

## Exploring the Impact of a Documentary Film on Young Consumers' Understanding of Sustainable Apparel Consumption and Behavioral Changes

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In an early stage, sustainability in the apparel industry connoted improving resource efficiency of manufacturing, reusing, and recycling (Reisch & Røpke, 2005). Whilst they result in clear environmental benefits, it is important to see consumers as key players for sustainable development in the apparel industry. Changes to the scale and pattern of apparel consumption and attitudes in favor of sustainable apparel consumption is crucial.

Apparel products do not just offer utilitarian benefits, but symbolic role in managing individuals' identity and communicating personal, social, and cultural meaning to both themselves and others (McCracken, 1990). Individuals consume what signifies them, their lives, and desires as well as what differentiates themselves from others (Jackson, 2005). Consumption is part of a way of living. In the conventional economic approach of consumption, the more consumed, the better (Lancaster, 1966). With insatiable desire for more, consumers are "locked" into a repetitive process of managing an identity via continually renegotiated social and cultural symbols (Jackson, 2005, p. 21).

Sustainable apparel consumption is a dynamic process to manage economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects in the lifecycle of apparel products. It is not sufficient to simply ask individuals to buy less based on negative economic and environmental impacts. It would be overlooking human nature, needs, and values. However, it is clear that current patterns of apparel consumption are not sustainable (Siegle, 2008). The challenge for sustainable apparel consumption is resolving the tension. Then, how can we find ways to transform unsustainable consumption to sustainable?

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of a documentary film on undergraduate students' awareness of sustainability and future intentions to change their apparel consumption behaviors. This study sought out ways to shift fast fashion consumption patterns into sustainable apparel consumption practices at an individual level. Oscillation theory was used as research framework in finding ways to make behavioral changes. The theory describes a process of individuals' psychological and socio-cultural interactions for their well-being and offers potential answers to how individuals find meaning and value in their lives and how they express them through actions (Jackson, 2005). A documentary film, "The True Cost" (2015), and other activities (Maitney, 2002) were utilized because they provide the context for the global supply chain of fast fashion and its practices. Behavioral changes are likely stimulated by intellectual information (Hobson, 2004), experiences, and emotional factors (Peattie, 2010). Without a straightforward solution the film allows participants to engage in indirect experiences and emotional involvement of human and environmental costs.

A total of 33 undergraduate students who majored in apparel design participated in this study. The procedure of this study consists of multiple steps. First, the students were asked to

take the first part of the questionnaire as an assignment. It includes questions for writing their own definition of sustainability, sustainable apparel actions taken, recording apparel purchases of the past four months, apparel shopping frequency, and perceived level of sustainability of retailers where they shopped most frequently. Secondly, students watched a documentary film, “The True Cost”, in class. Thirdly, students were re-assessed with similar questions as the first part of the questionnaire (e.g., definition of sustainability, perceived level of sustainability of the retailers) and asked to answer their future intention to make behavioral changes concerning sustainable apparel consumption. Lastly, a class discussion followed.

Almost all participants initially defined sustainability as conserving natural resources by reducing, recycling, and reusing. Their concept of sustainability was solely associated with an environmental aspect. However, participants’ understanding and awareness of sustainability had deepened after watching the film. It expanded into social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions of sustainability as well as environmental. No drastic shift was found between participants’ initial sustainable practices that they articulated and future intention of behavioral changes after watching the film. Most participants indicated that they would be more conscious of what they buy (e.g., fair labor, organic fibers, locally made) and how much apparel they buy (i.e., quality over quantity). In addition, most participants indicated they would continue, or do more, recycling, and saving energy and water (e.g., washing less often, line drying).

The most crucial theme emerged after watching the film was that several participants appeared to recognize themselves as a change agent in the system addressing some fundamental issues of consumerism. Those participants seemed to become more proactive for a sustainable lifestyle in their life, community, and for their professional careers. Future research will be conducted to assess a long term impact of behavioral changes towards sustainable consumption.

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