



## Socially Responsible Apparel Purchasing Intention, Knowledge, and Attitudes: Cross-Cultural Comparison of U.S. and Korean Consumers

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The purpose of this study is to cross-culturally examine consumer groups most likely to engage in socially responsible (SR) apparel purchasing behavior. Numerous business studies have investigated the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR), noting positive relationships between CSR initiatives and financial performance (e.g., McGuire, Sundgren, & Schneeweis, 1988) and attitudes held by consumers (e.g., Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004). However, studies have also shown that consumers are often unwilling to pay premium prices for SR products (e.g., Creyer & Ross, 1997) and are often skeptical and/or cynical toward CSR campaigns (e.g., Swaen & Vanhamme, 2004). According to Hofstede (1991), consumer behavior and business practices are culturally bound. To date, most CSR studies and SR apparel purchasing behavior studies have been examined within a single country and very few studies have compared CSR activities cross-culturally. As part of the current study, data were collected in academic settings in both South Korea ( $n = 215$ ) and the United States ( $n = 325$ ). Questionnaire items included the Knowledge of and Concern with Apparel Social Issues Scale (Dickson, 1999) and the Sustainable Apparel Purchasing Behavior Scale (Kozar & Hiller Connell, 2010). The ages of participants ranged from 18-29 years of age. Among both samples, the majority of participants were female (73.7% of Korean sample; 81.2% of U.S. sample).

Two important differences in participants' SR apparel purchasing intentions were found. As compared to U.S. participants, the Korean participants were less willing to settle for a lower quality garment in order to purchase from a SR apparel firm ( $t = -7.96, p < .05$ ). This may be an indication that Korean consumers, as compared to U.S. consumers, perceive product quality as a more important attribute in their apparel purchasing decisions and are less willing to purchase SR goods if perceived quality expectations are not met. Future research should explore other barriers perceived by Korean consumers in engaging in SR apparel purchasing behavior. For example, in one study, researchers determined that U.S. consumers were impeded in their SR apparel purchasing intentions due to the perceived need for increased resources in terms of money and time. Participants also perceived inadequate availability of SR apparel product options and insufficient information about sustainable apparel firms (Hiller Connell & Kozar, 2010).

Interestingly, the two samples did not significantly differ in the willingness to pay premium prices for SR goods. However, as part of the current study, Korean consumers were less willing to buy clothing from SR businesses just to support CSR initiatives ( $t = -22.45, p < .05$ ). It is possible that U.S. consumers may consider the SR of a firm more frequently when making purchasing decisions; this willingness may also be impacted by consumers' awareness and depth

of understanding of SR issues. For example, Korean participants indicated being less knowledgeable about SR clothing businesses ( $t = -3.89, p < .05$ ) and held stronger beliefs that apparel goods should be labeled to differentiate among SR firms and those produced by mainstream commercial brands ( $t = 3.21, p < .05$ ). Korean participants also reported lower scores on their beliefs that they are informed about issues in foreign clothing manufacturing factories ( $t = -2.48, p < .05$ ) and concern with issues surrounding workers in foreign factories ( $t = -9.75, p < .05$ ). In fact, although not significant, U.S. participants held stronger attitudes toward other apparel social issues, such as the banning of goods in the marketplace produced by child laborers, the need for government regulations to protect apparel manufacturing workers, and the willingness to boycott clothing sold by firms that exploit workers in the production of goods.

The findings of this study are useful in contributing to a theoretical framework which deepens the interpretation of consumers' decision making process cross-culturally. This is significant to firms with a strong commitment to CSR; utilizing a comprehensive framework provides answers about those consumers most likely to engage in sustainable apparel purchasing practices. For firms seeking to establish a strong rapport and differential advantage in the supply chain, it is noteworthy to identify those consumer groups in the global marketplace most motivated by CSR in their purchasing decisions.

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