

American consumers overvalue US-produced apparel, study finds

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In today's globalized economy, a large percentage of apparel products are multinational products as raw materials are produced, transported and assembled in different countries. However, consumers have little information about where and to what extent their apparel is produced domestically or overseas. Now, University of Missouri researchers have found that American consumers place a much higher value on apparel produced entirely in the US with US raw materials as opposed to products produced partially or entirely overseas. The value is so high, in fact, that MU experts worry it could be damaging to US apparel manufacturing businesses and the overall economy.

In a study published in *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, Jung Ha-Brookshire, an assistant professor in the textile and apparel management department in the College of Human Environmental Sciences at MU, surveyed [American consumers](#) to determine the value they place on apparel produced in different countries. She showed participants a cotton shirt, told them it was made in [China](#), and said it sold for \$40 in [retail stores](#). She then showed them the same piece of clothing and told them it was made in the US with US cotton. The study participants valued the US cotton shirt at \$57, which is more than 42 percent higher than the same shirt produced in China. Ha-Brookshire says this demonstrates a troubling trend for American [consumers](#).

"Americans tend to severely overvalue apparel produced entirely in the US," Ha-Brookshire said. "This is concerning because if Americans place higher values on these US products, they perceive those products

to be too expensive and are less likely to buy them, opting instead to buy similar Chinese-made products perceived to be more in their price range. To help US apparel businesses create and maintain domestic jobs, American consumers need to have a realistic understanding of the value of apparel made in the US."

One positive finding in Ha-Brookshire's study was that American consumers do value apparel made with US-grown cotton, even if the finished goods are manufactured overseas. When she showed the survey participants the same cotton shirt and told them it was made in China from US cotton, participants valued the shirt at \$47, or 17 percent higher than a shirt with only a "Made in China" label. Ha-Brookshire says this increased value is not large enough to be prohibitive for consumers.

"US cotton growers can utilize these findings by better indicating what apparel is manufactured from their cotton," Ha-Brookshire said.

"Currently, retailers are only required to indicate where the apparel was manufactured or sewn, but if consumers could see that apparel produced in China was made with US cotton, they would probably be more likely to purchase it."

Ha-Brookshire also will present her research in November at the Textile Product Labeling Summit at the University of Missouri. The summit will consist of discussions among national policy makers, researchers, consumer advocates and industry leaders about important topics regarding current textile product labeling practices and regulations. For more information about the summit, visit

<http://muconf.missouri.edu/textilelabeling/index.html>.

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