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Factors influencing consumer choice: a study of apparel and sustainable cues from Canadian and Indian consumers' perspectives

Osmud Rahman^a, Benjamin C. M. Fung^b and Devender Kharb^c

^aSchool of Fashion, Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada; ^bSchool of Information Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Canada; ^cSchool of Fashion, World University of Design, Delhi, India

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the salient effects of product evaluative cues from a cross-national perspective. A web-based survey consisted of eight measuring items of environmental commitment and behaviour, 20 items of product cues, and demographic and behavioural questions were employed. A total of 321 and 309 usable surveys were collected from Canada and India, respectively. The results revealed that Canadian and Indian consumers were more concerned about psychic/aesthetic and physical/functional cues than extrinsic and sustainable cues. In particular, fit and comfort were perceived as the two most important evaluative criteria by both samples. Indian consumers relied more heavily on 'no child labour' and 'no animal skin usage' cues to evaluate apparel products than their Canadian counterparts. The findings underpin several implications, including aesthetic longevity, versatility, durability, and affordability of clothing, as well as transparency on sustainable production and practices

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Sustainability; sustainable consumption; apparel evaluation; fashion consumption; product choice; cross-national study; Canada; India

Introduction

Consumers have become increasingly aware of sustainable practices, ethical conduct, environmental impact, and social responsiveness. A survey of 1,362 Canadians in 2010 revealed that 29% of the participants 'would spend \$15 or more on a \$100 item if they were sure it was ethically made' (Abacus Data, 2010, p. 4). In the United Kingdom, total spending on ethical personal products, including ethical cosmetics and clothing increased more than four times, from £398 million in 2000 to £1,323 million in 2015 (Ethical Consumer, 2016). Another global survey (Cone Communications/ Ebiquity, 2015) on social responsibility reported similar results, showing that 84% of global consumers were prepared to buy sustainable products.

Due to the increasing concerns of fashion sustainability, many fashion companies including fast-fashion retailers have developed various sustainable programmes to minimise the environmental impact and reduce social/ethical dissonance of the products they sell. For example, H&M unveiled its '*Conscious*' collection in 2011, and in the following year 2012, Topshop launched its eco-conscious label '*Ready to Reclaim*' focused on recycling and zero waste production. Likewise, a collaboration was formed between Adidas and Parley in 2015 to produce sustainable products made from plastic debris salvaged from the oceans. A year later, Zara launched its new 'Join Life' sustainable collection in 2016. It is evident that the concept of sustainable fashion and practices have received attention not only from the fashion retailers but also from the research scholars. For example, a considerable amount of academic research has examined ethical fashion (Shen, Wang, Lo, & Shum, 2012), social responsive consumption (Gandhi & Kaushik, 2016), sustainable fashion design and practices (Rahman & Gong, 2016), eco-labelling (Ma, Gam, & Banning, 2017), circular fashion (Koszewska, Rahman, & Dyczewski, 2020) and slow fashion movement (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). Although sustainability research has made significant progress over the years, limited research has investigated how products and claims of 'sustainable manufacture' may affect consumers' choices when buying apparel, particularly from a cross-sociocultural perspective. Due to the lack of past studies focusing specifically on fashion consumption and sustainable practices, further empirical research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of what apparel attributes may affect consumers' choices in two different socio-economic contexts (developed vs. emerging countries; western vs. eastern cultures) - Canada and India. The overarching goal of this study is to investigate consumer buying behaviour, and selection criteria for apparel products from a cross-national perspective.

CONTACT Osmud Rahman 🖾 orahman@ryerson.ca 💼 School of Fashion, Ryerson University, 350 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON M5B 2K3, Canada © The Textile Institute and Informa UK Ltd 2021



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Literature review

Importance of product cues

Prior to the 1960s, research on product evaluation primarily focused on a key sales feature or a single cue of products such as price or brand name (Brucks, Zeithaml, & Naylor, 2000). Single-cue research has been criticised for having low reliability, producing biased results, overemphasising the effects of one specific cue, and a failure to capture latent but important constructs such as perceived value (Rahman, Fung, Chen, Chang, & Gao, 2018). Therefore, some researchers (e.g. Davis, Kern, & Sternquist, 1990; Rahman, Fung, Chen, & Gao, 2017) suggest that a multiple-cue approach is able to yield more reliable results, avoid exaggerating the effect of a single product cue, and bring research closer to the real market situation. Indeed, many consumers do not base their purchases on a single attribute. Rather, many of them select a product based on multiple cues and benefits to satisfy their diverse needs as well as to fulfil personal goals and aspirations.

Since the early 1970s, there has been increasing interest among scholars in multiple-cue research. As a result, many apparel studies have investigated multiple product cues, rather than merely focusing on one attribute or two relational cues (e.g. price-quality relations and tradeoffs). According to previous studies of cue utilisation (Jamal & Goode, 2001; Rahman, Jiang, & Liu, 2010), product cues can be categorised into intrinsic and extrinsic. Extrinsic cues include price, brand name, and country of origin, factors that are external to the physical product and not directly attached. Changing these attributes would not affect the physical properties of the product. On the other hand, intrinsic cues such as style, fabric, and colour are inherent physical characteristics of the product. Changing these apparel cues would affect the physical appearance and performance of the product. In addition, intrinsic cues can be further divided into two sub-categories - psychic and physical (Rahman et al., 2017). The psychic utility is associated with the aesthetics of a product, whereas physical utility is associated with performance and functionality. Previous studies indicated that consumers from individualistic cultures (e.g. Canada, the United States) show greater reliance on psychic/aesthetic cues when making apparel choices as compared with consumers from collectivistic cultures, (e.g. India and China) (Hofstede, 2001). For example, a cross-national apparel study (Rahman et al., 2010) conducted in Canada and China found that Canadian consumers tended to engage more with aesthetic features such as colour and style,

whereas Chinese consumers were more concerned about functionality such as comfort and durability. Although the Indian wardrobe has undergone a significant transformation, many women continue to prefer to wear traditional clothes, such as *salwar* kameez for work (Sandhu, 2015). Based on the previous discussion, the following hypotheses were postulated:

H1: Canadian consumers rely more significantly on style and colour (psychic cues) to evaluate clothing than do the Indian consumers

H2: Indian consumers rely more significantly on comfort and durability (physical cues) to evaluate clothing than do Canadian consumers

Moreover, prior research has reported that fit and comfort were often cited as the two most important cues for apparel evaluation, and country of origin and brand name were viewed as the two least important. The results of many previous studies (Hsu & Burns, 2002; Rahman et al., 2017; Zhang, Li, Gong, & Wu, 2002) are consistent across different types of apparel products and cultures. From the apparel perspective, the association between garment fit and comfort are highly correlated. Well-fitting clothes can provide physical comfort and well-balanced proportions to complement the human body, however, ill-fitting clothes often lead to discomfort and merchandise being returned to the seller, (Gardyn, 2003). For a similar reason, people are unlikely to pay attention to brand name or country of origin if their basic needs, personal aspirations, and intrinsic values are not met by the product on initial examination. With this perspective, the following hypotheses were proposed.

H3: Both Canadian and Indian consumers rely more significantly on garment fit and comfort to evaluate clothing than on other product attributes

H4: Both Canadian and Indian consumers rely less significantly on brand name and country of origin to evaluate clothing than on other product attributes

The World Bank (2019) reports the GDP per capita of Canada and India was US\$46,233 and US\$2,010 in 2018, respectively. Due to the economic disparity between Canada and India, it is reasonable to expect that Indian consumers are more likely to be concerned about the price of clothing than Canadian consumers. Additionally, studies conducted in India (Adnan, Ahmad, & Khan, 2017; Puddick & Menon, 2012) also reported that Indian consumers are price conscious and equally quality sensitive. As Puddick and Menon (2012, p. 51) mention in their study, 'Indians know the price of items in different markets and they will absolutely shop around for the best deal.' With this perspective, it is reasonable to assume that people from a less affluent society may be more cautious about their spending compared to consumers in affluent societies. Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed:

H5: Indian consumers rely more significantly on product price to evaluate clothing than Canadian consumers

Sustainability – its definition and significance

Although a considerable amount of research has examined the effects of a wide array of apparel cues, there is a paucity of empirical research focusing on both productrelated cues (intrinsic and extrinsic) and sustainable cues (environmental, social and ethical), particularly from a cross-national perspective. Due to different levels of ethical sensitivity and diverse environmental concerns among nations, people from different countries may perceive sustainability differently.

The term 'sustainability' has been used interchangeably with sustainable development, socio-ecological principles, green and ethical production (Chu & Rahman, 2012). It has been frequently defined as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (United Nations, 1987). Moreover, Moon, Youn, Chang, and Yeung (2013) suggest that sustainability entails the minimisation of negative impact on environment, society, and economy. In a similar vein, Shen et al. (2012) describe 'sustainable fashion' as apparel products produced with ethical conscience toward labour rights, safety, and working conditions, as well as having a minimal detrimental impact on the environment. Although there is no consensus of what sustainability entails (Watson & Yan, 2013), this term is often referred to environmental, ethical and social aspects, such as good working conditions, fair trade, cleaner manufacturing production, and environmental protection.

To understand what product attributes may exert greater influence on consumer choice of apparel products, 13 product-related cues (10 intrinsic and 3 extrinsic), and 7 production-related sustainable cues were adopted for this study, including 'less water usage,' 'less energy usage,' 'air quality,' 'worker safety,' 'fair wages,' 'no child labour' and 'no animal skin usage' (as indicated in Table 3). The reasons for selecting these sustainable cues were due to the importance, relevance, and frequency of use in prior research studies (Hsu & Burns, 2002; Moon et al., 2013; Rahman & Koszewska, 2020; Speranskaya et al., 2018).

Environmental cues – air quality and less water and energy usage

The textiles and clothing sector has been classified as the 'red category' as related to sustainability because it creates severe air and water pollution (Domainb.com, 2007). The amounts of water and energy used for textile and clothing production are massive. According to Speranskava et al. (2018), 'the textile industry is the #1 industrial polluter of freshwater on the planet.' In a similar vein, previous studies (Merchant, 2009; WWF, 2013) reported that vast amounts of water are used in the clothing industry. Approximately 2,700 litres are required to produce a cotton T-shirt, and 1,800 gallons go into the making of a pair of jeans. In terms of energy use, 0.45-0.55 kWh electrical energy is needed to produce a single square metre of cloth, (O Eco Textiles, 2009). These manufacturing practices translate into a large volume of fossil fuel consumption, every year, to produce textiles and clothing.

Prior research (Abacus Data, 2010; Ethical Consumer, 2016; Gandhi & Kaushik, 2016) has indicated that people are becoming increasingly care about the impact of environmental issues, including air quality and effective use of water and energy. Several studies, however, have found that consumers are highly skeptical about 'green production' (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017), environmentally-friendly claims (Thøgersen, Haugaard, & Olesen, 2010), and assertions of green credentials (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Consumers are uncertain about the actual benefit to the environment, particularly with regard to philanthropic contributions to ecology and fair trade (Meyer, 2001). As a result, there is a discrepancy between attitudes expressed by consumers and their buying practices. This has been referred to as an attitude-action gap or value-action gap (Gandhi & Kaushik, 2016). When consumers are unfamiliar with certain sustainable attributes or are skeptical about the claims of sustainable benefits, they tend to rely more on intrinsic (concrete/observable) cues to evaluate a product and to guide their purchases than on the sustainable (abstract/altruistic) cues. According to some studies (e.g. Forsythe, Kim, & Peter, 1999; Rahman et al., 2017) of cue utilisation and adaptation, intrinsic cues usually have higher predictive or diagnostic values than extrinsic and sustainable cues. With this discussion, the following hypothesis was put forth:

H6: Both Canadian and Indian consumers rely less significantly on production-related environmental cues (Su-E) to evaluate clothing than they do on intrinsic psychic and physical cues (In-Ps, In-Ph, and In-Ps/Ph).

Social and ethical cues

Social and ethical responsibility may be described as the commitment to improving and strengthening the socio-ecological system, as well as to the ethical practices of society. These two sustainable elements often are associated with opposition to sweatshop environments, commitment to safe working conditions, fair wages, no employment of child labour, no use of animal hide in the product nor animal testing, adherence to social justice, and greater transparency and accountability of the manufacturing and supply chain processes. Some researchers (Bray, Johns, & Kiburn, 2010; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013) reported that consumers lack sufficient knowledge and information to make social and ethical decisions. Due to the lack of sustainable information, consumers are not sure if products live up to claims of being manufactured with minimal negative effects on society, free from animal testing, or compliance with social justice. Thus, many consumers are ambivalent about ethical and social consumption due to skepticism about 'greenwashing' and the negative perception that philanthropy has become marketized to improve sales (Meyer, 2001). With this perspective, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H7: Both Canadian and Indian consumers rely less significantly on production-related social/ethical (Su-S/E) cues to evaluate clothing than they do on intrinsic psychic and physical cues. (In-Ps, In-Ph, and In-Ps/Ph)

Although consumers may not rely heavily on sustainable cues to evaluate clothing, it is reasonable to believe that some sustainable cues may yield more engaged consumers' responses or may exert greater influence in some countries. For example, child labour is one of the major socio-ethical issues in many developing nations. India has the largest population of child workers in the world, contributing annually to about 20% of India's GDP. According to census data (Census India, 2011) published by the Government of India, the population of child workers aged 5-14 years was 4.35 million. Many of these children work 6-12 h a day. Their earnings 'vary between 0 and 200 (US\$2.61) to 300 rupees (US\$3.92) per month, depending on the nature of the work and the sector of employment' (Shukia & Ali, 2006, p. 154). The issue of child labour and exploitation remains ongoing in India, despite all measures and efforts, including national campaigns and international agreements, (ILO Convention 182), and the implementation of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act in 2016. Thus, it is reasonable to propose that Indian consumers are more likely to be concerned about child labour than

Canadian consumers because child labour is a common problem faced by Indians every day.

H8: Indian consumers rely more significantly on "child labour" to evaluate clothing than Canadian consumers

The anti-fur campaign can be traced back to the mid-1980s. The successful 'Respect for Animals' political campaigns led to the ban of fur farming in the United Kingdom almost 20 years ago. A growing number of fashion retailers have embraced 'fur-free' policies, (Respect for Animals, 2019). Although anti-fur and anti-cruelty campaigns have raised global awareness, fur farming continues in Canada although regulated by statute. According to Statistics Canada (2020), the number of mink and fox fur farms has declined from 287 in 2014 to 125 in 2018. Canadian consumers and producers remain concerned about animal hide usage. On the other hand, Indian government has banned the import of exotic animal skins, including the skins of reptiles, and the fur of chinchillas, mink, and foxes, since 2017 (Mohan, 2017). Interestingly, some studies (e.g. Sreen, Purbey, & Sadarangani, 2018) point out that beliefs in karma may play a role in sustainable consumption and practices in India. The law of karma rests on moral causation - cause and effect, action and reaction. Past actions or present doings of an individual will affect his/her future. In addition, Hinduism treats all living beings as sacred and owed great respect. With these perspectives, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H9: Indian consumers rely more significantly on "no animal skin usage" to evaluate clothing than Canadian consumers

Research methods

A web-based survey was used to collect data from Canada and India. The survey was in the form of a questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section contained eight measuring items on the commitment to sustainability and subsequent behaviour. This measuring instrument was adapted from D'Souza, Gilmore, Hartmann, Ibáñez, and Sullivan-Mort (2015), and 5-point Likert scale anchored from 1 as 'strongly disagree' to 5 as 'strongly agree'. For example, items used for empirical testing included 'I would avoid buying clothing items if it had potentially harmful environmental effects,' and 'I would be willing to reduce my consumption to help protect the environment.' In the second section, 20 product cues were chosen for the current study. To overcome the shortcomings of previous research and offer a more comprehensive view, the present study employed 13 apparel-related cues (10

intrinsic and 3 extrinsic) and 7 production-related, sustainable cues (3 environmental and 4 social/ethical). As shown in Table 3, the product-related cues were categorised into 'intrinsic' (In) and 'extrinsic' (Ex) groups. The intrinsic cues were subdivided into 4 genres -(1)'psychic/aesthetic' (In-Ps): style and colour are directly linked to the visual aspects and aesthetic appeal of the product; (2) 'physical/functional' (In-Ph): comfort and durability are associated with function and performance; (3) 'psychic and physical' (In-Ps/Ph): fit, quality/ workmanship and fabric quality can offer both functional, (ease of movement, warmth, sturdiness) and aesthetic benefits (visually pleasing, fashionable); and (4) 'sustainable' (In-Su): certified eco-/ethical labels and garment life are associated with sustainable aspects. In addition to these product-related cues, 7 productionrelated sustainable cues, including 3 environmental cues (Su-En), and 4 social/ethical cues (Su-S/E) were employed for this study. Participants were asked to rate the significance of each cue by means of fivepoint Likert scale ranging from 1 as unimportant to 5 as very important. The selection criteria of the aforementioned cues were based on the importance, relevance, and frequency of use in previous fashion or environmental research studies (Hsu & Burns, 2002; Moon et al., 2013; Rahman & Koszewska, 2020; Speranskaya et al., 2018). In addition, demographic and behavioural questions, encompassing age, sex, annual income, employment status, education level, and clothing expenditure were included in the last part of the survey. In terms of the sampling method and subject recruitment. convenience sampling was used to collect the primary data from Canada and India. Subjects were recruited through a snowballing method starting with a network of researchers' acquaintances and colleagues. Participation in the study was voluntary, both male and female adults were invited to participate in the study.

Results

A total of 321 and 309 usable data were collected from Canada and India, respectively. As shown in Table 1, both samples were composed of more females than males. The participants were predominately women in both samples. This may be attributable to the current research topic. In general, women are more interested and involved in fashion consumption than men (Rahman et al., 2018). In terms of education level, many Canadian (54.8%) and Indian (32.4%) participants held 'Bachelor's Degrees.' Over half of the participants in both samples spent 0–10% of their income on apparel annually.

Table 1. Demographic pr	rofile and an	nual appa	irel exper	diture.		
	Car (<i>N</i> =	nada : 321)	In (3	India (309)		
	n	%	n	%		
Gender						
Male	83	25.9	111	35.9		
Female	232	72.3	198	64.1		
No response	6	1.9	0	0.0		
Age						
18–24 years old	90	28.0	123	39.8		
25–34 years old	117	36.4	71	23.0		
35–44 years old	56	17.4	34	11.0		
45–54 years old	53	16.5	80	25.9		
No response	6	1.6	1	0.3		
Level of education						
High school	69	20.8	94	30.4		
Bachelor's Degree	176	54.8	100	32.4		
Master's Degree	58	18.1	67	21.7		
Doctorate Degree	13	4.0	22	7.1		
No response	5	1.6	21	6.8		
Employment status						
Student	84	26.2	119	38.5		
Full-time employed	145	45.2	109	35.3		
Part-time employed	26	8.1	13	4.2		
Self employed	40	12.5	45	14.6		
Other	19	6.0	23	7.4		
No response	7	2.2	0	0.0		
How much money do you sper	nd on apparel a	innually?				
Less than 5% of my income	102	31.8	80	25.9		

99

47

32

24

13

4

30.8

14.6

10.0

7.5

4.0

1.2

96

54

43

21

15

0

31.1

17.5

13.9

6.8

4.8

0.0

Environmental commitment and behaviour

5-10% of my income

11-15% of my income

16-20% of my income

21-25% of my income

No response

More than 25% of my income

The measures of environmental commitment and behaviour were considered 'good' (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) and all deemed reliable, with Cronbach alphas ranging from 0.798 to 0.830. As shown in Table 2, all eight measuring items scored higher than the mean of 3.0 on a 5-point scale across all three data sets, for except one item related to spending on ecoclothing were rated below the mean of 3.0 among Canadian participants - 'I would rather spend my money on eco-friendly clothes more than anything else' ($\overline{x} = 2.77$, SD = 0.990). These findings revealed that both Canadian and Indian participants were concerned about protecting the environment and committed through their consumption. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that sustainable cues did play a critical part in the apparel selection and evaluation process. The participants were more likely to use multiple cues (intrinsic, extrinsic, and sustainable) concurrently to evaluate the apparel products.

Moreover, a series of independent samples *t*-tests revealed that there were statistically significant mean differences in all items between Canadian and Indian samples. Based on these findings, it is reasonable to believe that Indian participants are relatively more

Table 2.	Environmental	commitment	and	behaviour:	sample,	and	significant	mean	differences	between	Canadian	and	Indian
consumer	rs.												

Eco commitment and behaviour		Total Sample $(N = 630)$			Canada (<i>n</i> = 321)			India (<i>n</i> = 309)				
		SD	Ν	М	SD	n	М	SD	n	t	df	р
Protecting the natural environment increases my quality of life	4.27	0.817	629	4.06	0.912	321	4.48	0.638	308	6.742	627	0.000
Supporting environmental protection makes me more committed to the environment	4.09	0.762	630	3.97	0.809	321	4.21	0.690	309	3.968	628	0.000
Supporting environmental protection makes me more socially responsible	4.27	0.651	628	4.20	0.737	320	4.34	0.540	308	2.788	628	0.000
When I have the choice between two equal clothing items, I purchase the one less harmful to others and the environment	4.17	0.877	630	3.95	0.994	321	4.40	0.665	309	6.622	628	0.000
I would avoid buying clothing items if it had potentially harmful environmental effects	4.12	0.836	628	3.93	0.907	319	4.33	0.702	309	6.151	626	0.000
I would be willing to reduce my consumption to help protect the environment	4.24	0.741	630	4.15	0.805	321	4.33	0.656	309	3.080	628	0.002
I would rather spend my money on eco-friendly clothes more than anything else	3.17	1.058	629	2.77	0.990	320	3.57	0.970	309	10.249	627	0.000
I prefer to purchase eco-clothing even if it is somewhat more expensive	3.38	0.868	630	3.13	0.895	321	3.63	0.760	309	7.598	626	0.005

p < 0.05 (indicated in bold type).

committed to environmental protection and concerned about the impact of their consumption.

The importance of intrinsic and extrinsic cues

According to the *t*-test results, there was statistically significant mean difference in style (t = -0.019, df = 628, p = 0.492) as salient evaluative cues between Canadian and Indian consumers, but not colour (t = 4.289, df = 628, p = 0.000). Thus, H1 was partially supported. In terms of comfort and durability as salient apparel evaluative cues, the *t*-test indicated that there were significant mean differences in comfort (t = 5.232, df = 627, p = 0.000) and durability (t = 1.780, df = 622, p = 0.038)

between Canadian and Indian consumers, and H2 was supported.

As shown in Table 3, garment fit and comfort were rated as the two most important evaluative cues by Canadian and Indian participants, while brand name and country of origin were rated as the two least important considerations among all other product cues. These findings are consistent with previous apparel studies (Hsu & Burns, 2002; Rahman et al., 2018). To check the significant difference between the two most important cues and other product cues, paired samples *t*tests were conducted on a few product cues. The results clearly indicated that the Canadian participants considered 'comfort' ($\bar{x} = 4.60$, SD = 0.568) more significant compared to 'style' ($\bar{x} = 4.39$, SD = 0.581), t(319) =

Table 3. The significant difference of evaluative cues between Canadian and Indian consumers – means, standard deviation and t-test.

Product Cues	Canada (N = 321)				India (<i>N</i> = 309)				
Apparel product-related cues (Types)	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	t	df	р
Fit (Intrinsic – psychic/physical)	320	4.67	0.673	307	4.75	0.535	1.588	625	0.056
Comfort (Intrinsic – physical)	320	4.60	0.568	309	4.82	0.458	5.232	627	0.000
Style (Intrinsic – Psychic)	321	4.39	0.681	309	4.39	0.701	-0.019	628	0.492
Price (Extrinsic)	321	4.27	0.714	309	3.98	0.837	-4.642	628	0.000
Quality (Intrinsic – psychic/physical)	321	4.19	0.707	307	4.45	0.610	4.854	626	0.000
Colour (Intrinsic – Psychic)	321	4.17	0.738	309	4.41	0.700	4.289	628	0.000
Durability (Intrinsic – physical)	320	4.08	0.789	304	4.20	0.796	1.780	622	0.038
Fabric (Intrinsic – psychic/physical)	321	4.10	0.764	309	4.55	0.651	8.011	628	0.000
Garment life (Intrinsic – sustainable)	321	3.80	0.905	309	4.10	0.795	4.504	628	0.000
Ethical label (Intrinsic – sustainable)	320	3.52	0.899	301	3.83	0.910	4.294	619	0.000
Eco-label (Intrinsic – sustainable)	321	3.21	0.831	309	3.90	0.917	9.962	628	0.000
Brand name (Extrinsic)	320	2.92	1.135	307	3.45	0.973	6.312	625	0.000
Country of origin (Extrinsic)	321	2.97	0.982	305	3.21	1.140	2.840	624	0.002
Sustainable production-related cues									
No child labour (Social/ethical)	316	4.42	0.860	307	4.62	0.600	3.432	621	0.000
Worker safety (Social/ethical)	316	4.20	0.833	307	4.31	0.775	1.671	621	0.047
Fair wages (Social/ethical)	316	4.18	0.861	306	4.25	0.763	1.043	620	0.148
Air quality (Environmental)	317	3.70	0.999	307	4.10	0.799	5.932	621	0.000
Less energy usage (Environmental)	315	3.70	0.890	308	4.00	0.813	4.412	621	0.000
Less water usage (Environmental)	317	3.58	0.989	308	3.99	0.905	5.395	623	0.000
No animal skin usage (Environmental)	316	3.37	1.229	308	4.48	0.805	13.355	622	0.000

p < 0.05 (indicated in bold type).

4.064, p = 0.000; and Indian viewed 'comfort' ($\overline{x} = 4.82$, SD = 0.458) more significant than 'fabric' ($\overline{x} = 4.10$, SD = 0.764), t(308) = 7.389, p = 0.000. Thus, H3 and H4 were supported. In addition, fit and comfort were positively correlated, as shown in Table 4 – Canadian: r (320) = 0.270, p = 0.000; and Indian: r(307) = 0.262, p = 0.000. These findings imply that garment fit may greatly affect the wearers' comfort.

Regarding the price cue, the *t*-test result revealed that there was no significant mean difference between Canadian and Indian consumers. The possible explanation is that the price of apparel products are relatively less expensive in India, as compared to other consumer products such as computers and appliances. Therefore, Indian consumers pay less attention to price when they shop for apparel, and H5 was not supported.

The importance of sustainable cues

As shown in Table 3, both Canadian and Indian participants rated all three environmental cues (air quality, less water usage, and less energy usage) lower than all psychic and physical cues. In other words, many participants relied more on functional and aesthetic cues to evaluate apparel products than they did environmental cues. Thus, H6 was supported. In terms of social/ethical cues, many Canadian consumers rated 'no child labour' higher than several intrinsic cues including price, quality, colour, durability, and fabric. Likewise, the Indian consumers relied more heavily on 'no child labour,' 'worker safety' and 'no animal skin usage' than on price and durability. Neither Canadian nor Indian participants rated all social/ethical cues higher than all intrinsic cues, thus, H7 was partially supported.

According to the *t*-test analysis revealed that there were statistically significant mean differences in 'no child labour' (t = 3.432, df = 621, p = 0.000) and 'no animal skin usage' (t = 13.355, df = 622, p = 0.000) as salient evaluative cues between Canadian and Indian consumers. Indian consumers were more concerned about these two social/ethical cues than their Canadian counterparts. Thus, H8 and H9 were supported.

Conclusion

Fit and comfort

According to the findings of the present study, both Canadian and Indian consumers were more concerned about fit, comfort, and style than extrinsic and sustainable cues when shopping for apparel products. In particular, the clothing fit and comfort were cited as the two most important cues. It would seem reasonable to

1-5 305 3.21 3.21 1.140 0.007 0.087 0.087 0.028 0.028 0.029 0.474* -5 5 07 4.75 0.535 0.204* 0.110 0.110 0.305* India (N = 309) 309 4.39 .701 -5 3 21 2.97 0.982 0.982 0.054 0.148³ 0.054 0.148³ 3 20 2.92 1.135 0.233 0.196 Table 4. Descriptive and correlation analysis of the top six product evaluative cues. 4.67 0.673 0.162 0.150 0.193 Canada (N = 321)4.60 0.568 0.081 0.026 0.150³ 20 20 - 2 -5 4 4 0.20 0.789 0.789 0.026 Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level 321 4.39 .681 Country of origin (Ex) Brand name (Ex) Durability (In-Ph) Comfort (In-Ph) lour (In-Ps) Fit (In-Ps/Ph) Style (In-Ps) roduct Cues requency 1 In-max Aedian

conclude that consumers might lose interest in the product or adjourn their purchases if these two intrinsic criteria were not fulfilled. The findings also revealed that garment fit and comfort (Canadian: r(320) = 0.270, p = 0.000; and Indian: r(307) = 0.262, p = 0.000), and fit and style (Canadian: r(320) = 0.162, p = 0.004; and Indian: r(307) = 0.204, p = 0.000) were positively and significantly correlated (see Table 4). Thus, it is essential for fashion designers, developers and producers to pay greater attention to intrinsic properties. For example, a well-fitting garment must be both fashionable and comfortable for the users. As previous apparel research (Rahman et al., 2018; Tate, 2004) has pointed out that consumers may use a certain type of clothing such as loose fitted and less revealing styles to camouflage and conceal figure faults, or form-fitting styles to accentuate and compliment the desirable body parts. Therefore, virtual garment fitting technologies and solutions should be further developed to enhance online shoppers' experiences, particularly e-commerce has become a new normal for many consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Grover, 2020).

On a side-note, it is worth mentioning that although garment renting (e.g. *Rent the Runway*), sharing and coowning services offer potential to reduce clothing consumption, garment fit remains an important feature that cannot be ignored. It is of paramount importance that fashion rental companies offer enough sizes to fit different customers' body types and physiological needs, in addition to a plethora of fashion styles.

Durability

The concept of 'sustainability' is associated with the durability of a product. According to a study conducted by Hill and Lee (2012), more than half of their participants (58.75%) defined 'sustainability' with reference to long-lasting, durable goods. The results of the current study revealed that Indian consumers relied more heavily on physical cues (durability and comfort) to guide their purchases than Canadian consumers. Thus, it is no surprise that Indian participants rated 'garment life' as more significant than their Canadian counterparts (see Table 3). To provide a long-lasting product with multiple benefits, clothing manufacturers must develop innovative ideas/designs and select appropriate materials to extend the lifespan of a garment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that if garments can offer multiple values and benefits to the consumers, they are more likely to be worn over a longer time (Pierre-Louis, 2019). As a result, clothing consumption and waste disposal can be reduced.

Sustainable cues

The results of the present study suggest that Indian consumers are more likely to pay closer attention to sustainable cues when they shop for clothing, particularly 'no child labour' and 'no animal skin usage' played relatively more significant roles. In many situations, however, consumers have access to only limited product-related information (e.g. 100% organic cotton, biodegradable material, transformable/reversible garment), as supplied by producers but not production-related information. For example, consumers usually are not informed regarding the manufacturing process (e.g. dyeing ingredients and methods), worker safety, working conditions, labour ethics/wages. It seems obvious and indisputable that greater corporate accountability and transparency can help consumers to make more informed choices, avoid risk, and gain sustainable knowledge and trust. Thus, it is important for fashion companies to disclose more information about their products with the public, through various means, such as certified labels, in-store kiosks, mobile apps, annual reports, company web sites, and printed and digital media. In terms of sustainable labels, retailers are gravitating toward integrating certified, eco-/ethical labels as a business strategy to demonstrate their companies' commitment to sustainability, to inform shoppers about the products and environmental impacts, as well as to encourage more mindful behaviour. Our findings, however, indicated that both Canadian and Indian consumers relied less on certified eco-/ethical labels than on intrinsic cues when they shopped for apparel. This may be partly due to consumers' skepticism, confusion, lack of knowledge, or limited understanding of 'green' values. Therefore, sustainability information needs to be more trustworthy, reliable, informative, straightforward, and easy to understand.

Summary: key determining factors and implications

Although the current study was conducted in Canada and India, we believe that the findings can provide important insights and useful information to the fashion practitioners and academicians in different countries.

To summarise, the above findings and observations underpin several key determining factors and implications for fashion industry practitioners when they develop new products, as well as to prioritise and allocate resources.

(1) aesthetic longevity (style/design, fit/silhouette): classically aesthetic design, ageless design, and slow fashion approaches should be considered

- (2) versatility (design engineering and methods): transformable and adjustable designs could be an alternative to address changing body types; products should provide multiple functions and benefits and also be capable of use in different social settings
- (3) durability (fabric properties): sturdiness, long-lasting utility performance, and comfort should be considered during the material selection process
- (4) sustainability (environmental, social and ethical responsibilities): need to be transparent and integrated into the production and design processes
- (5) affordability (price): it is important to maintain a reasonable price because some consumers, particularly the Canadian participants stated that they are not willing to pay high premiums for eco-friendly clothing

It is important to note that people buying apparel products do not merely focus on functional benefits but also aesthetic, altruistic, psychological, and sustainable values. Due to different life stages and socio-cultural contexts, people may apply different criteria to make product choices and buying decisions. In the long term, it would be useful to build a database to identify consumers' selection criteria and purchasing decisions. Big data analysis may help to gain a better understanding of consumers' choices and buying behaviour.

From the theoretical standpoint, the results of this study can provide additional knowledge and empirical evidence to researchers regarding how different product attributes may influence apparel consumers' buying decisions. Unlike the majority of prior cue utilisation research (e.g. Hsu & Burns, 2002; Rahman, Jiang, & Liu, 2009), the present study has covered a more comprehensive list of product cues for empirical testing. Moreover, this study can also act as a basis for conducting cross-sectional research of sustainable practices between different nations, including eastern and western, developed and developing, and individualistic and collectivistic.

Limitations and future research

This study may provide useful information for fashion practitioners, enhancing their ability to identify and target the right market segments, offer appropriate products to satisfy consumers' changing needs, and deliver effective messages to their current and potential customers. However, the present study is not without limitations. Although the results from the study provide empirical insights and useful information on product evaluation, further research of eco-fashion design, consumer-centric approaches and sustainable practices is needed. Moreover, the findings cannot legitimately be generalised to other product categories such as electronics, food, smartphones, and appliances. Furthermore, a qualitative research approach may be employed to generate more in-depth information. Future research on consumers' cognitive and affective responses to sustainable fashion or eco-labelling should also be considered. Lastly, researchers could replicate this study, comparing other countries to yield additional insights, further substantiate its reliability, and it may provide support to the current study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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