



Consumer Emotional Intelligence and its Role in the Apparel Consumption Behavior

Amrut Sadachar and Virginia Rolling, Auburn University, USA

Srikant Manchiraju, Florida State University, USA

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Background: Apparel consumption significantly impacts the environment (Kim & Damhorst, 1998). Consumers who are aware of apparel/textiles-related pollution may engage in environmentally responsible behavior (Sadachar, Khare, & Manchiraju, 2016). The impact of environmental apparel knowledge on environmentally responsible attitude and environmental apparel consumption behavior has been previously explored (Kim & Damhorst, 1998), but there exists a gap between consumers' pro-environmental attitude and behavior (e.g., see Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Even though consumers express their interest in green consumption and have pro-environmental attitudes, it is seldom reflected in their behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore antecedents which can help understand the pro-environmental attitude-behavior gap. One such promising antecedent is Emotional Intelligence (EI), which is the ability to recognize emotions to be able to problem-solve (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999). This study seeks to determine if emotional intelligence will significantly moderate the relationships between environmental apparel knowledge (EAK), environmental attitude (EA), and environmentally responsible apparel consumption behavior (ACB).

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development: Emotions are a key driver for human behavior (Kidwell, Hardesty, & Childers, 2008), by extension, a promising factor that may help address attitude-behavior gap is EI. Consumer EI is defined as "a person's ability to skillfully use emotional information to achieve a desired consumer outcome" (Kidwell *et al.*, 2008, p. 154). For example, consumers who possess a high level of food nutritional knowledge, but have low EI are more likely to make poor-quality consumption decisions (Kidwell *et al.*, 2008). Thereby, extending this finding to buying and disposing of apparel context, [having higher] EI may help consumers to make better decisions, which consequently may result in pro-environmental behavior. The present study is the first of its kind to investigate the role of EI in the apparel consumption context. Based on Kollmuss & Agyeman' (2002) model as a framework and extant literature review, three hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Consumers' environmental apparel knowledge (EAK) will positively influence their environmentalism attitude (EA).

H2: Consumers' EA will positively influence environmentally responsible apparel consumption behavior (ACB).

H3: EI will moderate the relationships between: (a) EAK and EA and (b) EA and ACB.

Methods: An online survey panel consisting of U.S. national sample (age 18 and above) was used for collecting data. The survey instrument consisted of Likert type existing measurement scales on focal research variables: EAK and ACB (Kim & Damhorst, 1998), EA (Banerjee & McKeage, 1994), and EI (Kidwell *et al.*, 2008). Demographic data were also collected.

Data Analysis and Results: A total of 436 useable surveys were collected (male 42%) with an average age of 48 years. All research variables demonstrated adequate internal consistency (i.e.,

Cronbach's $\alpha > .70$). Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using Mplus that resulted in acceptable model fit. Next, structural model was tested ($\chi^2 = 73.15$, $df = 12$, CFI = .96, TLI = .93, SRMR = .04, RMSEA = .10), which indicated an acceptable model fit. Based on the standardized path coefficients and significance levels, EAK positively influenced EA ($\beta = .67$, $p = .000$) and EA positively influenced environmentally responsible ACB ($\beta = .50$, $p = .000$). Therefore, *H1* and *H2* were supported. To test *H3*, Hayes' (2012) moderation models were conducted, which revealed that EI moderated the relationship between EAK and EA ($t = 6.37$, $p = .000$) as well as EA and ACB ($t = 2.72$, $p = .006$). Thus, *H3* was also supported.

Conclusion and Implications: Consistent with Kidwell *et al.* (2008) findings, we found that EI plays an important role in consumer-decision making process beyond the cognitive framework even in ACB context. In short, the present study found that both emotions and cognition play an important role in ACB context. More particularly, EI moderated the relationship between EAK-EA-ACB. The present study has some implications; especially in the context of transformative consumer research. For example, Payne (1985) noted that EI can be learnt and taught. Furthermore, Payne (1985) posited that modern-day maladies (e.g., economic deprivation, mental illness) can be attributed to lack of human emotions and EI (or emotional ignorance). Thus, we propose that EI could be a potential guiding tool for consumers, which can further close the attitude-behavior gap and enhance consumer well-being. The present study also has some limitations (e.g., methodology, demographics, and context specificity).

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