beyond “I”

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Introduction and Purpose. The fashion industry has been under excruciating pressure to solve environmental issues. To tackle these issues and create a business opportunity, the fashion business pays attention to the sustainable apparel market (Fact.MR, 2023). Especially, recent acts such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) developed by the United Nations and consumers’ advocacy for action on climate change through their social networks convey that the battle to sustain the environment is a social/collective matter beyond a personal one. This study will take two different paths (the individual and social-driven processes) to explain consumer consumption of green apparel. Traditionally, green consumption has been examined at the personal level as evidenced by widely applied theories such as Fishbein and Ajzen’s Theory of Reasoned Action (1975), Stern et al.’s theory of value-belief-norm (VBN, 1999), and Van der Werff and Steg’s value-identity-personal norm (VIP, 2016). Recently, Fritsche et al. (2018) developed a social identity model of pro-environmental action (SIMPEA), building on the assumption that people interpret information on environmental issues as a social/collective phenomenon. By integrating the VIP and SIMPEA together, this study examines the roles of biospheric values and green identity (at individual and group levels) in shaping a personal norm, which leads to green apparel purchase behavior and ultimately continuance intention.

Hypotheses Development. When individuals value a social issue, they tend to have a positive attitude and behavior toward the issue. Individual biospheric value is a value associated with pro-environmental action (Wang et al., 2021). People with biospheric values are likely to pursue pro-environmental behavior because they find their identity aligns with their values (Wang et al., 2021). VIP theory further elaborates that self-green identity (i.e., an individual's overall perceived identification with the typical green consumer) forms a personal norm (i.e., moral obligation) that ultimately leads to behavior (Van der Werff & Steg, 2016). In the green apparel context, Kim and Seock (2019) found that an individual’s norms related to pro-environmental behavior drove green apparel purchasing behavior.

H1. Self-green identity and personal norm serially mediate the relationship between individual biospheric value and green apparel purchase behavior.

Environmentalism is more of a social phenomenon (Fritsche et al., 2018) and its movement often occurs through collectivistic values among a group of people in order to protect their identity within society (Stern et al., 1999). Fritsche et al.’s SIMPEA illuminates that individuals’ in-group identity is an important determinant in their response to pro-environmental behavior. Further, Wang et al. (2021) revealed that group biospheric value drove pro-environmental behavior by heightening environmental group identity. When consumers feel a social green identity (i.e., a group's overall perceived identification with the

typical green consumer group) driven by group biospheric value, they tend to buy green apparel (Valaei & Nikhashemi, 2017). Additionally, we predict that current green apparel consumption behavior influences the intention to continue such behavior.

H2. Social-green identity and personal norm serially mediate the relationship between group biospheric value and green apparel purchase behavior.

H3. Green apparel purchase behavior positively affects continuance intention toward green apparel purchasing.

Methods and Results. Data were collected from 412 U.S. consumers using an online consumer panel survey via Prolific ($M_{age} = 37$, 47.6% male). The scales were modified from previous studies. Personal and group biospheric values (Wang et al., 2021) were measured by the importance of protecting the environment as a guiding principle in their personal and social group' lives, respectively. Self- and group-green identity (Wang et al., 2021) were measured by the extent to which acting environmentally friendly is an important part of who they are and their social members, respectively. Personal norm (e.g., "I feel morally obliged to wear eco-products to protect the environment") was modified from Lee et al. (2021); green apparel consumption (e.g., "I buy apparel made by environmentally responsible companies") was measured using items from Jain and Kaur (2004); continuance intention toward green apparel purchase (e.g., "The next time you buy clothing, how likely you will choose eco-friendly clothing?") was captured by the scale from Kareklas et al. (2014). All measures were rated on a 7-point scale.

Both CFA and SEM showed satisfactory model fits (AMOS 28.0). All paths were significant (Figure 1). Additionally, we estimated 5,000 bias-corrected bootstraps with 95% confidence (AMOS 28.0) to test the serial mediation effect and found support for each path: the individual-driven path ($\beta = 0.43$, CI [0.32; 0.55], $p < .001$) and social-driven path ($\beta = 0.07$, [0.004; 0.147], $p < 0.05$). That is, individual (group) biospheric value enhanced green apparel purchase behavior through heightened self (social) green identity followed by increased personal norm, supporting H1 and H2. Enhanced green apparel purchase behavior further increased intention to continue purchasing green apparel, supporting H3.

Discussion. Theoretically, the study found that green apparel consumption practice is not only an individual but also a social phenomenon. Green consumption behavior and continuance intention toward green apparel purchasing are determined through both individual- and social-level processes, highlighting the importance of integrating VIP and SIMPEA theories to explain the phenomenon. Practically, when marketers promote green apparel, they can accentuate how buying green apparel can serve customers' self-identity as well as social identity – getting approval from their social groups. The sample in this study consisted of socially homogeneous US consumers. Comparing the difference between collectivistic (e.g., Asian) and individualistic (e.g., European) cultures on group value and social identity will further extend our findings in future studies.

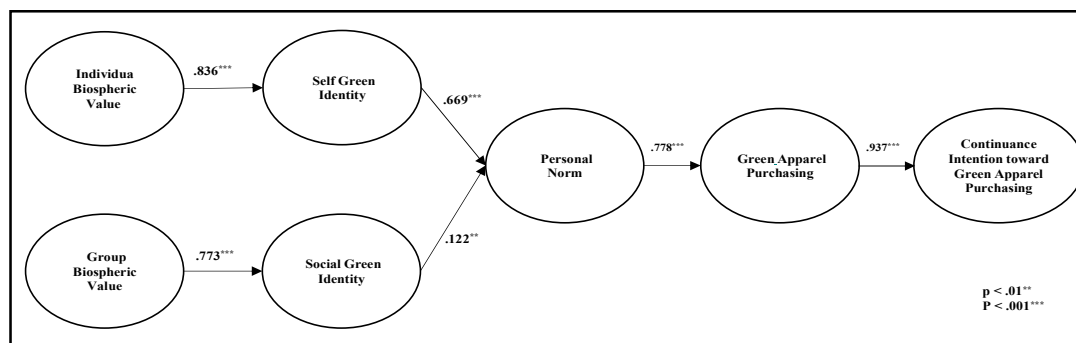


Figure 1. Research Model

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