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The demand for ethically made apparel has been on the rise in recent years (Hassan et al., 2013; Harrison & Scorse, 2006). Concern over human rights violations and working conditions in apparel factories has become a hot topic for consumers. This increased concern has led to a greater demand for transparency in the apparel supply chain (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). Increased transparency allows for the consumer to make an informed decision when purchasing ethically produced apparel (Harris, 2015). When making purchase decisions, consumers tend to use information from multiple sources (Peterson & Merino, 2003), evaluating the source and content before making their purchase decisions. While previous studies have explored the connection between knowledge and purchase decisions in regards to sustainable apparel, the connection in regards to ethically-produced apparel has not yet been fully explored.

The two-fold purpose of this study was to explore consumers' knowledge of unethical supply chain practices, and to understand what this knowledge means for their purchasing behavior. Using a qualitative methodology, in-depth interviews were conducted with nineteen individuals who have purchased ethically produced apparel in the last two years. Interviews lasted for approximately thirty minutes to an hour and were recorded with participant consent. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and interpreted thematically. Four conceptual areas emerged: *Consumer Knowledge*, *Preferred Sources*, *Trust*, and *Knowledge Impact*. Within these conceptual areas, nine themes emerged and were used to structure the interpretation. Based on the interpretation, participants' level of knowledge and preferred sources were identified. The ways they use the information in their purchase decisions was also explored. Based on these findings, several recommendations were made, including: (a) utilizing online sources, such as

social media or online news outlets to connect with consumers, (b) providing consumers with data and testimonials to validate the claims made, (c) using third party certifications that the consumer can recognize, (d) incorporating ethical ideals into the make-up of the company, and (e) providing alternative avenues to connect with the consumer.

Because there is a limited amount of research that explores the connection between knowledge, trust, and purchase decisions in regards to ethical apparel, the results of this study provide an in-depth understanding of the role of knowledge in ethical apparel purchasing behaviors. Future empirical research is needed to further investigate the factors affecting preferred source choices and the idea of limited consumption as an ethical consumption choice. Such research would deepen the overall understanding of the role of knowledge in consumers' decisions to purchase ethically produced apparel.

INFORMATION AND THE ETHICAL APPAREL CONSUMER:

AN EXPLORATION OF THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN

KNOWLEDGE, TRUST, AND PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

by

Haley Elizabeth Hendershot

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction to the problem the study aims to address, background of the topics discussed, and the research purpose and objectives. The research design is presented, and the significance of the study is outlined.

Statement of the Problem

The aim of this study was to explore consumer knowledge of working conditions in apparel factories, specifically, the goal was to understand where they gain this knowledge, and what this knowledge means for their purchase intent. Consumer concern for ethically made products has become a greater concern in recent years (Hassan et al., 2013; Harrison & Scorse, 2006). This growing concern on the part of the consumer has led to responses by companies. Companies are now putting more focus and effort into making sure that the factories they use meet their safety requirements and provide suitable working conditions through both increased regulations and corporate social responsibility policies (Emmelhainz & Adams, 1999; Goworek, 2001).

In an effort to reduce cost at the demand of consumers, many apparel companies have moved production of their products overseas. While this has kept prices low, it has also led to a lack of control over supply chain operations, allowing unsafe working conditions, labor exploitation and low pay in the factories (LeBaron et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2016). Not only has this lack of control created a space for dangers in working conditions, but companies also run the risk of the factories they are partnered with subcontracting out the agreed upon work, which leads to a lack of oversight of the factory conditions and methods used in the production of the products (LeBaron et al., 2018). Ultimately, the benefits of moving production overseas to keep costs down comes at the risk of a breakdown in regulations and standards (Clarke-Sather &

1

Cobb, 2019). This lack of control and breakdown of standards can create an unsafe and inhumane working environment for factory workers. While consumers have enjoyed the lower prices that come from using foreign factories, the increased social consciousness about issues like human rights and sustainability has forced the consumer to reevaluate the products they use due to the way they are produced (Rashid & Byun, 2018). In turn, the consumer has put pressure on companies to not only improve working conditions and production practices, but to also be more transparent about their supply chains.

As a result of moving production overseas and losing the ability to have a more secure hold on what is happening in the factories, multiple human rights issues have arisen across the industry. These violations take many forms, including labor violations, low wages, and unsafe building structures (Flanagan, 2006). For example, in Bangladesh, the Rana Plaza garment factory collapse of 2013 took 1,138 lives. The collapse was due to an unsafe physical structure and gross neglect on the part of the factory owners (Appelbaum & Lichtenstein, 2016). Along with unsafe buildings, violations can occur through labor exploitation, which typically appears as child labor or forced labor. For example, Nike has inadvertently relied on child labor in the past due to the factories that they contract with overseas (Burns & Spar, 2000). Instances of forced labor and low wages are also prevalent in the apparel supply chain in Tamil Nadu, India where a special scheme of locking young women from poor families into forced labor is rampant (Dickson & Warren, 2020). When these instances come to light, companies have to not only deal with the negative fallout for their brand image, but also how to rectify the situation and ensure better conditions in the factories they utilize going forward (Emmelhainz & Adams, 1999).

With the increase in concern over human rights violations and safety of factory workers comes the importance of alliances and associations that operate outside of the government and

corporations. These alliances allow for companies to have a more concrete and workable plan of action in regard to regulating the factories they partner with. These alliances tend to be made up of companies, universities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and non-profit organizations. They focus on creating industry guidelines, setting standards, and auditing for their set requirements (Gereffi et al., 2001; Protecting Workers' Rights Worldwide | Fair Labor Association, n.d.). Some of these associations also offer accreditation or certification as a way to inform consumers of the level of standards met by the companies (Gereffi et al., 2001; Hale & Held, 2011). The companies who join these alliances agree to meeting the standards set forth and helping to dictate what that looks like in their global supply chains.

There are multiple alliances and coalitions that partner with companies around the world. Two alliances that started in the United States and have helped in shaping the way the industry regulates itself are *The Fair Labor Association* and the *Fairtrade Labeling Organization*. *The Fair Labor Association* is focused on creating a set standard for labor safety, including the safety of the physical structures that house the factories. This association helped create standards for companies to implement at the international level, allowing for a cohesiveness of guidelines regardless of location (Hale & Held, 2011). The *Fairtrade Labeling Organization* is focused on certifying that a product or company is producing goods in a sustainable manner, in safe conditions, and with fair pay. As a result, they offer assurance to the consumer, through their auditing of the supply chain, that the products they are purchasing are produced in an ethical manner (Hale & Held, 2011). As the consumer becomes more educated, their demands for transparency, regulation, and ownership of failures by apparel companies has grown. In an effort to alleviate consumer concerns about working conditions, companies have taken part in efforts to be more forthcoming about their practices and regulations. Along with partnering with NGOs

3

and alliances to let consumers know the standards and regulations they utilize in their factories, many companies now also share their supply chain information in an effort to be fully transparent with their consumers. The thesis explored how consumers seek knowledge about apparel supply chain practices, and what they do with this knowledge.

Background

In order to address consumer concern over unethical working conditions, companies have taken steps towards being more transparent with their supply chains. This transparency allows for consumers to gather information about the regulations and factory conditions to make informed decisions regarding their intention to purchase the products (Harris, 2015). Consumers require adequate knowledge to make decisions they feel confident in. When consumers feel confident in their knowledge, they tend to have positive intentions towards purchasing (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). When gathering information, consumers may find that companies are not always completely transparent. Multiple factors can play into the consumer's uncertainty about the information they have gathered, both in terms of the information itself and the source that provided it (Hassan et al., 2013). This uncertainty or distrust can lead to a lack of confidence and thus disrupt the consumer's positive intention to purchase.

Transparency in the Apparel Supply Chain

As consumers become more concerned about the ways in which companies source and produce the products they sell, they have pushed for an increase in transparency about supply chain practices (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). This demand for transparency can been seen in changes in government regulations like the *California Transparency in Supply Chain Act* that the state of California enacted in 2010. This act requires companies to publish what they are doing to fight human trafficking in their supply chains, as well as place their audits and

certifications in a conspicuous place on their websites so that consumers can make more informed decisions when purchasing products (Harris, 2015).

Outside of government-mandated transparency, some brands have also taken it upon themselves to be transparent without outside requirements by making pledges and being more open about their supply chain in terms of working conditions and sustainability, as well as establishing stricter Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) guidelines and goals for themselves. Some brands have taken the push for ethical or fair-trade products a step further than being transparent or socially responsible and made it not only a goal, but the very essence of their brand. Brands like Everlane, People Tree, and Patagonia have integrated ethical production practices into their brand image and corporate structure (*Environmental & Social Footprint*, n.d.; *Everlane*, n.d.; *Our Story*, n.d.). Everlane focuses their brand image on their ideals of exceptional quality, ethical factories, and radical transparency. Everlane works to find ethical factories to partner with, providing a list of their factories on their website detailing the factory location, the number of employees, how they found the factory and highlighting what the factory provides as well as information about the factory owners (*Everlane*, n.d.b). The brand promises personal relationships with its factories as well as third party auditors. Along with a detailed factory breakdown, Everlane provides in-depth production information on each product, noting the factory it was made in and transparent pricing details. Everlane also works to source sustainable materials and partners with third parties to certify their materials, suppliers, and production processes (*Everlane*, n.d.c). The company seeks to provide pieces meant to last and focuses less on trends.

People Tree focuses their brand image on being a truly conscious clothing company. According to their website, People Tree puts great importance on integrating Fair Trade

principles into every part of their business. The company works with fair trade certified artisans, factories, and farmers to ensure ethical treatment and sustainable production practices (*Fair Trade Fashion,* n.d.). People Tree provides information on the materials used and the makers in product descriptions on its website. Along with certifications, People Tree focuses heavily on the empowerment of their workers through the People Tree Foundation. Per the website, The People Tree Foundation works to better the lives of individuals in developing countries, supports community development, training and support as well as campaigning for issues of Fair Trade (*What is the People Tree Foundation?,* n.d.).

As a final example, Patagonia prides itself on an inventive spirit focused on environmentally friendly manufacturing (*Environmental & Social Footprint*, n.d.). Patagonia offers general information on the factories they partner with and the initiatives they are taking for both ethical and environmental concerns in the production process on their website. Patagonia also offers a program called *Worn Wear*, which allows consumers to fix their Patagonia apparel, trade in their used garments and even purchase reused apparel with the aim to cut down on environmental waste (*Better Than New*, n.d.). Patagonia integrates ethical concerns and transparency into their structure by also setting up multiple initiatives focused on giving back and supporting their consumers, with a pledge to give 1% of the company's earnings to environmental nonprofits and providing a platform for their consumers to connect with different activist groups as well as helping with resources for those groups' initiatives (Environmental Activism, n.d.).

All three brands make an effort to implement ethical practices in every aspect of their business and work to share those goals and practices with their consumers. When companies are transparent in their efforts and processes, it allows for the consumer to access and gather the

information they need to make informed decisions. Conversely, it can be assumed that when there is a lack of transparency and the information is limited, the consumer may not feel confident in their decisions.

Knowledge and Purchase Intention

When consumers are looking for ethically-made products, knowledge is key (Dickson, 2000). Transparency in the supply chain is one of the ways that companies can inform consumers of their practices and the conditions under which their products were made. It is also helpful to be explicit in sharing the information with consumers in ways such as hang tags, call outs on websites, and purposeful labeling (Hustvedt & Bernard, 2010; Hyllegard et al., 2012). In one study, consumers were found to respond positively to these ethical call outs when given the option of a product with ethical production regulations highlighted versus a similar product without such information (Prasad et al., 2004). Another study found that consumers who are already focused on these attributes will show an increased level of purchase intention when presented with information regarding production practices (Stringer et al., 2020). Gam et al. (2014) noted that when dealing with "regular consumers," in other words, consumers who do not have a significantly high fashion or shopping orientation, more explanation of the ethical practices on the labeling may encourage them to purchase the product, as they are typically less familiar with the implications than those who have a higher orientation.

Gam et al.'s (2014) idea reflects the findings of several other studies, indicating that there is a positive link between consumer knowledge of ethical issues and their intentions to purchase ethically produced products (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Dickson, 2000; Kozar & Hiller Connel, 2013). For example, Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2011) examined the connection between knowledge and purchase intentions in relation to transparent business practices, and

constructed an updated conceptual model for purchase intention to include the effect of knowledge, trust/distrust, and price/quality. This model visualizes the effect that knowledge has on consumers' thought processes in regards to their intentions to purchase (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Transparency and Prior Knowledge Effect on Purchase Intention
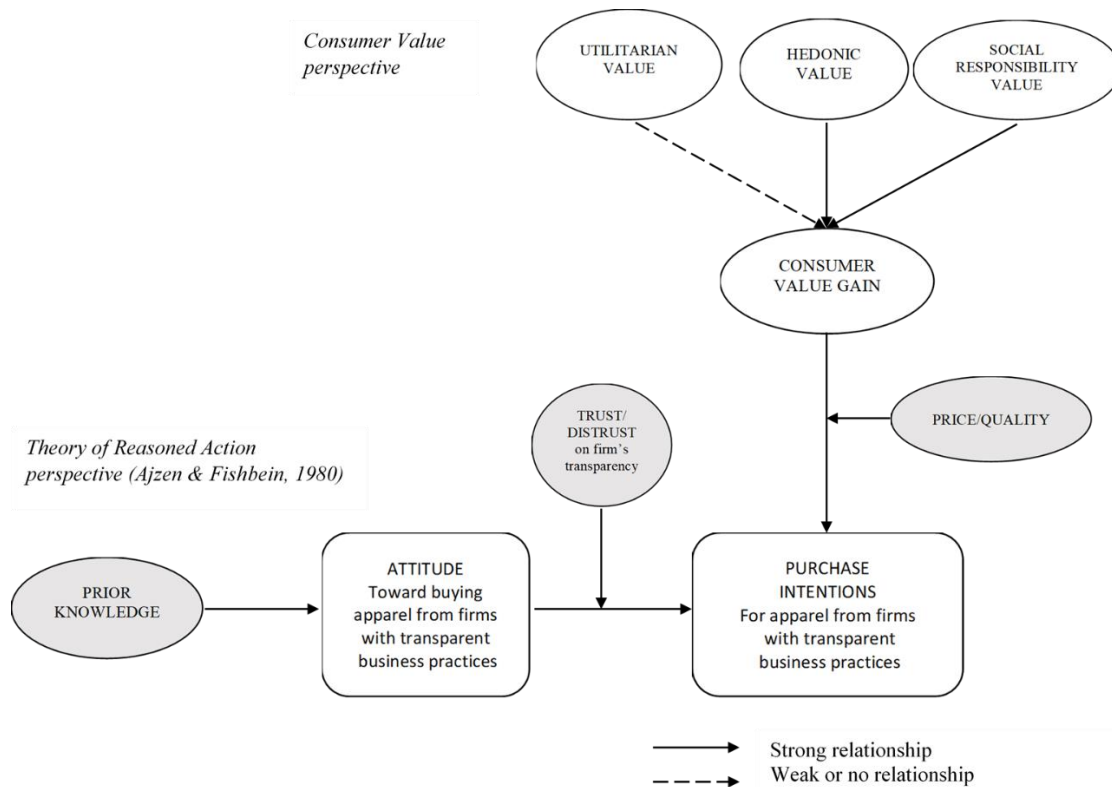
Source: Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire (2011)

This correlation between knowledge and purchase intention for ethical products reflects positively on the efforts of companies to be transparent and market their initiatives to their consumers. While knowledge is an important factor in the consumer decision making process, the consumers' distrust of the information also plays an important role.

Consumers' Distrust

Even with transparency and improved marketing, some consumers may not feel confident in or trust the knowledge that they have obtained in regards to the production processes of a

company or its products. This distrust can lead to a disconnect in the consumer's purchase intention due to uncertainty. Hassan et al. (2013) examined this uncertainty and found four main reasons for it: complexity, ambiguity, conflict, and credibility. *Complexity* refers to the respective ease or difficulty of an individual to understand a product's operation (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1989). In terms of ethical consumption, the consumption context is made complex, as it is inundated with information and varying decision criteria. The authors found that the complexity of gathering information from multiple sources and taking into account multiple issues can affect consumers' purchase decisions (Hassan et al., 2013). *Ambiguity* refers to the lack of understanding or the clarity of the information. Hassen et al. (2013) found that the ambiguity of the quality of the information in regards to ethical products played a role in consumer uncertainty. *Conflict* refers to the disconnect between the consumer's ethical values and information or product attributes, while *credibility* refers to the believability of the source and/or information. Hassen et al. (2013) found both conflict and credibility played a role in the uncertainty of consumers in ethical consumption, suggesting that these factors contribute to the uncertainty of the information among consumers. Likewise, Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2011) found similar reasons for the distrust of information by the consumer, noting that credibility and lack of connection to the consumer's personal values played a large role.

The lack of connection that Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2011) found is similar to the conflict that Hassan et. al (2013) noted in their study, that is, a disconnect between consumer values and what is being offered. From their findings, they created a conceptual model of the factors affecting consumers' uncertainty regarding information and the outcomes of that uncertainty (see Figure 2). This model shows the breakdown of the four antecedents: complexity, ambiguity, conflict, and credibility, and the most commonly noted issue that consumers had with

each antecedent leading to their uncertainty of the knowledge, choice, and evaluation. The model

shows the flow of the effects of uncertainty on the outcomes of the consumer's purchase

intentions, such as delayed purchase, compromised beliefs, and negative emotions.

Figure 2. Reasons for Uncertainty of Information and Consequences

Antecedents

Complexity
-Too many factors to consider
e.g. fair trade, organic cotton, use of animals, country of origin

Ambiguity
-Lack of specific/definitive information
e.g. vague ethical policies

Conflict
-Trade-off between products attributes and beliefs
e.g. trade with poorer countries vs home grown retailers

Credibility
-Information
e.g. credibility of information on clothing labels
-Source
e.g. reputation of clothing organizations

Uncertainty

-Knowledge
-Choice
-Evaluation

Outcomes

-**Delayed purchase**
e.g. making existing clothes last longer
-**Compromised beliefs**
e.g. making unethical purchase as decision becomes nearer
-**Negative emotions**
e.g. frustration, helplessness

Source: Hassan et al., (2013)

These studies highlight the importance of not only the type of information but also the source that the consumer receives it from. If the consumer does not trust or understand the information, they are not likely to have a positive intention to purchase the product. In this thesis, the connections between consumer knowledge and purchase intentions of ethical apparel are further examined. The connection between sources of knowledge and uncertainty or distrust are also examined.

Research Purpose and Objectives

The two-fold purpose of this study was to explore consumers' knowledge of unethical supply chain practices, and to understand what this knowledge means for their purchasing

behavior. To address this purpose, the sources used by consumers to gather knowledge were explored via four research objectives:

1. To investigate consumer knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel industry.

2. To identify sources consumers use to acquire this knowledge.

3. To understand the role of trust in regards to these sources of information.

4. To explore the role of consumer knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel industry in their purchase behavior.

Research Design and Conceptual Framework

As will be discussed in depth in Chapter III, to address the purpose of this thesis, a qualitative research design was employed. Merriam (2009) stated that qualitative research methods are to be used when the goal is understanding the experiences of an individual and how they interpret those experiences. Since the focus of the study is to understand consumers, the qualitative method of in-depth interviews was utilized. Once data was collected, a thematic analysis was conducted.

Current literature on the topic heavily utilizes the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), originally proposed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), to examine the effect of an individual's attitude and beliefs on their intention to purchase. The relationship of knowledge in TRA has been investigated by Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2011), leading to the updated model seen in Figure 1 (p. 8). While TRA provides a great deal of insight into different factors affecting purchase intention, the purpose of this thesis was to examine the role of knowledge formed through the adoption of information by the consumer. Thus, factors important to the adoption of information by the consumer were examined through the Information Adoption Model (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). This model considers the role of both information quality and source credibility

in the adoption of the information, both of which have been found to be factors involved with ethical purchase decisions (De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007; Hassan et al., 2013).

The Information Adoption Model (IAM) (Sussman & Siegal, 2003) was utilized, as it allowed for a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the consumer's ability to accept the information they gather. As a theory, IAM specifically considers argument quality and source credibility as factors important to the acceptance of information. To this end, the following model (Figure 3) was created to guide the analysis and interpretation of data. When analyzing argument quality and credibility of a source, the factors leading to uncertainty of information identified by Hassen et al. (2013), (e.g., complexity, ambiguity, conflict, and credibility), were utilized.

Figure 3. Knowledge, Trust, and Purchase Behavior
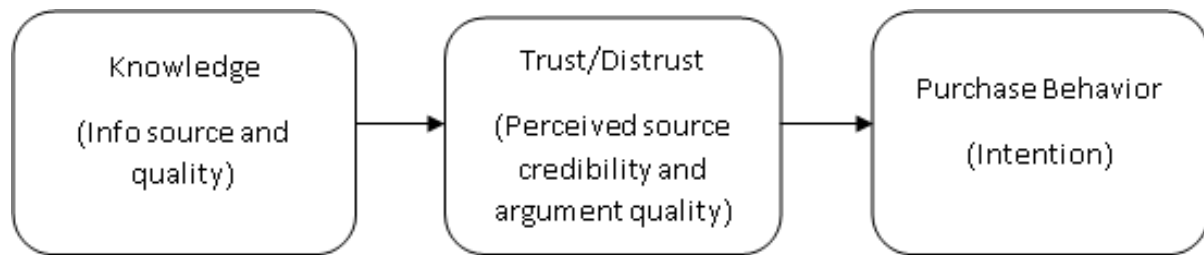
Significance of the Study

This study filled a gap in the current literature concerning consumers' knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel supply chain. Little research has been done to understand what the consumer knows about the apparel supply chain. With a better understanding of what the consumer knows, companies will be able to better market their products, and alleviate the issue that Gam et al. (2014) highlighted, which is that different levels of information are required by different consumers. There is currently a significant gap in research examining where and how consumers acquire knowledge about ethical apparel production practices. Through this study,

13

insights into consumers' preferred forms and types of sources were expanded. Identifying the sources that consumers go to for information on ethical production is important, as it will help companies know how best to reach the consumer.

Along with identifying the sources consumers use, examining whether consumers trust the information allows for companies to better interact with their target consumer and impart the information in ways that will best resonate with them. Current research has shown that knowledge of ethical practices has an effect on purchase intention among consumers (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Dickson, 2000). This thesis expanded on this current understanding to link knowledge and trust to behavior, specifically purchase intention, allowing for a deeper understanding of the relationship between consumer knowledge and purchase behavior.

This study is unique in several ways. Knowledge of working conditions on the part of the apparel consumer has yet to be fully explored. Examining the types of sources consumers use to acquire their information and why has not been examined in relation to ethical apparel production. While the sources consumers use to learn about sustainability have been examined, albeit not extensively, looking at ethical or unethical production in particular has yet to be fully examined in the literature. The deeper understanding and insight this study provided is of benefit to companies in their endeavors to better connect with their consumers and to encourage the use of ethical production practices.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following table presents the definitions of key terms that are utilized throughout this thesis.

Table 1. Definitions of Key Terms

Term	Description
Auditing	An assessment that looks at the systems, workplace environment, and capacity of a factory to ensure they meet the requirements set by brands or legislation (Team, 2021).
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	The responsibilities of a company to society beyond that of their stakeholders and how they lay out those responsibilities (Visser, et al., 2010, pp. 106-108).
Ethical Production	The consideration of the proper treatment of humans and communities in the production of apparel (Ethical Fashion Explained, 2020).
Fair Trade	Products that are produced in factories that meet strict requirements in terms of working conditions, pay, and transparency (Fair Trade Clothing Shopping Guide, n.d.).
Greenwashing	When companies make misleading or false claims on their environmental impact (Roshitsh, 2021).

Labor Violations	When employers violate laws in regard to safety, treatment, and recordkeeping. This can include low pay, unsafe working conditions, unpaid overtime, and forced labor (The Intersection of Labor, 2020).
Purchase Intention	The intentions of the consumer to purchase a product (Hashmi et al., 2016).
Sustainable	The consideration of the environment in the production of apparel from the fiber to the end result (Ethical Fashion Explained, 2020).

Summary

This chapter presented the topic of this thesis. The purpose, objectives and the research design and conceptual framework were outlined. The significance of the research was explained, and important terms were defined. Chapter II provides an in-depth look at the literature pertinent to the study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the literature pertaining to the topic. Areas of research to be discussed include: ethical apparel production, consumer knowledge, and factors important to information adoption. Information quality and usefulness are also explored, as well as the impact of knowledge on consumer behavior. The conceptual framework was discussed and a summary provided.

Ethical Apparel Production

The word 'ethical' in the apparel industry is a relatively new term (Thomas, 2008), which has allowed for a range in the definitions used. Thomas (2008) defined ethical fashion as "the positive impact of a designer, a consumer choice, or method of production as experienced by workers, consumers, animals, society and the environment" (p. 533). Joergens (2006) offered a narrower definition of ethical fashion, defining it as "fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labor conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton" (p. 361). Both definitions consider the production of apparel, from the process of design to the end result, and the impact that these methods and working conditions have on the workers and the environment. Ethical production refers specifically to the issues and practices used in the production of apparel in the global apparel supply chain. These issues and practices include using environmentally-friendly production methods (Lobel, 2006), avoiding labor exploitation (Balsiger, 2016; Ma et al., 2016; Thomas, 2017), and providing safe working conditions (Cerchia & Piccolo, 2019; Domeisen, 2006; Joergens, 2006).

Consumer concern over ethical issues in the apparel supply chain has increased over the past several years. Due to the rise in consumer demand for ethically-made products, companies

have taken the initiative to implement changes and enforce regulations (Jegethesan et al., 2012).

However, this can be difficult due to the fragmented and global nature of the apparel supply

chain (Maryanov, 2010).

Global Apparel Supply Chain

The apparel industry in America has moved the majority of its production overseas in an

effort to reduce production costs. This movement of production, called 'offshoring,' allowed for

the reduction in production costs to be passed down to consumers (Woo et al., 2020). Offshoring

offers lower production costs due to lower costs associated with material sourcing and labor.

When products are manufactured near or in the same countries as the raw materials, the cost of

sourcing the materials is significantly lower (Handfield, 1994). Offshoring also allows for

apparel companies to take advantage of the different production specialties that other counties

may have, such as leather production in Italy. Another benefit apparel companies have found

through offshoring production is the ability to mass produce at amounts not as easily or cheaply

done at home (Woo et al., 2020). While offshoring the apparel production process has provided

many benefits to apparel companies, recent interest in the ethics of apparel production have

shined a spotlight on the negative issues that come with offshoring.

Factory Standards and Labor Laws

The standards for apparel factories and labor laws are set by a country's government and

the local government where the factory resides. Along with government-mandated standards and

labor laws, the companies that contract with the factories can also provide their own standards

and regulations (Maryanov, 2010) or adhere to industry standards set by outside bodies

(O'Rourke, 2003). While laws and regulations for labor and safety may differ from country to

country, the United Nations has laid out general guiding labor standards through the International

18

Labor Organization (ILO). The eight main areas covered in labor laws and regulations are child

labor (United States, 2011), forced labor (18 U.S.C. § 1589), safe working conditions

(Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 1970), wages and benefits (United States,

2011), hours of work (New York Labor Law § 162; United States, 2011), non-discrimination (42

U.S.C. § 200e et seq), freedom of association and collective bargaining (National Labor

Relations, 1934), and harassment (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 1970). As the

issues that face the global apparel supply chain happen on an international scale, the use of

globally accepted definitions is important. The ILO sets out defined terms for these issues to

offer a guiding standard for what each issue encompasses.

Child labor is an ongoing and complex issue in the global apparel supply chain. The

International Labor Organization defines child labor as "work that is mentally, physically,

socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or interferes with their schooling…"

(What is child labour (IPEC), n.d.). In order to protect children from harmful working situations,

child labor laws and regulations typically include age restrictions, types of jobs suitable for

children, minimum wages, and definitions of what child labor is. Forced labor was defined, with

exceptions, by the International Labor Organization at the Forced Labor Convention (No. 29) as

"all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which

the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily." Forced labor laws set out penalties for

those found to knowingly benefit from any venture that has engaged in forced labor (18 U.S.C. §

1589).

Safe working condition laws can be both overarching and industry specific. The World

Health Organization defines a safe workplace as one that is continually working to protect and

promote the physical and psychosocial well-being of the workers (World Health Organization,

2010). Safe working conditions for the apparel industry include regulations on chemicals and machine care as well. Wages and benefit laws and regulations dictate the minimum wage and any other compensation due to individuals for work performed. The ILO defines minimum wage as "the minimum amount of remuneration that an employer is required to pay wage earners for the work performed during a given period, which cannot be reduced by collective agreement or an individual contract" (*How to define a minimum wage*, n.d.). The amount of time an individual can work any given job is regulated through hours of work laws. These laws set the maximum amount of time an individual can work; they can also dictate required periods of rest and meal breaks.

Non-discrimination laws protect workers from being denied the right to work due to race, religion, sex, social origin, and political opinion, among other things (*Non-discrimination and Equality*, 2019). The right to freedom of association and collective bargaining refers to the right of workers to assemble and petition on their own behalf (*Freedom of Association*, n.d.). The ILO defines harassment and violence as one entity in reference to the workplace. Defined as "a range of unacceptable behaviors and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment" (C190, n.d.).

Having a set of standard definitions and ideas for the main issues found in labor laws allows for unification of the labor law requirements across national borders. While the finer points of each law may differ from country to country, or even state to state, base standards allow for better regulation and protection of workers' rights. Because the global apparel supply chain operates on an international scale with multiple countries at different points in the supply chain, it is important to have a baseline for labor standards to ensure that working conditions

remain safe throughout the supply chain. This baseline also allows for companies to establish codes of conduct that compliment and follow laws and regulations, regardless of whom they partner with.

Factory Conditions and Compliance

Even with industry standards and the growing focus on ethical production in the apparel supply chain there are still breakdowns in compliance. In May of 2018, Global Labor Justice found evidence of exploitation and mistreatment of female workers in Asian factories manufacturing for H&M and Gap (Stafford, 2018). While in 2013, the Rana Plaza building which housed five separate garment factories collapsed, killing roughly 1,127 people (Yardley, 2013). The building which had been deemed safe to work in even after structural damage was noted, housed factories manufacturing for brands such as Primark and Benetton (O'Connor, 2014). Both of these violations were brought to light through either outside auditing or deadly tragedies. Other instances of factory conditions have been reported by the companies themselves. In 2005, Nike, having suffered from ethical issues regarding their manufacturing in the past, published a comprehensive report detailing the conditions they had found in the factories they were partnered with, including self-reported issues regarding the physical and verbal abuse of factory workers, particularly in their Asian factories (Teather, 2005).

When violations of ethical production are brought to light, whether they come to light due to tragedy or reports, companies must find a way to ensure better conditions in the factories they partner with. In response to ethical concerns, companies have implemented multiple methods of regulation and enforcement to remedy the issues plaguing the global apparel supply chain. As will be discussed in the next section, companies have joined alliances and associations as a way to convey to consumers their standards of practice in regards to ethical production.

These associations also provide audits on the basis of these standards, allowing for confirmation

of whether the standards are being met or not (Protecting Workers' Rights Worldwide | Fair

Labor Association, n.d.). Along with becoming a member of an alliance or association,

companies have also implemented their own regulations through the use of codes of conduct.

These company-specific regulations, laid out in corporate codes of conduct, allow for companies

to convey and execute ethical and social responsibilities (Kolk & Tulder, 2002). To ensure that

all standards and regulations are being met, companies will often partner with a third-party to

assist with the auditing of the factories and standards. This third-party verification can be done as

a simple auditing of compliance or for formal certification (Nath et al., 2019).

Alliances and Associations

One of the ways that companies have responded to public demand to remedy violations

of workers' rights is through joining alliances and associations. These alliances and associations

are typically comprised of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), companies, universities, and

non-profit organizations. These alliances and associations are often focused on a particular set of

issues, such as human rights violations or environmental sustainability. These associations set

out specific industry guidelines, standards of practice and offer third party auditing to verify

adherence to the requirements they denote (Protecting Workers' Rights Worldwide | Fair Labor

Association, n.d.; Theory of Change, n.d.). The standards set by these associations are created

around the International Labor Organization (ILO) standards, using ILO standards as the

minimum standard (O'Rourke, 2003). Along with offering set standards and audits, these

associations also provide a place for individuals to share ideas and discuss issues affecting the

industry, providing a voice for all entities in the industry (About WFTO, 2019). Many of these

associations also offer certification or accreditation to companies or factories for meeting the

standards they set. These certifications inform consumers that the companies, factories, or company standards are operating in agreement with the association's standards (Fair Labor Association, 2005). Companies utilize these alliances and associations to verify that their production practices are in compliance with industry standards.

Regulations

While alliances and associations provide industry regulations, companies also engage in private regulations through the use of corporate codes of conduct or codes of ethics. Corporate codes of conduct are one way companies self-regulate their supply chains. Government regulation is difficult in such a fragmented and global supply chain and the implementing bodies do not always follow through or carry enough weight (Maryanov, 2010). In place of this regulation breakdown and in response to consumer concerns, companies will often adopt codes of conduct (Maryanov, 2010). Corporate codes of conduct typically provide a specific outline of behaviors or information needed to meet set standards and guidelines for the company. Codes of ethics differ slightly from this construction by laying out general ideas and goals in regards to ethical behavior, but often lack specifics (Cerchia & Piccolo, 2019). These codes allow for companies to dictate requirements for partnerships, thus giving them the ability to enforce standards (Cerchia & Piccolo, 2019).

Third Party Verification

Verification of compliance with industry and company standards is usually done through audits. These audits can be conducted internally or externally. Internal or first-party audits are conducted by employees of the company using standards set by the company (Ciliberti et al., 2009). While internal audits provide the company greater control over the auditing process, they also run the risk of being viewed as unobjective, which can lead to distrust of the findings

(LeBaron & Lister, 2015). External or third-party audits are conducted through an independent provider using their own standards or those of the company (Nath et al., 2019). Third-party audits tend to be viewed as more objective and thus more legitimate, though they are not totally impartial (LeBaron & Lister, 2015). A common type of third-party audit, known as third-party certification, audits the compliance of the company or their suppliers for compliance with the industry or third-party standards such as Fairtrade certified products (Nath et al., 2019). Audits verify the compliance with the standards by the factory and companies. If standards are not being met, audits allow for the identification of issues and improvement of the noted breakdown in compliance.

Supply Chain Transparency

Transparency refers to the "visibility and accessibility of information, especially concerning business practices" (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011, p. 136). With the rise of consumer awareness of ethical and environmental issues, there has been an increased demand for transparency of the global apparel supply chain (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). In an effort to be transparent, companies are sharing information on regulation compliance of their suppliers, provenance of products, and product testing results. Companies utilize supply chain transparency to inform the consumer of their commitment to social and environmental issues, though the degree of transparency varies by company due to the perceived value gained (Sodhi & Tang, 2019). Along with voluntary transparency by companies, The California Transparency in Supply Chains Act of 2010 was implemented in 2012 in an effort to eliminate human trafficking and issues of slavery as well as inform consumers of the social responsibility practices of the companies (Ma et al., 2016).

Multiple studies have found that transparency of business practices has a positive effect on the intentions to purchase by consumers (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999). For example, Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2011) explored factors that may affect the consumer's intentions to purchase from companies with transparent business practices. They found that prior knowledge of the global apparel supply chain has an effect on the consumer's attitude towards the products of transparent companies. Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2011) found that although consumers had a positive attitude toward purchasing from transparent companies, there was a disconnect with their purchase intentions. This disconnect between positive attitudes and purchase intentions was found to be due to the consumer's distrust of the information regarding the businesses' practices.

Although companies have taken the initiative to be transparent, there is a noted difference in the type of information and amount of information shared. When looking at reports for Nike and Adidas, Sherman (2009) found that although the companies used the same factories or factories in a similar location, their metrics to measure performance were too different to provide comparable information. The lack of standards of disclosure allows for companies to provide information as they see fit.

Consumer Response

Companies utilize multiple methods to regulate and ensure safe working conditions in the factories they contract with. They do this by utilizing partnerships of alliances and associations, codes of conduct, third-party verification, and transparency to not only improve working conditions in the factories, but also to inform the consumer of their stance and degree of compliance.

Lee et al. (2018) examined consumer response to companies' transparency of their social responsibility efforts on their websites, particularly in compliance with the California Transparency in Supply Chains Act (CTSCA), through consumers' purchase intentions. The authors found that transparency of the socially responsible efforts of the company through CTSCA disclosure guidelines were positively related to consumer intentions to purchase, as well as their overall response to the company. This relationship between transparency and consumer intention to purchase was further explored by Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2011), who found that trust of the company's transparency was a defining factor in the acceptance of the information and, in turn, the consumer's purchase intention. When consumer response to corporate codes of conduct was examined, it was found that while codes allow consumers to know the stance of the company, consumers were left with uncertainty of the accuracy about these codes due to the lack of a set regulatory system (Shaw & Tomolillo, 2004). Research into third-party certification has shown that consumers believe that certification by a third party would help them in identifying ethical apparel (Lee et al., 2018). In particular, Castaldo et al. (2019) noted that Fair Trade certification can act as a mediator for trust in consumer verification.

Based on studies exploring consumer responses to the methods employed by companies to ensure ethical production practices in the apparel supply chain, a common factor of the consumer's lack of ability to trust the information provided was noted. When consumers gather information, they examine multiple factors, particularly when deciding to adopt or utilize the information. When these factors are not satisfied, uncertainty or distrust of the information can occur.

Information and Consumer Decision Making

Sources of Information

Purchasing behaviors are typically preceded by an information search (Peterson & Merino, 2003), thus it is important to understand what sources consumers utilize to gather their information so that companies can accurately engage with their target consumer. The practice of gathering information by consumers is known as consumer information search (Peterson & Merino, 2003). Consumer information search involves both internal and external sources of information. An internal information search is primarily the recall of information from one's memories and happens prior to external information search (Klein & Ford, 2003), while an external information search is the act of gathering new information from the environment (Akalamkam & Mitra, 2018).

When consumers are gathering information to make a purchase decision, they will usually gather information from multiple sources (Peterson & Merino, 2003), thus it is imperative to understand the types of sources consumer prefer to best connect with them. Internal information, or memory, serves as prior knowledge for the consumer, as it is derived from prior experience. Previous studies have shown that prior knowledge has an effect on consumers' behaviors and intentions to purchase (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Han, 2019; Kang et al., 2013). Along with prior knowledge, consumers tend to gather information from external sources to help make their decisions, and this information search is done to mediate the risks and uncertainty they may have in relation to their intentions to purchase (Peterson & Merino, 2003). Since internal information search deals with memory and past experiences that consumers have with a product or brand, research into types of sources generally focuses on external information sources. Previous research on types of sources consumers use during their

information search has denoted multiple categories of distinction, as will be discussed in the following sections.

Types of Sources

When consumers gather information during their external information search, they utilize multiple types of sources. The categorization of types of sources has evolved over the years, changing to accommodate the change in the way consumers gather information. Some scholars use broad classifications when examining sources, such as Nam and Kim (2003, as cited in Lee & Lee, 2009), who classified sources into marketer-oriented information, human information, store displays, and mass communication. Other scholars (Klein & Ford, 2003; Lee & Lee, 2009) utilized narrower classifications, allowing for sources to be defined based on multiple identifiers and measuring them against dimensions of classification. Klein and Ford (2003) noted that even when scholars are using more narrow classifications for types of sources, these classifications can be broken down into two dimensions: personal versus impersonal and marketer-controlled verses non-marketer controlled. As the Internet has grown and evolved into a method of communication for consumers and brands, a third dimension has been added: online versus offline (Akalamkam & Mitra, 2018; Klein & Ford, 2003).

The definitions of the dimensions allow for sources to fall into more than one classification, creating a fuller picture of the attributes of the source in relation to the consumer. Personal sources refer to individuals that the consumer gathers information from through personal interactions, such as friends, acquaintances, family, or store associates. Impersonal sources refer to things such as advertisements, store displays, or celebrities that the consumer does not directly interact with (Seock & Bailey, 2009). Marketer-controlled sources refer to sources that provide information dictated by the marketer or retailer, such as advertisements,

websites, or salespeople. Non-marketer-controlled sources or neutral sources refer to sources that provide information that is not regulated by the retailer or marketer, such as word of mouth (WOM) or media that the marketer does not control. (Akalamkam & Mitra, 2018; Cho & Workman, 2015). Online information sources refer to any source that is gathered online, such as websites, emails, blogs, or electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Offline information sources refer to any source that does not use the Internet, such as physical magazines, TV advertisements, or WOM (Akalamkam & Mitra, 2018).

Classifying and identifying the types of sources consumers use in their information search lets marketers know where their consumers go for information. Along with understanding what sources the consumer uses, it is also important to understand how the source impacts the consumers' decision making process. Prior research has shown that the source a consumer uses can have an effect on their uncertainty of the validity of information that they have gathered (Hassan et al., 2013), which, in turn, can affect their intention to purchase. According to the literature, this uncertainty typically stems from the credibility of the source.

Credibility of Sources

When examining the types of sources consumers use to gather information, it is important to understand how credible they view that source to be. Credibility of a source has an effect on the consumer's adoption of the information, which, in turn, effects behavioral intentions (Attaran et al., 2015; Fanoberova & Kuczowska, 2016). Source credibility refers to the trust or belief that the source provides truthful and accurate information (Li & Zhan, 2011) and has no connection to the truthfulness of the information (Chaiken, 1980). Source credibility is typically made up of two components: expertise and trustworthiness (Sternthal et al., 1978). Expertise refers to the qualification or competence of the source, while trustworthiness refers to the degree of

confidence that the source provides valid information (Hovland et al., 1953). Some research on source credibility includes a third component, attractiveness, which looks at the physical attributes of the source in relation to the perceived credibility of the source (Fanoberova & Kuczowska, 2016). Source credibility is one of the main factors in the adoption of information.

The credibility of a source, along with the information quality, impacts the usefulness of the information, which, in turn, impacts the adoption of the information (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Hassan et al. (2013) noted credibility of the source as a factor contributing to consumer uncertainty with regards to ethical consumption. Consumers' desires to purchase ethical apparel can be impacted by the uncertainty caused by the source from which they gathered their information.

The literature shows that the sources of the information gathered can have an effect on the consumer's attitudes and intentions to purchase. With a plethora of sources for consumers to choose from in order to gather information, it is important to understand what sources consumers use and trust when gathering information on ethical issues in the apparel supply chain. Thus, this thesis explored how consumers acquire their information in relation to ethical apparel and the extent to which they use this information in their decision making.

Information Quality and Usefulness

As discussed, when consumers are faced with a decision, they gather information to reduce the perceived risks involved (Park & Stoel, 2005). Information is an important factor in the formation of attitudes and behaviors (Shaw & Clarke, 1999). When looking at ethical consumption, Carrigan and Attalla (2001) noted that one of the factors contributing to the attitude-behavior gap between consumers with ethical purchase intentions and consumers who practice ethical purchase behaviors is information. The authors found that consumers have a low

awareness of the ethical behavior of companies, although they did find a higher awareness of unethical behavior. The authors found that even though consumers were aware of unethical behavior, they felt uncertain of the information they had. Carrigan and Attalla (2001) suggested that lack of information availability, uncertainty of the information, along with too much wrong information and not enough quality information, can all impact consumers' purchase intentions and behaviors.

Research has shown that both the perceived quality and quantity of information have a significant effect on consumer buying behavior (De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007). Quality of information also has a positive effect on the adoption of information (Peng et al., 2016) and attitude of the consumer (De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007). The quantity of the information needed by consumers has been divided in recent research, with some researchers finding that more information has a positive effect (De Pelsmacker et al., 2006) and others finding that too much information leads to uncertainty or information overload (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007). When an increase in the information available was found to have an adverse effect on consumer decision making, it was noted that high quality information leads to the perceived notion of a higher quantity of information (Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007). Regardless of the amount of information required to have a positive effect on consumer behavior, the quality of the information always plays a significant role.

Information Quality

Information quality refers to the "persuasive strength of the arguments that are included in the information" (Fanoberova & Kuczkowska, 2016, p. 22). Previous studies have shown that information quality is positively related to information usefulness, which, in turn, is positively related to information adoption (Peng et al., 2016). Information quality is typically evaluated

through *relevance*, *timeliness*, *accuracy* and *comprehensiveness*. Relevance refers to the degree to which the information meets the needs of the consumer and allows the consumer to resolve uncertainty regarding their decisions (Fanoberova & Kuczkowska, 2016). Timeliness refers to the currency of the message, whether it is up-to-date or not (Cheung et al., 2008). Accuracy refers to the perceived correctness of the information. Finally, comprehensiveness refers to the depth and detail of the information, or its completeness (Fanoberova & Kuczkowska, 2016). Consumers utilize these factors to determine the quality of the information they have gathered, which impacts the perceived usefulness of the information, and, in turn, the adoption of the information.

Information quality has been utilized as a factor in examining ethical consumer behavior in regards to apparel. Existing literature shows that information quality has a positive relationship with consumer behavior intentions. De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007) found that information quality in relation to Fair Trade products had a positive effect on consumers' attitudes toward Fair-Trade products, both overall and, to a slight extent, their product-specific attitudes. Peng et al. (2016) found that information quality, along with source credibility, had a positive impact on information usefulness, which, in turn, positively impacted information adoption of female fashion shopping guide website users. They found that when the consumer had some level of purchase motivation, information quality became the stronger factor over source credibility in their decision making.

Information Usefulness

Information usefulness is a mediator in the process of adopting information (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Consumers evaluate the usefulness of the information they have gathered through perceived information quality and source credibility (Peng et al., 2016). In previous research, the

32

perceived usefulness of the information had a positive effect on the adoption of the information, which, in turn, was shown to have a positive effect on consumers' intentions to purchase (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Gunawan & Huarng, 2015).

Current literature on information and ethical consumption has shown that consumers struggle with conceptualizing the usefulness of the information they have gathered. Consumers' uncertainty about the information, whether it stems from distrust of the source (Shaw & Tomolillo, 2004) or of the information itself (De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007) leads to a lack of perceived usefulness, which, in turn, can affect their intentions to purchase. Thus, this thesis explored how consumers evaluate the information they have gathered about the ethical production of apparel and the extent to which it impacts their purchase behavior.

The Impact of Knowledge

Information adoption is the process of turning information into knowledge. Cheung et al. (2008) explain the transition of information into knowledge through information adoption as "…the internalization phase of knowledge transfer, in which explicit information is transformed into internalized knowledge and meaning" (p. 231). Consumer knowledge has been shown to have an effect on purchase intentions. Chi et al. (2019) found that environmental knowledge had a positive effect on purchase intention towards sustainably-made cotton collegiate apparel, both indirectly and directly. Environmental knowledge directly affected purchase intentions and indirectly affected intentions to purchase through attitudes (Chi et al., 2019). Dickson (2000) found that when consumer knowledge of apparel industry issues increased, so did the concern for the workers, which, in turn, had a positive effect on their intentions to support a socially responsible business.

33

Although the connection between knowledge and attitudes is well documented, there is still a noted disconnect between consumers with positive attitudes towards ethical apparel and their purchase intentions. Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2011) found that while knowledge impacted the consumer's attitudes toward apparel from companies with transparent supply chains and, in turn, their purchase intentions, one factor was found to disrupt their intentions to purchase: the consumers' distrust of the company's polices. This distrust or uncertainty regarding the information used in the formation of consumer knowledge was also noted by Rausch and Kopplin (2021) as the disrupting factor in terms of purchase intention. The authors found that while attitudes towards sustainable apparel had a significant effect on consumers' intentions to purchase, this intention was negatively affected by their concerns about greenwashing.

Information Adoption

Consumers gather information in order to reduce the risk involved when making a decision (Park & Stoel, 2005). When partaking in consumer information search behavior, the individual must analyze the information they have gathered to determine if they will adopt the information, thereby turning it into knowledge. This process of analyzing the information through the lens of source credibility and information (or argument quality) is explained through the Information Adoption Model (Sussman & Siegal, 2003; see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Information Adoption Model
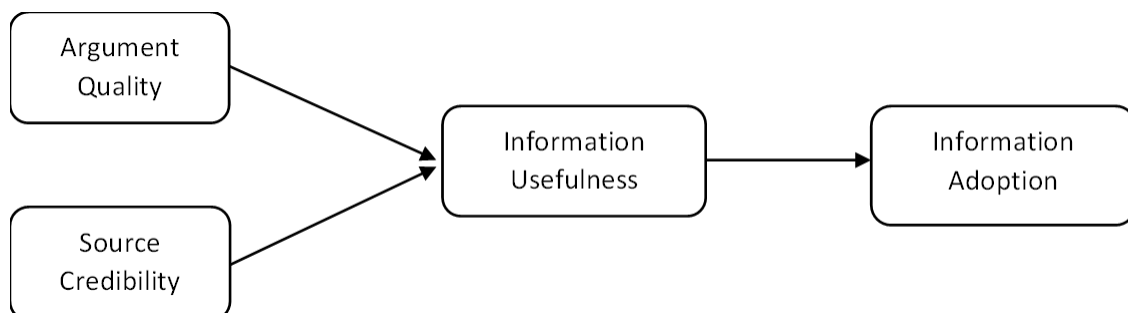
Source: Sussman & Siegal (2003)

According to the literature, both information quality (De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007) and source credibility (Hassan et al., 2013) have been found to be factors involved in ethical consumer decisions. Typically, the more interested or involved the consumer is with a product, such as apparel/fashion, the more information they seek. Thus, the next section discusses consumer involvement with fashion.

Fashion Involvement

A consumer's level of fashion involvement refers to the significance that individual puts on fashion clothing (Engle et al., 2005). Research has shown that the consumer's level of involvement can have an effect on their decision to purchase (Browne & Kaldenberg, 1997). O'Cass (2004) found that subjective fashion knowledge was significantly influenced by the individual's level of fashion involvement. When looking at fashion involvement in relation to the effectiveness of socially responsible labels, Gam et al. (2014) denoted three levels of fashion involvement or orientation: *fashionable shoppers*, *regular shoppers*, and *uninvolved shoppers*. Fashionable shoppers had the highest scores in multiple factors, such as fashion leadership and interest, shopping enjoyment, well-dressed, following and planning. Regular shoppers were found to have average scores for all the factors of fashion and shopping orientation, while uninvolved shoppers only had high scores in antifashion and traditionalism (Gam et al., 2014). Notably, the level of fashion involvement was found to have an effect on socially responsible label use, with fashionable shoppers being more likely to be familiar and engage with socially responsible labels, and to be more willing to purchase those products. While regular shoppers showed some knowledge of socially responsible labeling, they were not users of the labels. Gam et al. (2014) stated that in order to attract consumers who were not yet socially responsible label

35

users, catering the information on the label to provide more details may prompt regular shoppers to use them.

Consumers who are considered to have a high level of fashion involvement continuously search out new information in regards to apparel (Razzaq et al., 2018). This means that consumers with a high level of fashion involvement may also have more knowledge regarding issues in the apparel industry. This can be seen in Gam et al.'s (2014) findings, in that fashionable shoppers were more familiar with socially responsible labeling. Razzaq et al. (2018) also found that consumers with high fashion involvement were more inclined toward the consumption of sustainable fashion.

Research has shown that knowledge affects attitudes, and, in turn, consumer purchase intentions. The consumer's level of fashion involvement may play a role in their knowledge of the apparel supply chain and be an indicator regarding level of prior knowledge. This thesis therefore examined how consumers use their prior knowledge in regards to ethical apparel production alongside their level of fashion involvement, and specifically as it pertains to their purchase behaviors.

Conceptual Framework and Guiding Research Questions

To address the purpose of understanding consumer knowledge of working conditions in apparel factories, where they gather this knowledge from and what this knowledge means for their purchase intentions, the conceptual framework of this study is based on the Information Adoption Model (IAM). IAM provides the framework to examine the trust or distrust consumers have with sources of information but does not provide a direct link to purchase intentions. In order to examine the role of information in the consumer's intentions to purchase ethically

produced apparel, the expanded model of information adoption was explored as a way to connect information adoption with purchase intentions.

To explore the influence of information characteristics on the consumer's purchase behavior, prior research suggests the combination of the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Information Adoption Model (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Gunawan & Huarng, 2015). The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) states that attitudes and subjective norms towards a particular behavior determine an individual's behavioral intention, which, in turn, is predictive of their actual behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; see Figure 5). Purchase intention refers to what the consumer believes they will purchase (Engel et al., 2005). Research has shown that information usefulness, determined by source credibility and information quality, has a positive effect on information adoption, which then positively influences consumers' intent to purchase (Peng et al., 2016). When explored in relation to TRA, behavioral intentions, such as purchase intentions for ethical apparel, can be used as predictors of actual behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

Figure 5. Theory of Reasoned Action Model
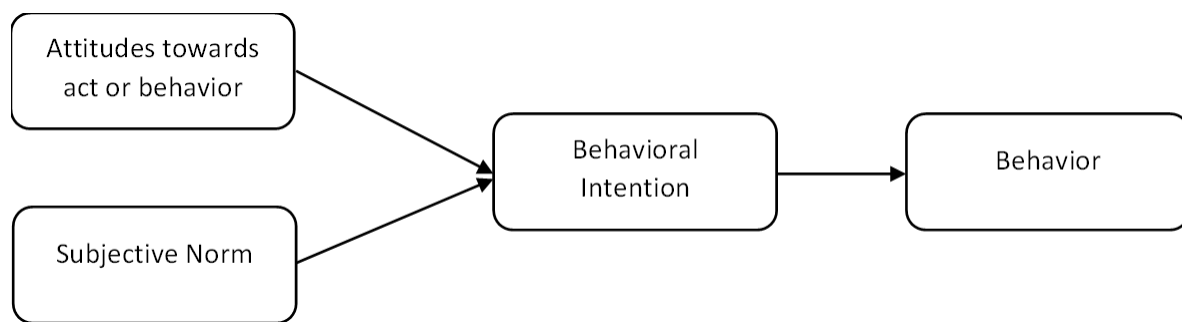
Source: Ajzen & Fishbein (1980)

How do consumers acquire their information about ethical supply chain practices and to what extent do they use this information in their decision making? To address these questions,

the Information Adoption Model (IAM) was developed by Sussman and Siegal (2003) and integrates the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) and Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). IAM allows for the examination of the two ways that individuals analyze information usefulness, through the content (information quality) or cues associated with the content (source credibility) (Sun et al., 2019). IAM depicts the effect that information quality and source credibility have on attitudes of information usefulness. These attitudes, in turn, determine the adoption of information by the consumer. Cheung et al. (2008) created an expanded model to depict the different factors of relevance, timeliness, accuracy, comprehensiveness, source expertise, and source trustworthiness that impact information usefulness, and, in turn, information adoption, where uncertainty impacts purchase intentions (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Expanded Model of Information Adoption
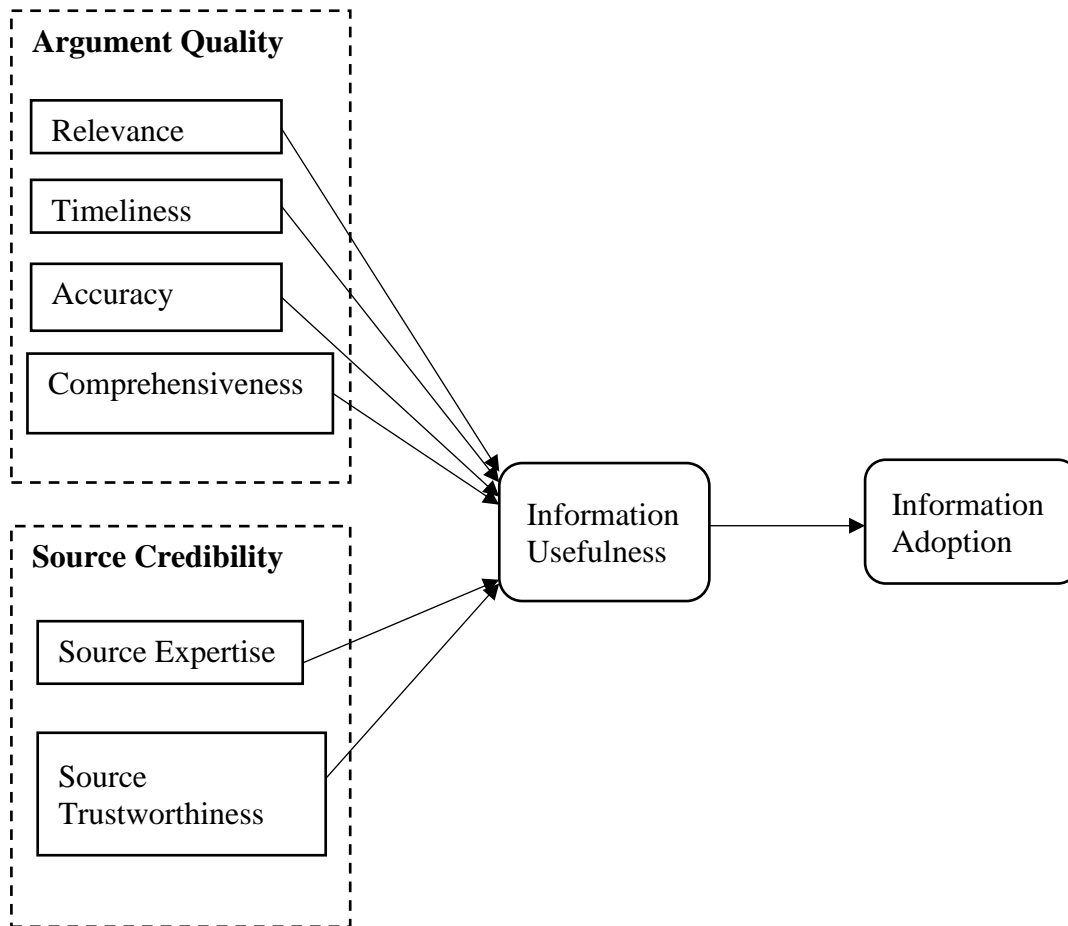
Source: Cheung et al. (2008)

Per the expanded IAM, perceived source credibility and argument quality were used to understand the trust a consumer has of the source, as the literature indicates that these are the factors they use when they evaluate the information to determine if they will adopt it (Bueno & Gallego, 2021; Hassen et al., 2013; Kumar et al., 2021). Once the information has been adopted, how the consumer uses the information reflects their trust of the sources and the information. This model helped frame the research questions guiding this thesis.

A primary goal of this study was to explore consumers' use of information regarding ethical apparel production and its role in their intentions to purchase. Thus, the connection

between knowledge, trust, and purchase behavior will be the lens through which the data are analyzed (see Figure 7). For example, when examining the role of trust in regard to the sources consumers use to gather information, the factors of source credibility and the quality of the argument from the source were examined relative to the sources the participants use. The adoption of the information indicates a level of trust of the argument quality and source credibility. Thus, the framework provides a means for understanding the role of trust in regards to the sources of information about ethical apparel production used by consumers.

Figure 7. Model for Exploring the Connection Between Information and Purchase Behavior
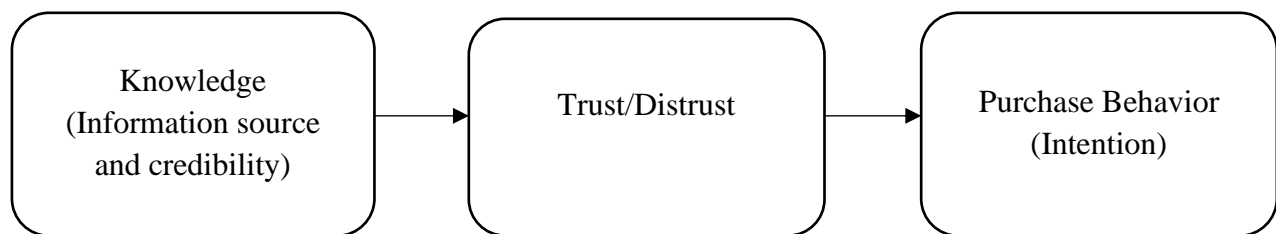
The first guiding research question is: *What sources do consumers use to gather ethical apparel information from and why?* Understanding what sources the consumer uses to gather their information and why allows for a better understanding of the types of information they have. Do they prefer to learn about ethical apparel from their friends and family or do they prefer to gather their information from certified third party sources? To better understand the sources that consumers gather information from, their level of fashion involvement is also explored. Gam et al., (2014) shared that one's level of fashion involvement has an effect on their interaction with social responsibility labels, indicating that the level of fashion involvement of the individual shapes the way that they interact with the type of source and the perceived credibility of the source. Knowing where the information comes from allows for a deeper understanding of the

depth of information the consumer has, as well as a better understanding of where consumers

prefer to go to gather their information. When consumers gather information, they can turn that

information into knowledge, as detailed by the IAM model, but only if they trust the information.

Trust of the information, so that it becomes knowledge for the consumer that is then used to

drive their purchase behaviors, is impacted by both the perceived credibility of the source and the

argument quality.

Once the sources of the consumers have been identified, the second guiding research

question is: *How does the consumer evaluate the information source?* Perceived credibility of

the information source and argument quality are used to better understand how the consumer

evaluates the information. The argument quality, such as timeliness, relevance,

comprehensiveness, and accuracy of the information affects the perceived usefulness of the

information, which, in turn, affects the adoption of the information to knowledge (Bueno &

Gallego, 2021; Hassen et al., 2013). Along with the argument quality, consumers use the

credibility of the source as a determining factor for whether to trust the information or not,

looking at traits such as the expertise and trustworthiness of the source (Cheung et al., 2008).

Understanding which traits are important to the consumer when evaluating their sources allows

for a better understanding of how the consumer turns information into knowledge in relation to

ethical apparel production.

The third guiding research question is: *What role does this information play in their*

intentions to purchase? Once they have gathered the information and decided to trust the

information, the consumer must then decide whether or not they will purchase an apparel product

based on the information. By exploring how consumers adopt the information about ethical

production in apparel they gather, this thesis sheds light on the connection between knowledge

and purchase behavior, and particularly purchase intentions. Understanding the role consumer knowledge plays in their purchase intentions towards ethical apparel allows for a better understanding of how consumers utilize and evaluate the information they gather.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the basic concepts relative to the topic of consumer knowledge and ethical apparel production in the global apparel supply chain. A brief background on ethical production was provided. A discussion of literature on consumer knowledge and information adoption, including source credibility, information quality, knowledge, and purchase intentions was also provided. The conceptual framework used to guide the study was then discussed and guiding research questions were provided. The next chapter will outline the methodology employed in the thesis.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter offers a description of the methodology used to conduct the study. Details of the research design, sample selection, and data analysis procedures are provided.

Research Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore consumer knowledge of unethical supply chain practices and to understand what this knowledge means for their purchase behavior. Consumers' knowledge and sources for gathering information were investigated and significant factors in relation to trust of this knowledge were explored.

To explore consumers' knowledge of unethical supply chain practices and the role of this knowledge in their intentions to purchase, four research objectives were defined:

1. To investigate consumer knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel industry.

2. To identify sources consumers use to acquire this knowledge.

3. To understand the role of trust in regards to these sources of information.

4. To investigate the role of consumer knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel industry in their purchase behavior.

Research Design

The design of this study is qualitative. Because there is limited research exploring consumer knowledge of unethical practices in the supply chain and the role of information in intentions to purchase, this research was exploratory in nature. The findings of this study have provided a deeper understanding of consumer knowledge regarding unethical supply chain practices and where they obtain this knowledge.

For this study, the primary method of data collection was in-depth interviews. The in-depth interview method was chosen as it is the most effective way to obtain specific information

from consumers in their own words. Kvale et al. (2009) describe interviewing as a structured conversation with a purpose. This purpose is to understand a phenomenon from the respondents' own perspectives (Kvale et al., 2009). As Patton (2002) noted "we cannot observe everything" (p. 340) thus we must ask about the unobservable.

A semi-structured interview format was used, utilizing open-ended questions to gather the individual's own experiences and thoughts. Chrzanowska (2002) noted that it is important to not lead or suggest ideas to the respondent through the questions. Semi-structured formatting was selected to allow for controlled direction of the topic of the interview with the flexibility to adapt to new ideas presented by the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This structuring embodies the way Patton (2002) described interviewing:

> The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories. (p. 341)

Through the perspectives gained by interviewing, we are able to better understand the consumer. Thus, this method has been used to explore consumers' understanding of ethical apparel. For example, Hiller and Woodall (2019) utilized interviews to gain a better understanding of the trade-offs and values consumers perceive to affect ethical consumption. Likewise, Djaforova and Foots (2022) used semi-structured interviews to explore what factors influence Generation Z consumers in regards to ethical consumer behavior.

Participant Sample and Selection

A total of 19 participants were recruited using a recruitment script. The script helped to limit participants to those who are the primary decision maker when it comes to their apparel purchases and have gathered knowledge on ethical production in at least one way, thus they were

familiar with at least one type of source used to gather information. The snowball method was used to recruit participants. Invitations were sent to students in apparel studies programs at two universities in North Carolina, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro and East Carolina University, as well as others within my personal network. Students at local universities were chosen due to convenience and perceived interest in apparel. Individuals within my personal network allowed for the sample to go beyond just college students.

Participants were asked about their knowledge of ethical apparel, including what they consider to be ethical apparel brands and where they gather their information from to make their decisions (see Appendix A for Schedule of Questions). Participants were asked about their purchasing habits and their personal interactions with ethical apparel, which allowed for a better understanding of how and why they may or may not purchase ethical apparel. Exploring their understanding of ethical apparel and industry practices in the apparel industry sheds light on the extent of their knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel industry. Participants were also asked where they gathered their information from and why they utilized certain sources, allowing for a better understanding of the sources consumers use, and to examine how trust of the sources plays a role in their adoption of the information. Further questions covered demographic information, such as race, gender, age, education level, and average household income.

With IRB approval (see Appendix B), interviews were scheduled and held via Zoom, adhering to COVID-19 regulations. Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participant and lasted approximately one hour. Interviews were conducted until saturation was achieved.

All participants in this study are the primary decision maker when it comes to their apparel purchases and have gathered knowledge on ethical production in at least one way. A total

of 19 participants were interviewed, 15 females and 4 males. Ages ranged from 18-60. Participants' occupations included college students to retired professionals. With the aid of the recruitment script, it was determined that participants had purchased ethically produced apparel in the last two years and had gathered information prior to their purchase. Table 2 includes the participants' demographics. Pseudonyms have been used in order to maintain confidentiality.

Table 2. Participants' Demographics

Name	Gender	Age	Education Level	Employment Status	Level of Fashion Involvement (Self-Identified)
Luci	Female	18-27	Some College	Student	Low
Matilda	Female	44-59	Ph.D.	Full-time	Low
Harry	Male	28-43	Bachelor's	Full-time	High
Daniel	Male	28-43	Bachelor's	Full-time	High
Morgan	Female	18-27	Bachelor's	Full-time	High
Emily	Female	18-27	Bachelor's	Full-time	Low
Jessica	Female	28-43	Bachelor's	Full-time	High
Ally	Female	28-43	Bachelor's	Full-time	Hight
Lilly	Female	44-59	Bachelor's	Full-time	High
Brian	Male	28-43	Bachelor's	Full-time	High
Georgia	Female	28-43	Bachelor's	Full-time	Low
Elijah	Male	18-27	Some College	Student	High
Jess	Female	28-43	Ph.D.	Full-time	Low
Rebecca	Female	18-27	Some College	Student	High
Kasia	Female	28-43	Bachelor's	Student	Low
Jenny	Female	18-27	Bachelor's	Student	Low
Chloe	Female	28-43	Bachelor's	Full-time	High
Sally	Female	18-27	Bachelor's	Full-time	High
Ann	Female	44-59	Bachelor's	Retired	Low

Data Analysis and Interpretation

After the completion of the in-depth interviews, each interview was transcribed verbatim to allow for analysis and interpretation of the data. Along with the collected demographic information from the questionnaire, the interview data was analyzed thematically. Thematic interpretation is used to analyze the findings of qualitative data to interpret the meanings individuals attach to their experiences and decipher the patterns and ways the meanings link together (Spiggle, 1994). According to Bailey (2007), thematic analysis is an effective method for analyzing data "when you seek themes that address your research questions, frame themes conceptually, and explore links among them" (p. 155). Thus, thematic interpretation allowed for a deeper understanding of the participant's perspective.

Analysis of the data followed Spiggle's (1994) operations, starting with the categorization of the data, in which the participants' experiences were divided into units of data for the purpose of coding. This was followed by abstraction, where the categories were then grouped into more general conceptual ideas. Then a comparison of the data was explored, noting any differences or similarities among the interviews. After the categories had been defined, the properties of the categories and constructs were identified through dimensionalization. Finally, through the integration of the data, the connections between the identified meanings and theoretical ideals guiding the study were detailed. Throughout the process, a continuous, back and forth, iterative process was used to identify emerging themes (Spiggle, 1994), while linking them back to literature. Once themes emerged, they were articulated and examined in relation to the literature and conceptual framework and their significance to the research purpose and objectives was described.

Summary

This chapter provided an outline of the methodological framework. The research design, including the use of the interview method, the participant sample, and approach to sample selection were discussed. The chapter concluded with discussion of the approach to data analysis and interpretation procedures utilized. The next chapter provides a thematic interpretation of the data.

CHAPTER IV: INTERPRETATION

The two-fold purpose of this thesis was to explore consumers' knowledge of unethical supply chain practices, and to understand what this knowledge means for their purchasing behavior. To address this purpose, the sources used by consumers to gather knowledge were explored, as well as the significant factors in relation to their trust of this knowledge. The four research objectives were: (1) to investigate consumer knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel industry, (2) to identify sources consumers use to acquire this knowledge, (3) to understand the role of trust in regards to these sources of information, and (4) to explore the role of consumer knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel industry in their purchase behavior. Semi-structured interviews with 19 individuals allowed for a better understanding of the individuals' own thoughts and experiences in relation to their knowledge of unethical supply chain practices. The following interpretation of the interview data provides a deeper understanding of participants' knowledge regarding unethical supply chain practices and where they obtained their knowledge on this subject.

As a result of the analysis of the in-depth interviews, four conceptual areas emerged: *Consumer Knowledge*, *Preferred Sources*, *Trust*, and *Knowledge Impact*. Within each conceptual area, themes were developed that represent the participants' knowledge of unethical supply chain practices and their experiences with gathering this knowledge. In the conceptual area of Consumer Knowledge, the two emergent themes are: *Fashion Forward versus Fashion Functional* and *Inferred Knowledge*. These themes help to explain the participants' knowledge levels regarding unethical supply chain practices. The conceptual area of Preferred Sources includes two emergent themes: *Google or Searched Sources* and *Personalized Sources*. Both themes explain the sources participants preferred to use to acquire knowledge of unethical supply

chain practices and why they choose them. As part of the conceptual area of Trust, three themes emerged: *Third Party*, *Data Presented*, and *Expert Influencers*. These three themes provide explanation of how participants evaluate the source of the information. In the conceptual area of Knowledge Impact, two themes emerged: *Planned versus Everyday* and *Sustainably Inclined*. These themes help to explain the role of consumer knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel industry in participants' purchase behaviors.

Consumer Knowledge

The first conceptual area, Consumer Knowledge, explores the level of knowledge consumers have regarding unethical supply chain practices. Although all participants had a general level of knowledge about ethical apparel, the participants' priorities in terms of the issues in ethical apparel production differed depending on their level of fashion involvement, which is reflected in the theme of *Fashion Forward versus Fashion Functional*. In instances where the participants did not have a defined answer, they were able to puzzle out meanings or ideas regarding issues that they had not previously been exposed to. This use of previous knowledge to fill in their own information gaps is highlighted in the theme of *Inferred Knowledge*.

Fashion Forward versus Fashion Functional

The concept of ethically made apparel was relatively easy for all participants to explain. Most highlighted two main factors when asked to define ethical production: workers' rights and environmental impact. Living wages, child labor, working conditions, and forced labor were all issues that participants noted as concerns when discussing ethically produced apparel. They also highlighted issues such as material waste and excess production as well as longevity of apparel products. Participants looked at ethical production as encompassing the whole life cycle of the

product and not just a single stage in the factory. For Sally, the full life cycle was key in terms of ethical production:

> I think that first of all, it involves the materials used, and whether or not the overall process takes reduction of waste into account, where the materials are sourced from, and also using fair labor practices as well, and the people that are making the clothes work in safe conditions, and are paid a living wage, and all of that good stuff.

Rebecca shared a similar sentiment, focusing on living wages and materials:

> I think about like it being like, the packaging being recyclable. I think about the employees being paid a living wage. I think about the manufacturer. People being treated well. I think about like ethically sourced or well sourced material, like the leather is good, or it's not just super cheap and thrown together with people that are treated super poorly and not paid well.

When asked to define what ethical apparel is, all participants shared responses similar to Rebecca, noting both the human aspects and the environmental aspects. While all participants had similar ideas about what ethical production should look like, they were not unanimous in what the main issue is in regard to ethical apparel production. Participants were split between 'people,' meaning fair wages, safe working conditions, etc. and 'general ideas,' such as cost or the impact and awareness of ethical production. Some of those who indicated 'people' as the main issue in ethical apparel production also pointed to 'general ideas' as another significant issue, however, those who indicated 'general ideas' as the primary issue in ethical apparel production usually did not also highlight 'people.' Interestingly, the participants who mentioned 'people' as a main issue aligned with their self-identification of level of fashion involvement. That is, nearly all those who highlighted 'people' as the main issue in ethical apparel production also self-identified with a higher level of fashion involvement, with only two individuals who self-identified as having a lower level of fashion involvement also highlighting 'people.' For example, Jess, who self-identified as having a lower level of fashion involvement stated, "I don't know if it's across the entire apparel industry. But the main issues that I see are of concern is

child labor, slave labor, and inhumane treatment of animals." This notion was echoed by Jenny, who also self-identified as having a low level of fashion involvement:

> I think definitely like how it's produced and who produces it, and kind of whether or not their work and efforts in producing it benefit them in a meaningful way versus in a way that's not balanced with the amount of effort and/or personal risk that goes into making it and then also kind of the other side of things. And then not making clothing that's intended to disintegrate or kind of go out of use pretty immediately…

In some cases, participants who self-identified as having a higher level of fashion involvement shared the same sentiment. For example, Chloe shared:

> I think again, it'd probably be like the sweatshops and the way they treat people, the underpaying of them. And then also again, not focusing on like these micro trends where you're producing so much for such a short timeframe and then having that go to waste and like go ending up in the landfill.

> All other participants who self-identified as having a low level of fashion involvement

indicated more general ideas, such as cost, awareness, or mass production as main issues in ethical apparel production. For example, Matilda highlighted awareness and cost as the main issues in ethical apparel production:

> Well, clearly, it's been brought to my mind that maybe people are less aware of what ethical apparel is and how important it is. But I'm sure there's cost issues, right? Cause you're using natural products that are maybe harder to come by.

Kasia echoed the importance of cost, but in terms of easy access to items:

> Mass produced garments at incredibly cheap prices might be alluring for people to purchase ultimately, but they almost never come from good places. So, I think, at the purchasing end of things, the biggest issue is that we continuously support these poor practices from the manufacturing standpoint by continuously buying those things, and they don't last as long because they're not made as well because poor materials were used. So, we buy more of them, but they cost less. If we bought a better product for slightly more, it would last longer...

> While the main issue in regard to ethical apparel production differed slightly among

participants, all pointed to lack of fair wages, use of child labor, and unsafe working conditions as known issues in regard to unethical apparel production practices. The level of fashion

involvement did not play a role in whether or not the participant had boycotted an apparel brand for unethical practices, however nearly all participants reported they had done so. Emily stated that she also encouraged others to boycott as well:

> Oh, yes, okay. So, I don't shop at Shein anymore. Because I found out from the whole media blow up a couple of years ago about their sweatshop problem. I stopped buying from them, and I encouraged other people to not buy from them too.

The idea of not shopping at brands that engage in practices that the participant views as unethical was a common theme. Indeed, most participants had multiple brands that they have boycotted, like Sally who said, "I would never buy from Shein, H & M, Forever 21 those kinds of brands. Or even like, yeah, the other brands that come to mind aren't fashion brands. But yes, I have boycotted brands."

Overall, the knowledge participants had in regard to ethical apparel was similar across the sample. The level of fashion involvement seems to play a small role in terms of what the participant identified as the most significant or main issue facing ethical apparel production, otherwise the knowledge of ethical issues in the apparel industry was relatively similar among all of the participants.

Inferred Knowledge

Participants displayed a strong general understanding of issues regarding unethical apparel production practices, and seemed to struggle only when asked more specific questions. The majority of participants were able to come up with a definition of "Fair Trade Certified" even if they were unsure of the actual parameters for the certification. They did so by using their knowledge of Fair Trade in other industries, or by inferring the information from previous knowledge. For example, Matilda used her knowledge of Fair Trade in terms of coffee:

> Well, I've defined it for coffee. But I would think that means that the people who are employed are paid appropriate wages. That they're treated appropriately when they're

53

working, yeah, and that they have a living wage. I don't know if it also includes, you know, organic materials or natural materials and that kind of thing, yeah.

Morgan inferred from context clues in the name, "I guess Fair Trade Certified, it's when things are fairly made and sold like how much it's worth and how much equals the amount of it, the cost of it being made. Maybe." Other participants, like Lilly had a clearer understanding, summarizing it as,

> Fair Trade Certified to me is when you're sourcing your fabrics and your goods, and your wages to me all of that. I mean when your fair trade certified… it means you've gone through some hoops and some red tape to get inspected and checked and rechecked. And in my mind, I feel like these people have done what they have to do to make it official. They have that symbol. That means that they are being monitored in some fashion. It makes it believable and official, I guess.

> While participants were able to use inferred knowledge to fill in the blanks with relatively familiar terms, like "Fair Trade," the majority were unaware of what a Certified B Corporation is. Only five of the nineteen participants had any knowledge of Certified B Corporations. Those five participants were only aware of Certified B Corporations in that they know it is a certification, but did not offer specifics. For example, Ally mentioned that it was a topic broached at work:

> I'm aware of what a B Corporation is, but I don't know of any. I'm assuming, maybe I said one or two who knows. It's funny you say that cause we were just talking about it at my company, like we were just talking about like B Certification stuff…

Those five participants had some exposure to the concept of Certified B Corporations beforehand, allowing them to be able to infer what it can mean, while the other participants had none and thus had no knowledge to draw from. When participants had gaps in their current knowledge of ethical apparel topics, they appeared to utilize the knowledge they had on similar topics to help fill the gaps. Therefore, when known information and inferred knowledge are combined, participants showed a relatively high level of general knowledge regarding unethical apparel production practices.

Preferred Sources

Although participants displayed relatively similar levels of knowledge in regard to unethical production practices in the apparel industry, they seemed to rely on a variety of different sources to gather their information. The types of preferred sources were broken down into two themes *Google or Searched Sources* and *Personalized Sources*. These themes explain the types of sources preferred by participants and why they choose them.

Google or Searched Sources

All participants noted that they utilize the Internet, as a type of source, in their quest for information on unethical apparel production practices. Several participants cited Google, in particular, as the "go-to" or starting point for their information search. As Emily explained, she starts with Google and moves through the options to sources she views as trustworthy, "Well, initially, yeah, Google. But then, like I try to choose sites that seem trustworthy, like you know, not filled with ads. Things like *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review*. Like, I would trust those kinds of sites." Harry echoed this statement, "Google News…. It's just easier. It's like, just type in like what product, and then like factory or controversy, or something like that. And then I can just see the headlines and be like, alright."

Along with the Internet as a source, some participants also utilize news outlets as their preferred source, in particular online news outlets, because they are easy to navigate and provide a good amount of relevant information. There were multiple news sources preferred. For Rebecca, the go-to is Apple News:

> Apple News, actually, the Apple News app, I saw an article about it [Shein ethical issues] a few years ago. Like before, it was like a huge thing on, like social media and stuff. I read an Apple News article about it, so I felt very ahead of the times during that, ahead of the times.

Anne prefers the *New York Times*:

I think because if I go say for instance, if I go to the *New York Times*, then they have an article on ethically produced garments or something in that line. I can read the whole article and get more information than if I found it on social media where you might get a snippet.

A common theme between the use of the Internet/Google and online news outlets was the intention behind the use of the sources. That is, participants indicated that they utilized these types of sources with the goal of gathering information on ethical apparel and therefore were intentional in their searches. For example, Ally shared how she uses these types of sources with intention:

The Internet, because I feel like there's no other place. But when I'm on the Internet, I'm really intentional about the sources and how resourceful they are, and how honest or factual they are…. I prefer predominantly, like, reputable sources like I read a couple from Routers, which is great. Obviously, then, you have, like the *New York Times*. And then I do like places like, I think they're a little more opinionated, though, but it'll be like *The Cut*, but that's cause they're on like trending topics.

Participants indicated Google and online news outlets as preferred sources when they were actively searching out information and wanted a source for content with more than just a headline. They also often utilized these types of sources to verify information gathered from other sources, including more personalized sources, like social media.

Personalized Sources

Outside of the broad scope of the Internet, as a source, the majority of participants also claimed to use more personalized sources, such as social media, for information gathering. The use of social media allows for the individual to connect with others who are like-minded or to follow accounts and themes that they enjoy, curating unique feeds catering to the individual. In particular, the social media platforms of Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube were cited as preferred sources of information among participants. Instagram and TikTok were the most mentioned forms of social media. Of the two preferred types of social media, Instagram was

mentioned by participants of all ages, while TikTok was only mentioned by those of the

Millennial generation. Chloe claimed that TikTok was her preferred source overall:

> I like TikTok. It's super easily digestible. Also, it gives me like really good go-to action places, while like visually showing it to me. So [it] will be like, oh are you looking for like summer dresses like here's some ethical places to buy them. Or like it's a trial from like an ethical source, or like showing like other options that are ethical as well. So, I think that way, it's like an easy way to direct people, and a really good way for me to find it very easily, versus having to do a ton of research.

In contrast, Rebecca stated that her preferred social media source was Instagram:

> Well, I have the most Gen Z answer for you. Unfortunately, I let it come to me through the accounts I follow on Instagram. And like social media. I wish I had some like super important, like informational answer, like, oh I like this blog. And I like this website. But no, Instagram.

> Along with social media sources, participants also indicated the use of word of mouth

(WOM) as a source for gathering information. Participants who claimed WOM as a preferred

source of information were either a Millennial or Gen Z, like Morgan, who shared:

> Online, I mean and also just word of mouth. I was well, I know some of my friends are more aware of it than I am, and more informed. So, I guess in that sense, yeah, just googling and word of mouth.

> With these personalized sources, such as social media and WOM, the participants

indicated that they did not always intend to seek out information on unethical apparel production

practices. Instead, they allowed their post interactions and those they follow to generate the

informational posts, versus actively seeking it out when they use sources such as Google. This

more passive information gathering was described by Georgia:

> I don't think I seek it out, but I do see it more and more [as a] talking point on TikTok and YouTube and stuff…. I think and like Instagram ads, I think that a lot of people are labeled online as being ethically conscious. And they're trying to create a market for that. So like, that's why these brands reach out to these YouTubers, these fashion YouTubers and TikTockers, influencers. And on Instagram, I get a lot of targeted ads I feel like of, here's this new direct [to] consumer company. This is why it's gonna solve your problems for this specific thing. So, I think that if, like the algorithms glean that you care about politics at all, you'll be advertised to.

Participants tended to use a lot of personalized sources, like social media and WOM, because of the convenience they offer. The ability to gather the information passively was a major factor in these preferred sources, as it took no additional time for the participants to find them. These sources also provided access to particular accounts or individuals that the participants had already deemed to be trustworthy.

<div align="center">**Trust**</div>

While the sources the participants use may differ, the methods by which they evaluate the source to determine whether or not they would adopt the information appear to be relatively the same across the sample. Participants indicated the main factors that they look for when trying to determine if the source they were using was trustworthy. These factors were broken down into three main themes: *Third Party Certifications*, *Data Presented*, and *Expert Influencers*. These themes explain how, as consumers, participants evaluate sources of information.

Third Party Certifications

One of the main indicators that participants claimed helped them evaluate a source for trustworthiness is third party certifications. The type of certification was important to the participants, as they indicated that they were wary of anything that was not an industry standard or that did not have set requirements. They preferred certifications that were recognized more broadly, and thus they could infer the meaning of. The third party certification gives them the ability to trust that the information they are receiving is not deceptive, like in the case of greenwashing. Kasia shared why the type of certification mattered to her:

> If it's a federal certification, and you can look up that certification, it would be trustworthy automatically. The Fair Trade does have a certification with it, I know. So that's gonna be one of those things. If they can label themselves fair trade in market, then you're good there. Organic doesn't mean anything, so that doesn't do anything. So, is the certification federally recognized, ergo, I trust it.

<div align="center">58</div>

Third party certifications allow for the consumer to have faith that the information that they are receiving has been verified by another party and is accurate. Participants indicated that they had a fear of being deceived, particularly by apparel companies, when claims about being ethical were made, and then felt like it was difficult to prove whether or not the information provided was trustworthy. They indicated that the lack of set meaning or definition for words such as 'sustainable' or 'ethical' makes it harder to analyze the claims being made, particularly when the claims are made by the companies themselves. Georgia explained this fear, "I'm just cynical about any big company saying like, oh, we're ethically sourced. We're sustainable. Cause what does that mean? I think these words also, like, don't mean anything standardly. So, I definitely don't trust any company." For Georgia, the third party certifications help to give credit to the source and it's information. Similarly, Morgan stated that she finds it tricky when it feels like there is no way to prove a source wrong. For her, third party certifications help indicate that the information gathered is true, "Definitely third party publication or certification. Also, maybe like they have a lot of things backing them up in their word, like 'Here's where we did this. Here's the exact material we use from this place.'"

In addition to third party certifications, participants indicated that the amount of data, or "proof" offered, provides a greater amount of credibility to a source and, in turn, the information they gathered from it.

Data Presented

While third party certifications provided proof that the claims made by a source were in line with set regulations, thereby giving credibility to the source, participants also indicated that getting to see the data themselves prompted a lot more trust in the source. Getting to see the physical proof of the statements made by a source, whether that be photos or numerical data, was

a major factor in source credibility for participants. As with third party certification, such

information allowed them to verify the claims themselves, rather than having to trust an outside

source. For example, Jenny shared:

> Yeah, I think, like concrete numbers and or sources cited. I look for as well as potentially, not like if there are images associated with it, stock looking images, things that are like directly tied in specific to that company or their production process or clothes. So, I think in summary detail, is what I would say I look for.

The ability to verify the information themselves was very important to the participants, as they

felt like there is so much ambiguity surrounding the idea of ethically made apparel. Having

access to the data allowed them to determine if the statements made were up to their own

personal standards of what ethical apparel is, and if so, this lent credence to the source. Emily

echoed many other participants by saying:

> I don't think you ever know for a hundred percent, but I think it helps when you're able to like see the details that they have about it. And like you can kind of tell when they're more passionate about it, cause they share more information, and will like walk you through a lot of things. Whereas the other ones may just like say, oh, "ethically made" and no details.

> When dealing with such terms as "ethically made," the definition or standards are so

ambiguous that it can be difficult for consumers to know if the information that they have

gathered is accurate. Being presented with the data or proof of how the apparel is being made

ethically, such as what the wages paid are or photos of the working conditions, allows for the

participants to better evaluate the validity of the information they have gathered, as well as the

accuracy of the source, which leads them to trust the source and accept the information as

knowledge. Elijah highlighted the preference for data as a way to determine that the source was

trustworthy:

> Data and reports. So, if they can produce numbers and charts and actual tangible information that I can sit back and look at and go, okay, that's provable. And it's been written and documented by other sources. That's how I know I'm checking off boxes. The whole greenwashing thing that we learned about, I think, is going on with some of

the bigger companies. And they're just saying, this is what we're doing, or this is being implemented. And there's no data or any analytics to back up the event. And so I think, when there's tangible numbers and statistics, that's what's the most reliable thing.

For participants, when a source is able to present the data that backs up the claims they are making, they feel more confident in their ability to trust that source. With such ambiguity around the topic of ethical apparel, the extent of a source's trustworthiness can also be affected by the expertise of who presents it.

Expert Influencer

Along with presenting the data, which allows for the individual to evaluate the source's trustworthiness, participants also indicated that the expertise of the source was important to their ability to trust the information gathered. The expertise of the source was an important factor, regardless of whether the source was a personal source, such as social media or friends, or a professional source, such as Google or a news outlet. Participants indicated that they found sources that they believed to be expert or more knowledgeable on the topic of ethical apparel to be more trustworthy. Jessica explained that outside of data, the expertise of the source is a strong indicator of whether she can trust it or not, "When there's multiple sources and I can look, maybe at like articles that people who are more well rehearsed in this topic, and I can trust they seem trustworthy. We can look at their opinions." Likewise, Brian indicated that he utilizes what he considered expert sources to verify or confirm information from new sources he is using to gather information:

> I check, like other folks, there's some Reddit pages also. For like ethical consumption of goods that I also check, and then I will do like the occasional TikTok search, because usually most of the time people will put it out there for everyone to know.

The importance of the source's expertise was emphasized not only for outside or secondary sources of information, but also when the participant was gathering information from the brands themselves. Participants shared that brands that do not have ethics as a part of their

branding or as a pillar of what the brand stood for, are brands they are less likely to believe.

Instead, participants viewed this as more like it was a PR move, or marketing, rather than factual

information. Chloe articulated this distinction:

> I think, when it's more trustworthy, is again, when it's like the whole site is based on it. It's not just placed on like this one item is ethically made…. But when your whole site is like this is ethically made, this is like it's more detail oriented on what they do like as a whole business.

> Brands that hold ethics or sustainability as central to the company's image were

significant factors for participants, particularly when the source they were using was the brand's

website. When ethically-based ideals are part of the company's makeup, participants felt like

they could trust the information they gathered from the company website. In contrast, those

companies that did not have ethical traits as pillars of their brands led the participants to feel as if

they were being lied to, or 'ethical washed' as Ally called it:

> It depends on the company, and like why they decide to come out and make that claim right. Like if they just come out of nowhere and they're saying it, I'll be like, let me look into why… say, company controversy and like, oh it's because this ex-employee came out. So, is it actually ethical? Or if it's a new company, and this is what they say. I have this thing where I've learned a lot about greenwashing. And I work in marketing too. So, we have to just make sure we don't sound like that, and a lot of companies kind of like, get away with that. And I think I have a good eye now picking up, who's like greenwashing or ethical washing, because just cause you say it legally, they can get away with a lot [more] than we think.

The perceived expertise of the source was an important indication of whether or not the

individual could trust the source of the information. A strong message allowed for the

participants to have more trust in the source and thus more trust in the information they were

gathering.

Participants employed multiple methods to determine the trustworthiness of the sources

they used to gather information on unethical apparel production practices. They used third party

certifications to validate that the claims were in line with industry standards of what ethical

means. They examined the data presented themselves to confirm that the information gathered was accurate and in line with their own expectations. And finally, they looked to expert influencers as an indicator to avoid 'ethical washing.' Once they determined that the sources they used were trustworthy, they, in turn, could trust the information enough to consider it to be knowledge on the subject.

Knowledge Impact

The fourth conceptual area, Knowledge Impact, explores the role that the information participants have gathered about ethical apparel plays in their intentions to purchase products. Once individuals have gathered information and determined if the sources are trustworthy or not, they then have to apply that knowledge to their purchasing behavior. The ways in which participants indicated they applied this knowledge were broken down into two themes: *Planned versus Everyday* and *Sustainably Inclined*. These two themes help to explain the role of their knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel industry within their purchase behaviors.

Planned versus Everyday

All participants indicated that it was important to them to purchase ethically produced apparel. Participants discussed their purchases in two different ways: as planned purchases, that had pre-thought out intentions, and everyday purchases, that are either "in the moment" or reoccurring purchases. The majority of participants shared that when making planned purchases, the factor of ethical production played a role in their purchasing intentions. They indicated that while gathering information on the items they were looking to purchase, if they found ethically produced options that met what they needed, then they would purchase those over the other options. For example, Rebecca, who was in the market for a new tote bag, shared that at the

beginning whether something was ethically made was not her determining factor, but it ended up

playing a role in her final decision:

> Initially, when I went into wanting to buy a tote bag, I wasn't really thinking much about it being from an ethical company, but the more I found out about Able, my mom would shop through that a lot. And I was like, oh, of course, that I would want to support something like that, and their bags are great. So, a plus sign for that.

While the majority of participants indicated that ethical production practices were a factor

they used to determine which apparel item to purchase when making a planned purchase, there

were other factors that kept them from always picking the ethical option. Indeed, consumers use

multiple factors to influence their decisions to purchase a particular product, and while ethical

production practices were a factor participants used to evaluate their options, price and fit also

play a major role in their decisions. Multiple participants mentioned that price had kept them

from purchasing ethically made apparel, even though it was important to them, and this was true

whether the purchase was planned or not. Ally highlighted this roadblock when stating that

purchasing ethically made apparel was important to her, "Important, but I would be calling

myself a hypocrite, because it's kind of difficult with my budget. But I try my best." Jenny

echoed this sentiment, sharing that she uses different criteria for different types of purchases:

> I think cost was a factor. And then also I guess when I'm buying a t-shirt, especially one that's like kind of logo oriented. I don't think as critically about the ethical aspect, whereas if I'm making a bigger purchase and investing more money, I usually think a little bit more about that. Or if it's like an item that I think I want to last a long time, I think a little bit more about that as well. Whereas t-shirts probably just as important to think about that, but not my first thought. Unfortunately.

When making every day or "in the moment" purchases, participants indicated that the

factor of ethical production played more of a passive role in their decisions. That is, often

characteristics like price and fit played more of a role in their intention when faced with making

purchases that took place with less planning. Notably, participants shared that, instead of leading

them to decide to purchase a particular product, their knowledge of unethical apparel production

practices was often used to determine which products not to purchase. That is, they used their

knowledge to determine which products or brands to avoid when making their purchasing

decisions. Almost all participants indicated that there were brands that they refuse to purchase

from because of the knowledge they have pertaining to the brand's production practices. Lilly

shared how this knowledge helped her avoid supporting some brands through her purchases:

> …But I guess I just, I won't shop there. I won't shop there for my children, and I know my mom was talking to me about Temu the other day. And I was like, you know, that's bad…. I choose not to buy like if I need something really cheap, and I kind of have an idea of what it is I'm still not gonna go to Walmart and buy something made in China from Walmart. I'm just not going to do it.

Chloe, echoed this idea, stating:

> …I guess Shein would be one, because I will say like when Shein first came out, I was like this is amazing…. And I will now like not shop there. I used to shop there in like 2019, and I haven't bought anything from there since, after learning about their practices. And also, I'm very wary of like other ones that I'm maybe not fully sure of, like Spider or CommenSence, like they always have such cute stuff at low prices, which makes it so tempting, but just like in my head, I just know that it's probably unethical and not produced well… so I try to avoid them all at all possibilities.

The application of knowledge of unethical apparel production practices differed among

participants depending on the type of purchase they were making. In planned purchases, it played

a determining factor in what item they purchased when other factors such as price were not as

critical. In everyday or reoccurring purchases, the knowledge of unethical apparel production

practices led to the avoidance of a particular product or brand, regardless of whether price was a

factor.

Sustainably Inclined

Knowledge of unethical apparel production practices played a role in participants'

purchasing behaviors, both as a reason to purchase and as a reason not to purchase a particular

product. This knowledge, coupled with the individual's knowledge of environmental factors, can

result in the decision to not purchase anything at all. Multiple participants indicated that they had

started leaning towards the idea of less consumption as a way to combat issues such as ethics and sustainability in the fashion industry. For instance, Georgia shared that consuming less is one of the ways she feels like she is making an ethically based decision as a consumer, when discussing the ethically produced garments she has bought:

> I thought they look like good quality, like I saw good, like my friends had used it before. So, it's like something that is good quality, but I know it's ethically sourced. For me, more than it being ethically sourced, like the ethical thing is like not buying so often. That's how I think about it.

Other participants shared the same idea. As Chloe said,

> I definitely think it's been more top of mind as of the past two years. Purchase more ethically, just because especially what I've seen in recent years, like through the Internet. Like when you see, like these wastelands of wasted apparel, and just like how quickly fashion trends go through. I've definitely been trying to focus on things that will last me a long time, and that like there also the companies motto is to be more ethical and sustainable because it's crazy how much waste is out there.

Participants used their knowledge of unethical apparel production practices in multiple ways when determining what to purchase. They used the knowledge as a positive influence to purchase when making a planned purchase and when price was not a major factor. The knowledge acted as more of a deterrent towards specific items and brands with everyday purchases. And finally, participants used their knowledge of unethical apparel production practices to completely eliminate all intentions to make any purchase, as another way to address the issue of ethical production in apparel.

Summary

This chapter presented a thematic interpretation of participant responses. Four conceptual areas and their emergent themes were discussed, connecting participants' experiences. In the next chapter, the findings relative to the study's research purpose and objectives are discussed.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The twofold purpose of this study was to explore consumer knowledge of unethical apparel supply chain practices and to examine the impact of this knowledge on their purchase decisions. Four specific research objectives were identified to address this purpose:

1. To investigate consumer knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel industry.

2. To identify sources consumers use to acquire this knowledge.

3. To understand the role of trust in regards to these sources of information.

4. To investigate the role of consumer knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel industry in their purchase behavior.

This chapter includes the following sections: (a) a discussion of the findings relative to the study's objectives; (b) implications of the connections between knowledge and information for purchase behavior, and (c) recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

Consumer Knowledge of Unethical Apparel Supply Chain Practices

Ethical apparel is oftentimes an ambiguous term, and this ambiguity can cause confusion for individuals who want to make decisions that align with their personal morals. All participants of the study were able to explain what ethical apparel meant to them and the overarching ideas were relatively similar among them. Emily's definition of ethical apparel summed up the general idea that all participants shared, "I was, gonna say, that it's, like, made ethically and doesn't, like, harm the environment or people." All participants indicated that the entire life cycle of the garment was considered when defining an item of apparel as ethical, with participants focused particularly on the life cycle stages of production and post consumption (disposal). Jessica's

definition of what it means when something is ethically made highlighted the disposal or post

consumption concern that was shared by the other participants, "It's like, you know, they're

paying their workers fair wages. It's clothes that are gonna be made to last. You know, it's not

gonna end up in the landfill like the next year, and they're sourcing [of] them." This view is in

line with the definitions by Thomas (2008) and Joergens (2006), in that both defined ethical

fashion as an idea that touched all aspects of the consumption cycle and not just a singular

action.

While participants agreed on their definitions of what ethical apparel was, what they

considered to be the most significant issue in ethical apparel production practices differed. This

separation of significant issues appeared to align with the participants' self-identified levels of

involvement with fashion. Participants with a self-identified high level of fashion involvement

placed more significance on the human aspects of unethical apparel practices, emphasizing

issues such as child labor and low/unpaid wages. For example, Brian, who self-identified as

having a high level of fashion involvement, focused more the welfare of those who make the

clothing,

> Just that the workers were paid fair wages to produce whatever garments they did. And
> that they weren't made in like sweatshops or produced through child labor. So, if it's like,
> coming from outside of the country, it's like ideally, those people are paid well and not
> working like, you know, not like on slave wages or anything like that.

In contrast, those participants who self-identified as having a low level of fashion involvement

placed more emphasis on issues such as consumer lack of knowledge or cost factors. For

example, Anne, who self-identified as having a low level of fashion involvement, highlighted the

need for more information, "Hmm, making more people aware of the issue with, you know, the

manufacture, the disposal, all of it. You know the whole process."

The distinction found between what participants considered to be the most significant issue in ethical apparel production practices and their (self-identified) level of fashion involvement is in line with the current literature. That is, consumers with a high level of fashion involvement have been found to continuously seek out new information in regards to apparel, and thus may also have more knowledge regarding issues in the apparel industry (Razzaq et al., 2018). This increased knowledge has been linked to greater concern for the treatment of workers (Dickson, 2000). Likewise, participants in this study with higher levels of self-identified fashion involvement put more emphasis on issues affecting workers than those who self-identified as having a lower level of fashion involvement, though they both clearly had a good understanding of ethical apparel practices.

It is interesting to note that this separation was the only time that the participants' self-identified level of fashion involvement played an obvious role in their responses. Overall, participants with both high and low levels of fashion involvement had a strong basic understanding of unethical apparel production practices. Regardless of levels of involvement, participants primarily used inferred knowledge to answer the more industry-specific questions, particularly in relation to industry certifications. Previous research has suggested that consumers at different levels of fashion involvement may require different amounts of information, particularly in regards to socially responsible labeling (Gam et al., 2014), indicating more prior knowledge at higher levels of fashion involvement. Participants in this study used prior knowledge to infer meaning of the same ideas, regardless of their level of fashion involvement.

When discussing what they knew of unethical apparel production practices, participants shared that issues such as slave/forced labor, child labor, unsafe working conditions, unpaid or unfair wages, and environmentally harmful practices were issues that they were most aware of as

69

happening in the industry. While most participants could not think of specific examples of these issues, all of them knew about the issues in relation to particular brands. Specifically, the majority of participants cited unethical practices in tandem with fast fashion brands, including Shein and H & M, regardless of whether they could provide specific examples of these practices. Participants alluded to the idea that the extremely low prices and constantly changing options made it impossible to believe that ethical production practices were typical for these brands. The participants were confident in their knowledge of what it takes to produce ethical apparel and thus were able to infer whether or not a brand was unethical in its apparel production practices based on their general knowledge.

This finding was not the only instance of inferred knowledge that emerged among participants. Most of them had only vague ideas about what Fair Trade certified means in relation to apparel. When asked to define it, they used what they knew of the term in relation to other industries, such as coffee, to make assumptions about the implications of the certification for apparel production. For example, Chloe defined Fair Trade certified through the use of inferred knowledge based on the general idea, "I don't know if I could really say what that is specifically on my end. But I would assume that Fair Trade certified means that they purchase their goods ethically, I would hope, and would produce them [ethically] as well…" Even fewer participants had prior knowledge of the topic of Certified B Corporations. The level of fashion involvement of the participants did not seem to play a role in their knowledge of these certifications, which some brands use to indicate to consumers that they are engaging in ethical production practices. The lack of certain knowledge of these certifications or labels by participants, regardless of their self-identified level of fashion involvement, is different than what has been previously reported. For example, Gam et al. (2014) found that the level of fashion

involvement was an indicator of knowledge of socially responsible labeling, but the present study found that the self-identified level of fashion involvement was not an indicator of knowledge of either socially responsible labeling or certifications.

The findings of this study provide a better understanding of consumers' knowledge of unethical apparel production practices in the apparel industry, addressing the gap in current literature on consumer knowledge. Previous research has shown that consumers of different levels of fashion involvement have different levels of knowledge regarding ethical apparel practices and thus require different levels of information to be educated on the topic (Gam et al., 2014). This study has shown that the level of fashion involvement, while self-identified, did not play a notable role in the participants' level of knowledge of ethical apparel practices. It also showed that the self-identified level of fashion involvement of the participants did not play a role in their knowledge of socially responsible labeling, which had previously been shown to be a factor in consumer understanding and use of socially responsible labeling by Gam et al. (2014). Participants at both levels of self-identified fashion involvement had limited understanding of the ethical certifications, such as Fair Trade and Certified B Corporations.

The lack of divide between the different levels of self-identified fashion involvement and consumer knowledge would indicate that the amount or level of information that consumers need when gathering information on unethical apparel supply chain practices is not notably different. Instead, where the level of fashion involvement and consumer knowledge aligned was in terms of importance. Participants' level of self-identified fashion involvement aligned with their opinion of what the most important issue in ethical apparel production is, with higher levels of fashion involvement focused more on the human aspect, and lower levels of fashion involvement focused more on the education of the issue. This finding indicates that while different levels of

information may not necessarily be needed for different levels of fashion involvement, different types of information may be. These findings provide a better understanding of consumers' knowledge of unethical practices in the apparel supply chain, along with further insight into how levels of fashion involvement may affect the type of information needed by the consumer.

It was found that while participants shared similar definitions of ethical apparel and had relatively similar levels of knowledge in regards to unethical apparel production practices, they utilized multiple types of sources to gather this information. These findings are discussed in the next section.

Sources Used to Acquire Knowledge

Participants used an array of sources to gather information on unethical apparel production practices. They preferred to use different types of sources for different purposes. All participants utilized multiple sources in their quest for information, but, interestingly, they used the different types of sources in similar ways.

The types of sources participants preferred to use in their information search were broadly placed into two categories, personal sources and Google/searched sources. Participants used personalized sources as more of a passive form of information search and Google or searched sources as a form of active information search. Almost all sources that participants preferred were online, with the exception of WOM from friends and family. Previous research has broken down source types into three different dimensions: personal versus impersonal, marketer-controlled versus non-marketer controlled, and online versus offline (Akalamkam & Mitra, 2018; Klein & Ford, 2003). Participants in this study tended to prefer source types that fell into the dimensions of personal, non-marketer controlled, and online.

When examining the personalized sources that participants preferred, social media was the most common type of source. Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube were the most mentioned forms of social media used by participants to gather information on unethical apparel production practices. Participants tended towards these sources of information due to convenience and the curated algorithms, which allowed them to gather information passively without having to actively search out the topic. Participants indicated that this passive information gathering sometimes led to further intentional information gathering through other sources. As Rebecca explained,

> It's just, this is good and bad. It's very quick. Like I can get the information, and I can keep scrolling. But also, that's like really bad, because you don't end up really looking into it. If I find something interesting, and I'm like, oh, that catches my eye! I will look into it. I try to do that because I've caught myself being like, seeing the headlines, reading it and being like, 'Oh, I think I know everything about it.' But I don't. So, I try to catch myself and look into things. So, I think it's good and bad that it's easily consumed.

When participants actively seek out information on unethical apparel production practices, they tend to prefer Google or searched sources. Participants indicated that when they wanted to find information on a particular topic or to verify information gathered from another source, they preferred to start with Google and move through the source options provided. Kasia shared that,

> If I wanted to do my proper research, I could. We easily just Google around. The research that way, I mean, Google Scholar is obviously one of those places that you can go for those sorts of things…I really want to know if some, if a particular brand was ethical or not, I have a personal connection that would give me the full details.

While all participants indicated that they used Google or the Internet as a way of fact checking information they had gathered from other sources, multiple participants also indicated that they would search for the topics on their preferred form of social media or discuss them with friends/family as well, using these personalized sources in a more intentional information

73

gathering effort. This practice of 'fact checking' illustrates a degree of trust in some sources more than others. Through 'fact checking,' participants worked to alleviate uncertainty about the information they had gathered, which Carrigan and Attalla (2001) noted as one of the contributing factors to the attitude-behavior gap in consumers with ethical purchase intentions. For example, when asked how she knew the information she gathered on ethical apparel practices was trustworthy, Jess replied, "Usually, if you have it in multiple sources." All participants noted trust in information that they could 'fact check' with multiple sources. While consistency of information across sources led to increased trust for participants, along with consistency, participants also evaluate the source's expertise and the information's quality to determine their level of trust.

These findings regarding participants' preferred sources of information provide a better understanding of where and how consumers acquire knowledge about ethical apparel production practices. While previous research has indicated that the source a consumer uses to gather their information can have an affect on their trust of the information (Hassan et al., 2013), their preferred types of sources had yet to be fully examined. This study showed that participants had a preference for personal, non-marketer controlled, online sources. The use of personal sources refers to information gathered through friends, acquaintances, and family, rather than advertisements, store displays, or celebrities (Seock & Bailey, 2009). Participants noted that they utilized their personal networks to both learn about and confirm information regarding unethical apparel production practices, through both WOM and online methods. They preferred sources that were not marketer controlled in an effort to alleviate uncertainty of trust in the source. Participants shared that unless they had a preestablished level of trust with the brand, they tended not to use the company website or advertisements as sources of information. Instead, they

preferred to gather information from outside sources to ensure there was not an ulterior motive

for presenting the information. Such sources included information from bloggers and social

media accounts dedicated to the consumption of ethical apparel.

Outside of the use of WOM from friends and family, participants indicated that all other

sources of information they preferred to utilize to gather information regarding unethical apparel

supply chain practices were online, with a predominant preference for social media sites for both

learning about and confirming accuracy of the information gathered. Participants explained that

the use of social media allowed them to not only passively gather information on unethical

apparel supply chain practices, but to curate the specific sources they received it from by

utilizing the algorithm of their social media accounts, such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and

Twitter, to funnel them information posted by the accounts they followed and other accounts like

them. This method provided information in a convenient way that required limited effort to

gather, therefore the only effort required was to trust it.

Participants clearly preferred social media or personal sources as information sources

regarding unethical apparel supply chain practices due to the convenience they afford. Once they

had gathered information that they wanted to better understand or to confirm the validity of, the

participants preferred to utilize Google, in order to gather more data on what they had previously

acquired through social media. Participants explained that they often preferred to conduct

additional information searches through the Internet or Google, as it gave them the ability to look

at multiple types of sources such as online news outlets, blogs, or other websites. Participants

also shared that they may take the information learned from these Google sources back to their

social media sources to confirm, but tended to prefer to do active information gathering on

Google or the Internet, and more passive information gathering from their personal sources, such

as social media and WOM. These findings provide a better understanding of the types of sources

consumers prefer when gathering information about unethical apparel production practices, as

well as how they use them. With a deeper understanding of preferred sources, participants also

shared how they determined whether to trust the sources from which they gathered information

about ethical apparel practices.

<div align="center">**Trust**</div>

There are multiple factors that play into consumers' ability to trust the sources they

gather information from. This trust or distrust in a source of information plays a role in the

individual's choice to adopt the information they have gathered (Attaran et al., 2015). Previous

research has shown that consumers evaluate information by examining the argument quality and

source credibility (Cheung et al., 2008; Hassen et al., 2013). Participants in this study indicated

multiple factors that lead them to distrust the source from which they had gathered information

regarding unethical apparel production practices. When examining the argument quality,

participants struggled with the ambiguity of the regulations or requirements in labeling an item

as ethically produced, sharing that they often have trouble trusting these claims, particularly

when made by the brands or companies themselves. This ambiguity in regards to the regulations

or definitions of ethical apparel production practices is in line with previous research by Hassan

et al. (2013). Jess shared why she struggles to trust brands when making claims about being

ethical:

> It's the same way, where the term "organic" in food can be a very broad term and can
> encompass things that are not necessarily organic. It's the same way that they can say
> "ethical," but they also then have to be able to back it up.

Pointing to the idea of 'ethicalwashing,' as Ally called it, or 'greenwashing,' participants sought

credible information to combat the uncertainty in terms of what the industry standards are. To

this end, participants indicated that they deliberately search out sources that they find

trustworthy.

Participants shared that the sources they preferred to gather their information from were those they believed to be from experts on the topic and that provided data to back up any claims. For example, Harry shared how he came to find out about an incident of unethical production practices in the technology industry, "Like multiple corroborated sources about like the factory conditions in China, and like I saw, like pictures of a building with like nets outside of it. I'm like, what the heck is this. And I like looked into it…" His trust in the source was solidified by the data, in this case photos provided as evidence, and the fact that he was able to corroborate what the source was saying, proving it to be credible information on this topic. Indeed, sources that provided plenty of data were preferred by all participants, as it allowed them to analyze the information for themselves, as well as giving weight to the claims being made. This preference for transparency is in line with the current literature, which shows an increased demand for transparency in relation to business practices in the apparel supply chain (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). Along with transparency, participants' preference for more data aligns with the findings of De Pelsmacker et al. (2006). Rather than creating more uncertainty or the information overload that some previous studies had indicated (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007), participants preferred to have access to more information so that they could evaluate it themselves, which, in turn, eliminated the uncertainty of the validity of the claims or the question of whether it aligned with the participants' own values. Elijah shared that data was the strongest indicator that information he had gathered was trustworthy,

> Data and reports. So, it's, if they can produce numbers and charts and actual tangible information that I can sit back and look at and go, okay, that's printable. And it's been written and documented [by] other sources. That's how I know I'm checking off boxes.

Participants indicated that they preferred to gather their information from outside sources rather than from companies themselves, as they felt it provided a more trustworthy motive behind the facts. They often looked for multiple sources to back up the claims made by a company in terms of ethical production practices. A degree of uncertainty in the source credibility, particularly when made by the company or brand, is in line with current literature (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). Participants indicated that there were some brands that they trusted to gather information from, such as People Tree or Patagonia. These brands were viewed as credible sources because they had integrated ethical values into the entire identity of the brand and did not just have ethical apparel production as a pillar. This distinguishing factor of ethical values being a part of the whole brand identity, versus simply having the goal to produce ethical apparel, played a role in the credibility participants deemed about the information gathered from brand websites or company-controlled sources. While participants had a degree of uncertainty about information gathered from brands they did not previously know to be ethical, they worked to alleviate this uncertainty caused by the source through their assessment of the argument or information, and by choosing to seek out further information through outside sources to minimize the uncertainty. For example, Kasia shared the reasons why she preferred outside sources over gathering information from the company themselves, "Third party research is generally more trustworthy simply because they have no real particular reason to lie to you. While the company definitely does for marketing purposes."

When participants had trouble trusting company sources, one of the ways they were able to build trust was through third party certifications. This 'stamp of approval' from an outside source gave credibility to the company's claims. When discussing what factors made a

company's claims to be ethical more believable, Jess, along with almost all of the participants, stated that "third party certification is certainly a big one."

This study found that participants used multiple factors to establish trust or distrust in a source when gathering information on unethical supply chain practices. The most important factors participants used to analyze the information they gathered were data, expertise, and third party certifications. These factors are in line with previous research, which notes that the credibility of the source and the quality of the argument play a role in consumers' adoption of information (Sussman & Seigal, 2003). Hassan et al. (2013) found that the main factors affecting uncertainty for consumers regarding ethical apparel were complexity, ambiguity, conflict, and credibility. Participants in this study did not indicate that complexity or conflict were main factors in the uncertainty of information gathered, sharing only that ambiguity and credibility were their main concerns. When looking for credible sources, participants sought out those they believed to be based on expertise in the topic of unethical apparel production practices, as well as those that did not have an alternative motive for sharing the information. If the source used was one that participants believed may have an alternative motive for sharing the information, such as the company website or sponsored advertisements, then the use of third party certifications provided the necessary unbiased expertise to confirm trust in the information. Participants did note that the type of third party certification mattered, preferring certifications that were backed by the government and that had set standards used across the industry, not just certification that the company was achieving its set goals by an outside source. Once the source had been deemed credible, participants also analyzed the quality of the information that the source provided, looking for evidence to back up any claims made. When participants had decided that the source of information was an expert, or backed by one such as with third party certifications, and that

they had provided adequate data to back their claims, they were then willing to adopt the information they had gathered and use it in their purchase behavior.

Findings of this study indicate that the factors that are most important to consumers when determining trust or distrust in the information gathered on unethical apparel production practices included perceived source credibility, through unbiased expertise and outside certification, and argument quality, through data or transparency. Both factors provide a clearer understanding of the main factors consumers utilize to determine their trust in the information they gather.

The Role of Information and Purchase Behavior

Once consumers have decided to trust the information they have gathered, they then use the knowledge to shape their purchase behaviors. Participants indicated two different roles that their knowledge of unethical apparel production practices played in their purchase behavior, and particularly their intentions to purchase, indicating both a positive and a negative role.

Positive information gathered from trusted sources played a positive role in participants' intentions to purchase in terms of planned purchases, particularly when cost was not a factor. For example, Rebecca sought out an ethical option in her quest for a new bag, where price was not a major factor. Positive information also played a positive role in purchase intentions in terms of everyday purchases, although participants indicated that it was not as important to factor in as other factors, like price and fit. However, they did attempt to mitigate the other factors, such as cost, in order to be able to shop more ethically. Such was the case for Sally, who purchased work apparel from People Tree on sale in order to alleviate the price factor:

> For sure that brand specifically, I have been following for a while because of the reduction of waste and also the commitment to fair labor, so that I definitely, whenever they come up promotionally, I consider the values of the brand.

In sum, positive information in regards to a company's ethical production practices played a positive role in participants' intentions to purchase overall. The information played a larger role in planned purchases versus everyday purchases due to the overarching factor of price. Notably, attempts to mediate the factor of cost when making everyday purchases in order to make ethical apparel purchases shows a preference for ethical apparel consumption, when possible.

Negative information about a company's ethical apparel production practices, or lack thereof, played a negative role in participants' intentions to purchase. That is, participants indicated that information about unethical production practices played a large role in their intentions to not purchase from particular companies. This was the case for Lilly, who actively avoids fast fashion brands due to practices of unethical behavior. This avoidance was echoed by most all other participants. Outside of playing a negative role in participants' intentions to purchase particular brands, knowledge of unethical apparel production practices also prompted most participants to not purchase anything at all, and to engage in less consumption overall, not just avoid unethical brands. This was Georgia's main response to unethical apparel production practices, sharing that she's "tried to like, buy less clothes and not focus so much on the sourcing" as a way to be an ethical consumer.

The information participants gathered from sources they deemed trustworthy played a role in their purchase intentions. Knowledge of ethical apparel production practices played a positive role in their purchase intentions, particularly in planned purchases where price was not a factor. In contrast, knowledge of unethical apparel production practices played a negative role in their purchase intentions, in both planned and everyday purchases, regardless of price. Information gathered from sources the participants did not trust played a similar role as information of unethical production practices from a trusted source, in that the participants

tended to choose not to purchase due to the lack of verifiable information. These findings support previous research indicating that trusted information has a positive influence on purchase intention, while negative or uncertainty about the information plays a negative role (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Gam et al., 2014). The findings of the present study also expand on the findings of Hassan et al. (2013), in that one of the outcomes of uncertainty about information may be delayed purchase intentions. The outcome of delayed purchase intention was found in the present study, but not only as a response to uncertainty of information regarding unethical apparel production practices. Participants shared that, in instances of both trusted and distrusted information on ethical apparel practices, they may choose to delay the purchase or select alternative options, such as choosing not to purchase anything or to purchase secondhand. The choice to refrain from purchasing apparel, regardless of the ethical production practices used, or to purchase secondhand, was seen as a way to engage in ethical consumption by the participants. In sum, participants shared that purchasing ethically made apparel was not the only way they practiced ethical apparel consumption, and that they viewed refraining from purchasing or purchasing secondhand apparel as alternative ways to ethically consume apparel. These findings help to explain the disconnect between ethical purchase intentions and ethical apparel consumption found in previous research (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011).

This study found that consumers will actively work to alleviate uncertainty when gathering information on ethical apparel production practices. Participants all favored ethical apparel production practices as a factor when making their purchase decisions, and thus they were willing to try to alleviate uncertainty regarding a brand's unethical apparel production practices. Some relied on inferred knowledge to fill in the gaps from sources that were not trusted. For example, Elijah avoids shopping at H & M due to his understanding of the unethical

practices involved in fast fashion, regardless of the new recycling campaign they have launched, "And their whole recycling program and their whole green stuff to me I think it's great that they're saying they're doing that because at least [it's] starting to get something going. Whether they're doing it or not, I don't know." This desire to avoid brands that may make 'ethicalwashing' claims was a common concern among participants, as they placed importance on making truly ethical apparel purchases.

Based on the findings of this study, the model for exploring the connection between information and purchase behavior (see Figure 7, p.40) was revised to better reflect the possible outcomes of consumers' purchase behaviors and intentions in regards to ethically produced apparel. Prior knowledge was shown to play a role in consumers' knowledge of unethical apparel production practices. The level of fashion involvement was not shown to play a role in their knowledge of unethical apparel production practices, rather, it plays a role in what the consumer found to be the most significant issue in terms of ethical apparel production. Thus, knowledge was revised to include prior knowledge as a factor in consumer knowledge of unethical apparel production practices. In regards to information, positive information from trusted sources regarding ethical apparel production practices positively impacted participants' purchase intentions, while negative information regarding ethical apparel production practices or information from distrusted sources negatively impacted it. A third outcome, regardless of the information, was also found, which was the choice to refrain from purchasing altogether or make secondhand purchases. This lack of purchase intention was not always due to the information gathered and was viewed as a separate choice in terms of ethical consumption on the part of the consumer. Thus, based on the data, Figure 8, an enhanced and revised version of Figure 7, illustrates the links between knowledge, trust, and purchase intentions that emerged.

Figure 8. Revised Model for Exploring the Connection Between Information and Purchase Behavior

84
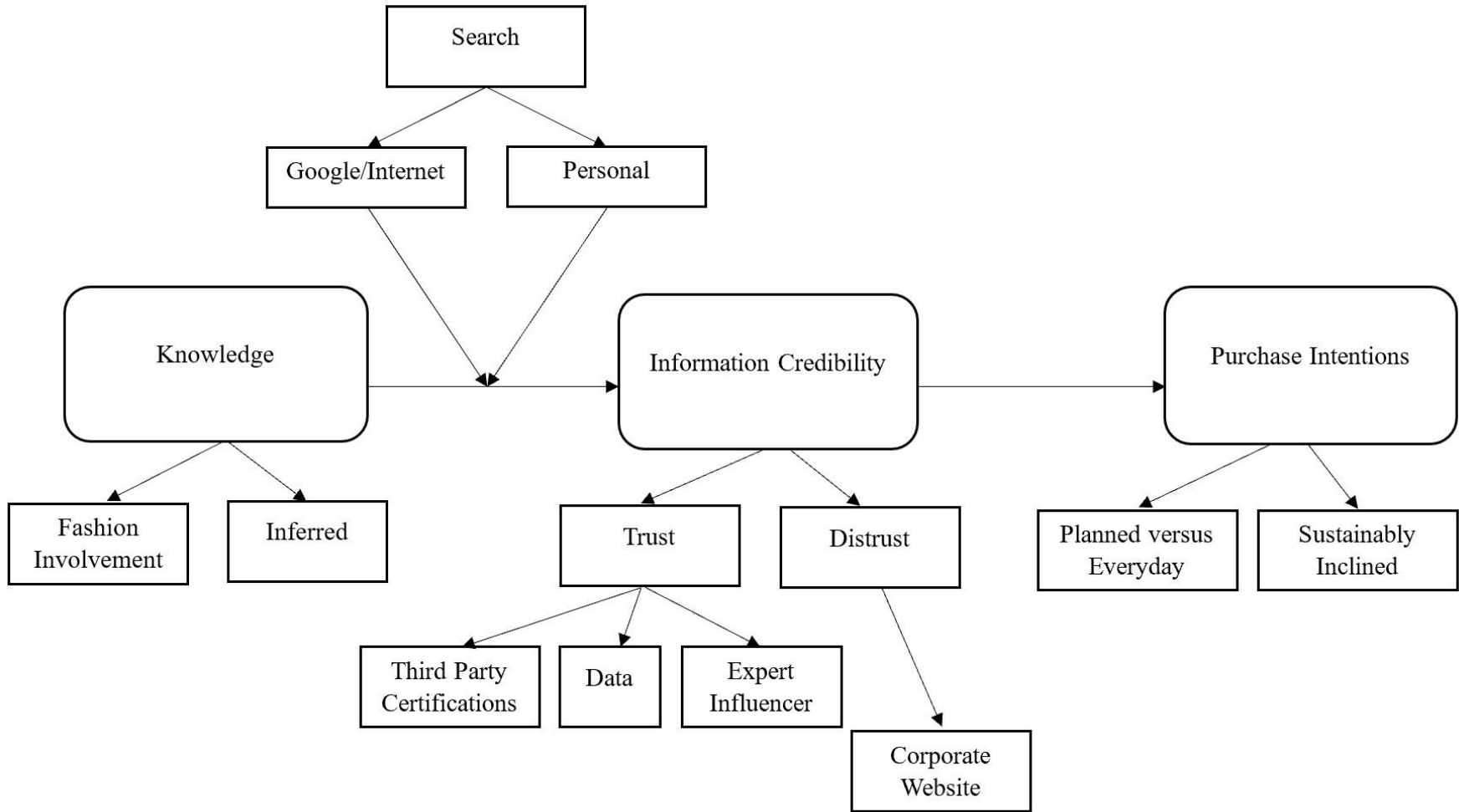
This study has provided a deeper understanding of consumer knowledge of unethical production practices in the apparel supply chain. It explored the sources consumers use to acquire knowledge about ethical apparel production practices, and further examined how consumers evaluate the sources to determine trust in the information on ethical production practices to understand how this, in turn, plays a role in their intentions to purchase. Expanding on the links between knowledge, trust, and behavior, specifically purchase intention, findings provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between consumer knowledge and purchase behavior.

The desire to be an ethical consumer was important to all participants, as was utilizing their knowledge to make decisions that aligned with their ethical desires while meeting their other needs. As consumers push for more ethical options to better align with their desires and needs, it is important for brands to understand how the information consumers gather plays a role in their intentions to purchase. In particular, it is important to understand their use of different types of sources in both passive and active information gathering behaviors, such as social media and Google searches, as well as how they evaluate the source for trustworthiness by focusing on source expertise, unbiased sources, and transparency of data. It seems that when consumers trust the source and receive positive information in regards to ethical supply chain practices, they are more likely to have a positive intention to purchase. On the other hand, negative information regarding ethical production practices gathered from trusted sources leads to lower intention to purchase, as does information from a non-trustworthy source. As demands for ethical apparel continues to grow, it is important for companies and brands to understand how consumers interact with information regarding unethical production practices and the ways in which they

use that information in their intentions to purchase, in order to connect authentically and credibly with their consumers.

Recommendations

One of the main issues facing consumers who wish to purchase ethically produced apparel is the ability to know that what they are purchasing has actually been ethically produced. This issue is due in part to the ambiguity of the term 'ethical' in the industry, as well as a general distrust of the sources available to gather information on unethical production practices. Consumers utilize multiple types of sources to gather information on unethical apparel production practices. When a consumer trusts the source and thus the information they gather about a brand, it can play a positive role in their intentions to purchase, and especially when the information gathered indicates that the brand is ethical. If the information gathered is from a trusted source, but sheds light on unethical production practices, it then plays a negative role in the individual's intentions to purchase. Moreover, distrust of the source, regardless of whether the information indicated that a company is ethical or not, plays a negative role in the individual's intentions to purchase. Consumers also engage in a lack of purchase intention altogether as a means of ethical consumption, regardless of the information they have gathered.

The sources consumers utilize to gather information on unethical apparel production practices were found to be different forms of social media or personal sources and Google or searched sources. For brands that are looking to connect with ethically-minded consumers, it is recommended that they focus on outreach through the preferred social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter. Consumers showed a preference for passive information gathering from these sources, thus creating an avenue for brands to educate and to introduce new ideas or products via these sources. Creating partnerships with influencers and

86

with accounts focused on ethical consumption will allow brands to utilize the algorithms of these sources and organically reach new and returning consumers.

Along with social media, brands should also focus on sharing information with consumers through the use of online news outlets and other searchable sites on the Internet. Consumers have shown that they prefer to use Google or the Internet to conduct their intentional information searches. Brands should utilize these sources to inform the consumer on what the brand or company is doing to ethically produce their apparel products, providing more in-depth details and evidence or data to further support their claims. In this study, providing the data for the consumer to examine themselves played a large role in participants' decision to trust the information on ethical production practices they had gathered, thus it is important for companies to provide this information on the platforms the consumer will use. These outside sources are important for companies to focus on, as consumers indicated an aversion to gathering information from brand sites themselves, as they feared 'ethicalwashing' due to the perceived bias of the source. Along with understanding the preferred sources consumers use to gather information, it is also important for brands to understand how consumers evaluate these sources.

Source credibility and argument quality have been shown to play a role in consumers' decisions to trust a source when gathering information on apparel. For consumers who are intentional in their efforts to purchase ethically produced apparel, the ways they examine the sources they used to gather information on unethical apparel production practices were shown to focus on several factors: the unbiased expertise of the source, outside certifications when examining the credibility of the source, and the data or transparency for basing the examinations of the argument quality.

For brands looking to connect with their consumers and create trust in the information they provide about their ethical production practices, it is important to understand how the consumer is evaluating the information they are sharing. Ensuring that the information source is viewed as an unbiased expert is important to the consumer as a way to alleviate the fear of 'ethicalwashing.' To this end, brands should utilize partnerships with ethically-focused social media accounts as a way to connect with their consumers through someone they perceive as an unbiased expert. Working with online news outlets as well as online magazines or blogs as a source for more in-depth information will also allow brands to connect with their consumers through unbiased sources. Although some companies have provided transparent information on their brand websites, consumers struggle with trusting the unbiased nature of the information. Beyond using third party sources to educate the consumer, companies can also use third party certifications to back their claims of ethical production. When utilizing third party certifications, it is suggested that brands work to ensure that the certifications they have earned are easily recognizable for consumers, as certifications that consumers may be familiar with in other product categories allow for less confusion about what the certification may stand for. Third party certifications that are easily recognizable or that consumers are familiar with in other industries, such as Fair Trade certified, were shown to encourage trust by the consumer, but certifications that they did not recognize or that they had no previous knowledge of did not. Brands can utilize third party certifications or outside sources as ways to ensure the information source is viewed as an unbiased expert, thus alleviating the fear of 'ethicalwashing.'

Consumers also indicated that the brand's image played a role in their ability to trust the information they gathered about ethical production practices. Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that brands work to integrate ethical ideals into all aspects of their image or 'make

up' and not just as a singular goal of production. That is, consumers place more trust in brands that they perceive as wholly ethical and not just using it as an afterthought in their production processes. Brands such as People Tree or Patagonia, that have integrated ethical practices into all aspects of their business model and not just in the apparel production process are easier for consumers to trust when they made claims about their production practices. Thus, it is recommended that brands make sure to communicate to the consumer how they have ensured ethical practices in all areas of their business and not just the apparel production process.

Consumers also rely on the data available when evaluating the sources they gather their information from in regards to unethical apparel production practices. Participants shared that the amount of information provided played a role in their trust of the source, and that they preferred to have access to the data, such as reports, photographs, or employee testimonials, in order to be able to evaluate the claims themselves. Based on these findings, it is suggested that brands provide evidence to back their claims, particularly through the sources consumers have shown a preference for gathering in-depth information from, such as online news outlets or other searched sources. The more information the consumer has access to, the more it helps to build their trust in the information they gather on ethical apparel production practices.

Understanding how consumers evaluate the sources they gather their information from regarding unethical apparel production practices allows companies to better connect with their consumers. Working with outside sources, utilizing recognizable third party certifications, and providing enough data for the consumer to evaluate themselves will help consumers to trust the information they gather about the ethical production practices apparel companies are claiming to engage in. While some studies have shown a need for different levels of information based on consumers' level of fashion involvement, this study found that the level of fashion involvement

did not play a role in the amount of information the consumer needed, but rather, played a role in what the consumer found to be the most important issue regarding ethical apparel production. Participants with a self-identified high level of fashion involvement were found to be most concerned about human factors in the production process, such as slave labor, child labor, unpaid labor, or working conditions, while those with a lower level of self-identified fashion involvement were more focused on the education of unethical apparel production practices. Based on these findings, it is suggested that companies focus the topic of their advertisements on the issues most important to the level of fashion involvement their primary consumers tend to fall into. Thus, brands with consumers who typically display a higher level of fashion involvement should focus on highlighting how they are combating issues such as child labor or unpaid labor and how they ensure that their products are not made in factories that partake in these unethical methods. Brands with consumers who typically display a lower level of fashion involvement should focus more on providing education around the ethical issues that arise in the apparel production process.

While information about ethical apparel production practices gathered from trusted sources has been shown to play a positive role in intentions to purchase, participants also indicated a lack of intention to purchase as another way to behave ethically. Participants viewed both the purchasing of ethical apparel and the lack of purchasing new apparel, regardless of whether it was ethically made or not, as ways for them to ethically consume apparel. In order for brands to alleviate this trend of not purchasing by the consumer, it is suggested that companies lean into alternative options they can provide consumers, such as programs to recycle or rework used products or programs to repair clothing. Introducing programs that allow consumers to interact with the brand in new ways that do not involve purchasing a new item of apparel, while

still engaging ethically through the process of repairing or recycling their old clothing, will allow for brands to connect with those who have a lack of intention to purchase. Brands can also work to create pieces that consumers can use to create 'capsule wardrobes' allowing them to match new pieces with pieces from previous seasons, encouraging ethically-minded consumers to continue to purchase from them when they are looking to buy new clothing, as it is guaranteed to match pieces already in their wardrobe. Offering 'capsule' pieces, recycling, or repair programs will allow companies to capture consumers who do not intend to purchase new apparel pieces in an effort to be ethical.

It is recommended that brands that want to connect with their consumers on the topic of their production practices utilize the sources consumers prefer, such as social media and online news outlets. Sharing data and testimonials to give weight to their claims, allowing the consumer to evaluate the validity of the claims for themselves, as well as participating in third party certifications that the consumer can easily recognize, all help to alleviate the fear of 'ethicalwashing.' Likewise, they should ensure that ethical ideals are integrated into the make-up of the company and not just as a part of their production practices. Finally, creating avenues to connect with consumers outside of initial purchase intentions, through recycling or repair programs, as well as curating pieces that consumers can pair with purchases from previous seasons, could mitigate the lack of purchase intentions some ethical consumers may have.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study has several limitations that could be addressed in further research on the topic. First, the sample was limited to participants who have purchased ethically produced apparel and had experience with gathering knowledge of ethical apparel production practices. Future research could include individuals who have not actively sought out ethically produced apparel or

91

intentionally gathered knowledge on unethical apparel production practices. This expansion of

participant criteria would allow for exploration of how those who are not actively engaged with

ethical apparel use information about unethical apparel practices in their purchase decisions and

could examine the sources they gather information from. Doing so would offer other avenues for

companies to better understand and connect with their consumers.

When discussing the sources participants engaged with, the scope of the type of accounts

they follow on their social media platforms could be more fully explored. As the expertise of the

source was an important factor to participants, and they indicated that they seek confirmation of

the information they gather, further exploration of why they believe the source to be credible is

needed. Understanding the particular attributes consumers look for in terms of experts,

particularly in the sphere of social media platforms, would broaden the understanding of what

consumers look for in terms of online sources when seeking information about ethical apparel

production practices.

Google and the Internet were the "go to" sources for participants in this study when they

were actively seeking information. Further exploration into the types of websites they chose to

view from their initial Google search in their attempts to verify previously gathered information

would provide a better understanding of the attributes needed to foster trust when the consumer

is gathering information about unethical apparel production practices.

Last, another topic in need of further examination is the idea of limited consumption as

an ethical behavior on the part of the consumer. Based on the data collected in this study, some

participants opted to not purchase rather than just using the information to choose between

apparel items or brands. This shift towards limited consumption as an answer to the ethical

motivations of the consumer needs to be further explored. Exploring this shift would allow for a

deeper understanding of how consumers engage in and enact ethical consumption purchase decisions.

Summary

This chapter discussed the findings relative to the purpose and objectives of the study. Consumer knowledge, preferred source types, and factors of trust were discussed as concepts important to understanding the connection between knowledge, trust, and purchase behavior in relation to ethical apparel. The model was updated based on the conclusions of the study. Recommendations, limitations of the study, and areas for future research were also presented.

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42 U.S.C. § 200e et seq

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Interview Questions:

<u>Purchasing Habits</u>

•   Describe the last apparel item you purchased.

•   Where did you purchase it from?

•   Was it an "in the moment" purchase or a planned purchase?

•   What do you think of when I say ethical apparel?

•   Did you consider ethical production practices when making this purchase? Why or why

         not?

•   Have you purchased ethically produced apparel in the last 2 years? Why or why not?

•   Is it important to you to purchase ethically produced apparel? Why or why not?

•   When purchasing apparel do you consider ethical factors?

•   When purchasing apparel which ethical issues do you consider?

<u>Fashion Involvement</u>

•   How would you describe a fashion forward person?

•   Do you think you are a fashion forward person?

•   Do you keep up to date on fashion trends?

•   Do you give advice to your friends about fashion? Who do you to go for advice on

         fashion?

•   When shopping what traits are most important to you? (ie) price, sustainability, name

         brand, ethically made

<u>Knowledge</u>

•   What does it mean when something is ethically made?

- Please share what you know about ethical issues in the apparel industry.

- What is a sweatshop?

- What would you say are the main issues in ethical apparel production?

- Are there retailers you consider to be ethical? Which ones and why?

- How did you learn about those retailers?

- How would you define FairTrade certified?

- Are you aware of Certified B Corporations? Can you name any?

Sources

- Where do you look for information regarding ethical apparel? Why?

- Do you try to learn about the conditions your clothing is produced in? Why or why not?

- Have you ever boycotted an apparel product or company due to unethical practices? What did you do? How did you find out about the issue?

- When shopping, do you take into consideration the certifications or information on production provided on the hangtags? Why or why not?

- When shopping, do you take into consideration the information on the company website in regards to production practices? Why or why not?

Trust

- Do you have any difficulties finding information on ethical apparel? Why does this make it difficult?

- When a company makes claims about using ethical production practices do you believe them? Why or why not?

- How do you know when the information you have found on ethical apparel practices is trustworthy?

- When gathering information when shopping what do you normally look for? Where do you find that information?

- Why do you prefer those sources for information gathering?

- Do you prefer to find information from the companies you purchase from or from an outside source? Why?

- When a company makes a claim to be ethical what factors indicate to you they are telling the truth? (e.g. third party certifications or celebrity spokesperson)

Purchase Intention

- What factors matter the most to you when purchasing apparel? Why?

- When making bigger purchases, for example an outfit for a big occasion or a luxury item, do the factors you consider change? Why?

- Do you consider any part of the production process in your decisions when purchasing apparel?

- Does knowing about the environment that your apparel was made have any impact on your intention to purchase certain items?

- Is there anything we didn't talk about regarding the topic that you think I should know?

Demographic Questions:

- What year were you born?

  o   1997-2004

  o   1981-1996

  o   1965-1980

  o   1955-1964

- o 1946-1954

- o 1928-1945

- o Prefer not to say

- What gender do you identify as?

  - o Male

  - o Female

  - o Non-binary

  - o (short answer space)

  - o Prefer not to say

- Please specify your ethnicity.

  - o Caucasian

  - o African American

  - o Latino or Hispanic

  - o Asian

  - o Native American

  - o Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

  - o Two or More

  - o Other/Unknown

  - o Prefer not to say

- What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

  - o Some High School

  - o High School

  - o Bachelor's Degree

- o   Master's Degree

- o   Ph.D. or higher

- o   Trade School

- o   Prefer not to say

- What is your annual household income?

  - o   Less than $25,000

  - o $25,000 - $49,999

  - o $50,000 - $99,999

  - o $100,000 - $199,999

  - o   More than $200,000

  - o   Prefer not to say

- What is your current employment status?

  - o   Employed Full-time

  - o   Employed Part-time

  - o   Seeking opportunities

  - o   Student

  - o   Retired

  - o   Prefer not to say

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL

IRB #: IRB-FY23-508
Title: INFORMATION AND THE ETHICAL APPAREL CONSUMER: AN EXPLORATION OF THE CONNECTIONS
BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE, TRUST, AND PURCHASE INTETION
Creation Date: 4-8-2023
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Haley Hendershot
Review Board: UNC-Greensboro IRB
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt
Submission Type	Renewal	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt

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