Globally-Sourced or American-Made Apparel: Post-election Consumers' Preferences

Katie Oorlog
Auburn University, kmo0010@auburn.edu

Amrut Sadachar
Auburn University, amrut@auburn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/itaa_proceedings

Part of the Fashion Business Commons, Fashion Design Commons, and the Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts Commons

https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/itaa_proceedings/2017/posters/192

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences and Symposia at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Annual Conference Proceedings by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Globally-Sourced or American-Made Apparel: Post-election Consumers’ Preferences

Katie Oorlog and Amrut Sadachar, Auburn University, USA

Keywords: American-made, apparel, fair labor, country of origin

Background and Purpose: The allure of American-made apparel reflects national history, identity, and loyalty that may not be achieved through overseas sourcing. During 1960s, nearly 95% of apparel worn in the United States was produced domestically (Wee, 2013). This situation has changed drastically, and presently, 97% of apparel sold in the United States has been attributed to overseas manufacturing (Wee, 2013). American textile and apparel production employment has taken a record downfall of nearly 50% over the past decade (Hall, 2014). More recently, there has been a rise in the “Made in the USA” trend (Sherman, 2015). A limited number of firms (e.g., L.L.Bean, Filson) have attempted to revive domestic manufacturing by producing “Made in the USA” apparel in conjunction with replenishing domestic jobs. Some apparel companies even claim that their domestic manufacturing allows them to command a premium for American-made goods (Perry, Lavelle, & Barnett, 2004). With a year-long presidential campaign focused on ‘Make America Great Again’, there was a huge emphasis on increasing the domestic manufacturing and employment opportunities (Flurry, 2016).

With the recent election of President Donald Trump, it was timely and important to survey American consumers to ask about their awareness and preferences for apparel made domestically. Smith (2013) found that for many consumers, it was important where their apparel was made, but they are not willing to pay more for an apparel product that is American-made compared to globally-sourced. With the given background and current scenario, the purpose of the present study was to survey consumers and seek their opinion and preferences on various aspects related to apparel manufacturing (e.g., country of origin, willingness to pay, fair labor).

Methods: An online survey was used to collect data from U.S. nationals which resulted in 72 useable responses based on questions asking about consumers’ awareness and preferences on apparel manufacturing locations, country of origin, apparel made in America, willingness to pay for “Made in America” apparel, and fair labor practices. Specific questions asked were: 1) Are you aware of where the clothes you purchase are manufactured?, 2) Do you look at the apparel label for country of origin information when making a purchase?, 3) Would you prefer to purchase apparel that are made in America?, 4) Are you willing to pay more for apparel products that are made in America and how much?, and 5) What is your opinion about the fair labor in apparel manufacturing? Two demographic questions (i.e., gender and age) were also included. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data and to investigate the current consumer scenario. SPSS 22.0 was used for analyzing the data.

Results: A total of 72 useable responses were collected (male 33% and female 67%) with the majority (68%) of them below 30 years of age. Fifty-three percent of the participants responded that they are not aware of where their clothing is manufactured. Out of the total number of respondents who answered, 39% (sometimes), 33% (rarely), and 22% (never) look at the apparel label for country of origin information when making a purchase. Fifty-three percent of the participants stated that they would prefer to purchase apparel that are made in America, whereas 33% stated that they would sometimes. Only 22% stated that they would never be willing to pay more for apparel products that are made in America. When asked about fair labor in apparel manufacturing, 67% of the participants stated that they were not familiar with the topic, whereas 25% stated that they had mixed feelings about it.
label for country of origin information while making a purchase. Only five percent said they always look at the country of origin label while making purchase. Also, 68% of the respondents indicated that they would prefer to purchase American-made apparel. A significant majority (61%) responded that they would be willing to pay more for American-made clothing, and 71% of them are willing to pay 1%-10% premium for American-made garments. Older consumers (51+ age) were willing to pay more for domestic manufacturing, even steeper price increases than 10%. More than 50% of the sample did not know where their clothes were manufactured, but would prefer to purchase from brands that practice fair labor.

**Conclusions/Implications:** In the current scenario, majority of consumers are not aware and they hardly pay attention to the country of origin label. The brand message needs to be apparent to consumers in a relatively simple manner about how their clothes are manufactured and where this manufacturing takes place. Apparel brands need to do a better job at marketing and labeling. One solution can be apparel company’s affiliation with the Fair Labor Association and making information easily accessible to consumers while they are deciding to make a purchase. For example, *Not My Style*, a London based iPhone app, tells consumers about the transparency of their favorite fashion brands (Scarano, 2017). It is in a fashion brand’s best interest to consider domestic manufacturing and fair labor use. Potential for profit through increased market share can align with the overwhelming majority of consumers’ willingness to buy and spend more for American-made apparel by paying 10% premium. The opportunity for American-made apparel looks positive. Most don’t know where their clothing is manufactured, but most are willing to pay more for American-made. These results would be interesting to see how they are connected to individual’s political viewpoint/voting for a future study. Limitations of the present study are a small sample size and simple analysis. For future studies, broader and larger sample will be tested along with rigorous statistical analysis.

**References**