

Consumers willing to pay more for sustainable apparel if business is transparent, study finds

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The public often views the apparel industry as lacking transparency, sustainability and ethical practices. Scandals like child labor, sweat shops, and environmentally damaging manufacturing methods have alienated many consumers from the industry. Now, University of Missouri researchers have found that consumers are willing to support apparel companies that do have employ sustainable and ethical practices; but those businesses have to prove it.

Gargi Bhaduri, a doctoral student, and Jung Ha-Brookshire, an assistant professor of textile and apparel management in the College of Human Environmental Sciences at the University of Missouri, surveyed apparel consumers to find out if they were willing to pay a premium for products produced using sustainable and ethical methods. She found that consumers would be willing to pay 15 to 20 percent more for such products. However, she also found that consumers are likely to remain skeptical about apparel companies' claims of transparency and sustainability.

"While consumers seem willing to support businesses that do practice sustainability and ethics, general distrust in the transparency of all apparel businesses tend to keep consumers from [spending money](#) on those businesses with sustainable practices," Bhaduri said. "To solve this issue, consumers seem to demand a universal standard authorizing agency to verify the claims of the businesses with transparent practices."

Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire found that consumer [skepticism](#) of corporate transparency stems from the suspicion that sustainability claims are falsified or exaggerated by apparel companies as marketing ploys. Their study suggests that consumers feel the need for authentication of these businesses' claims from one standardized and objective authority, like the government, whom they can trust.

"The apparel industry is one of the most globalized modern industries," Bhaduri said. "Multiple countries are involved in manufacturing a single garment, making 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 concerning the global manufacturing processes."

Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire also found that consumers want information regarding product sustainability to be available conveniently. They suggests the use of such as hangtags, care labels, and point-of-purchase tags with clear information about their sustainable [business](#) practices so [consumers](#) can make an educated purchase decision.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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