

STRATEGIES FOR POSITIONING SUSTAINABLE APPAREL AS A MAINSTREAM CHOICE IN THE INDIAN MARKET

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Abstract

In this conceptual paper, positioning strategies for sustainable apparel as competitive products for consumers in the mainstream market are developed. Consumers in India have a basic understanding of the environment issues, which encourages them to buy environmentally friendly products from the market, but they are less aware of the advantages of environmentally friendly clothing. According to earlier studies, customers are unable to purchase sustainable clothing in the same mainstream markets that promote fast fashion. While trends and styles are important in fast fashion, they are less important in sustainable clothing since they don't meet consumers' expectations and lack of variety in the products influences consumer buying behaviour. A significant consideration is that Indian consumers are extremely price sensitive. The high market prices for sustainable clothes have an impact on how much the consumers value them. Sustainable apparel marketers concentrate on selling products through online stores, which has an impact on the availability of sustainable clothing on the market. In order to position environmentally friendly apparel in the mainstream market, this study will develop a conceptual framework and investigate the factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions for sustainable clothing.

Keywords: - Sustainable Apparel, Mainstream Market, Market Positioning, Consumer Buying Behaviour and Price sensitivity.

1. Introduction

Although the production of conventional clothes has a negative impact on both human health and the environment, the majority of people who would typically purchase conventional clothing do not seek out or use eco-clothing (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Consumers typically priorities aesthetics, uniqueness, and innovation in clothing, however eco-apparel firms place a greater emphasis on environmental value, which discourages consumers from choosing eco-apparel. Eco-apparel products should provide value that is comparable to non-eco-apparel if the market for them is to grow from a niche to a larger customer group (Bly et al., 2015; Hyllegard et al., 2012; Sonnenberg et al., 2014). Despite the fact that manufacturers have created environmentally friendly products, sales of these products are prevented by the fact that many consumers are not interested in them due to their consumption habits, resistance to new technologies, or resistance to

the higher prices associated with these new products (Jung, H.J. 2020). Understanding the elements that influence consumers' decision to buy sustainable apparel is therefore crucial for effective green marketing (Xiaoyun Zhang. 2020)

Through a qualitative study, this research attempts to create a framework that gives marketers directions on how to position their sustainable clothing brands in the mainstream market.

The research questions created for this study are as follows:

- How can sustainable apparel be positioned in the market by framing a pricing strategy that is on level with conventional fashion?
- What value elements ought to be added, decreased, increased, or eliminated in order to provide eco-clothing a competitive edge among traditional clothing buyers?

2. Literature Review

2.1.Apparel customer expected value

The apparel market is extremely competitive. The supply and distribution of products helps apparel companies remain competitive (Bonetti & Schiavone, 2014), brand image (Callychurn et al., 2014), product styles (Cholachatpinyo et al., 2002; Tewari, 2006), cost of production (Jin, 2004), price (Fratto et al., 2006), manufacturing (Bonetti & Schiavone, 2014), and technology (Callychurn et al., 2014). However, above all, customer values in terms of their preferences seem to be the most influential factor driving the apparel firm's effectiveness on the market (Yeung et al., 2008). Customers for clothing are demanding a wider range of products more regularly and over shorter seasons. This has put pressure on apparel makers to provide rare and distinctive clothing. To be competitive in the apparel company, apparel manufacturers strive to understand consumer sentiment and act quickly to meet those needs. Flexibility in design, high quality, and quick time to market have emerged as the primary forces boosting competition in the garment sector (Doyle et al., 2006).

2.2. Customer value

The value that consumers derive from a product is known as customer value. It refers to consumer preferences, how they assess product features and how well they function (Anderson et al., 2006). In order to address consumer wants and boost satisfaction, customer value proposition must be created (Saarijärvi, 2012). The customer value proposition can be created through investigation of the key factors or values that can influence the purchase intention of consumers (Kim & Mauborgne, 2015). While deciding to buy a brand, apparel consumers tend to refer to some key specifications or elements of products to compare and assess alternatives (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012).

2.3. Ethical values of apparel consumers

These consumers' fundamental drives to support the environment and their environmental ideals drive them to purchase eco-products. When making a purchase, ethical consumers also take social issues like social inequality, fair trade, and human rights into account (Newholm & Shaw, 2007). Consumers who are motivated by ethics are frequently ready to pay higher for environmentally friendly goods (D'Souza et al., 2006). Consumers are divided into groups ranging from "dark green"

consumers, who have a favorable attitude towards all environmentally friendly items, to "environmentally unfriendly" consumers (Goswami, 2008).

2.4. The perceived value of eco-apparel

The terms like green fashion, sustainable fashion, eco-fashion, eco-friendly clothing organic clothing, green-apparel are synonymously used terminologies for apparels that seek to minimize adverse impact on the ecology (Kong et al., 2016). The idea of protecting the environment and ethical values through apparel is a difficult one to implement because, on the one hand, it must satisfy conventional consumer standards, and, on the other, it must achieve ethical and environmental benefits. Some studies hypothesized that by creating products with better designs, requiring less effort to purchase, and educating consumers, the value offering of eco apparel may increase (Gam et al., 2010 & Lee & Sung, 2016).

2.5. Eliminate-raise-reduce-create framework

Kim and Mauborgne (2005), created a strategy tool called the Four Actions Framework. In order to build a new value proposition for a product, one must decide which components should be eliminated, increased, decreased, or developed. The Four Actions Framework has never been applied to garment products before. The research intends to provide a framework for marketing actions that would provide guidelines for creating a package of value for eco-clothes enticing buyers of traditional apparel.

3. Research method

In order to analyse the research problem, this study used secondary data and an exploratory methodology. The study has utilised a few frameworks from some existing research articles.

4. Strategy Framework to Position Sustainable Apparel

A product's positioning and branding on the market are crucial factors, and a market that is fiercely competitive need additional marketing strategies. The very competitive fashion industry frequently shifts in response to customer behaviours. In order to establish competitiveness and promote sustainable apparel brands in the mainstream market, sustainable apparel requires an effective strategy. Because sustainable clothing is expensive and only available at online, this strategy must concentrate on pricing and accessibility of clothing in the market. The framework for positioning environmentally friendly clothing in the general market is given below.

4.1 Creating Environment Awareness

Resource scarcity, environmental damage, and pollution over the past few decades have forced businesses to pay more attention to sustainable business practices. Businesses that are proactive When they recognise that, they alter their company procedures. The expense of pursuing environmental and social objectives improvements to their competitive edge (Carroll and Shabana, 2010). Meanwhile, consumer environmental awareness (CEA) is formed gradually because of environmental protection publicity (Hao Zhou and Yongrui Duan, 2022). Although higher CEA increases consumers' willingness to pay for environmentally friendly products, other factors, known as the reference greenness effect, also influence consumers' purchasing decisions, including

their expectations for future environmental awareness and the greenness of previous products (Yao., et al., 2021).



Flow chart for Market positioning of sustainable apparel. Source: Developed for this study

4.2 Creating awareness for Natural Fiber

Despite of environmental concern, there are many different types of natural fibers that can be used in the composites industry, including bast (such as flax, jute, ramie, hemp, and kenaf), seed (such as cotton, coconut, and kapok), leaf (such as pineapple, abaca, and sisal), grass and reed (such as corn, rice, and wheat), kernel (such as hemp, jute, and kenaf), and even roots and woods (O. Faruk,

2010). More companies are using wood and natural fiber plastic granulates in consumer goods like cloths, watchcases, toys, combs or trays - the distinctive look and feel gives the impression of a high-value product and is well received by customers. Therefore, there is a need to raise consumer awareness about natural fibers in the market (Asta Partanen, Michael Carus, 2016).

4.3 Product Attributes

Product attributes, which are elements that can be connected to a product such as price, variety, and quality, have been identified as the primary influencer on customers' decisions to purchase sustainable clothing (Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire, 2015). Price, material/fabric composition that is related to a product's quality or performance, labelling or terminology used to communicate that a product is created in a sustainable manner, and so on are among the product features that have been highlighted as essential for consumers making sustainable fashion purchasing decisions (Rothenberg, L, 2017).

4.4 Strategic Pricing

Depending on the product type decisions, the firms then determine variety and lead time and finally set prices (Xia and Rajagopalan, 2009). Sustainable clothing is usually more expensive than non-sustainable clothing since it costs more to produce it and buy sustainable resources (such organic materials), which manufacturers must pay more for (Ritch, E.L., 2015). Although customers have a great chance to demonstrate their willingness to spend more for sustainable clothing as they realise that some sustainable materials, such organic cotton, may cost more, according to several studies, customers may be unwilling to spend more money on sustainable goods (Kim, J, 2014). Pricing for eco-friendly clothing needs to be set in accordance with market competitiveness for fashion trends.

4.5 Innovation and Technology

outlined market, law and legislative expertise, cross-functional teamwork, innovation-oriented learning, and R&D spending as major success elements for environmentally friendly product creation. They also emphasised that, in addition to market expertise, understanding of environmental laws and regulations, financial policies, and information activities geared towards green innovation are all necessary for environmentally sustainable innovation (Morley, N., 2014). The business has created an online customization tool that enables buyers to make minor adjustments to a garment's visual appeal. The interface creates a business model that integrates physical and digital infrastructures and develops local industry and infrastructure for product creation, working in tandem with Fully Fashion knitting machines (Jonas Karl Johan Larsson, 2018).

4.6 Creating Demand

Consumer knowledge of waste reduction and environmental effect through education is necessary for successful consumer acceptance of sustainable fashion. Additionally, significant principles for sustainability in fashion products can be found in an awareness of the complex driving reasons as well as the ethical beliefs of the consumer. The drive towards "eco-conscious fashion acquisition" is hampered, according to recent study, by obstacles such a lack of consumer awareness, an

unsuitable shop environment, and social conventions (Choi TM, 2012). Young consumers in developing countries follow the fashion trends and lifestyles of their counterparts in developed countries (Brooks, A. 2019). Studies on sustainable consumer behaviour and clothing sustainability, as mentioned above, have primarily concentrated on established garment consumer markets, such the USA and EU countries, as well as developing consumer markets, like China and India (Amed, 2019 and Su, J., Hodges 2022). Consumers are now aware of sustainable apparel, thus marketers must focus on developing a pricing strategy and plan for the mass production to boost market demand.

4.7. Media

Many companies are using social media to tell consumers about their objectives as they establish sustainability programmes for their businesses (Li, Q. and Dou, W. 2017). Social media are new media technologies that enable interaction and co-creation that permit the creation and sharing of user-generated content inside and across groups of people and organisations (Filo et al., 2015). Social media is compatible with the current digital environment as a platform where posts can be utilised to spread sustainable messages (Amed et al., 2017). There were 3.8 billion social media users worldwide at the start of 2020, up approximately 9% from the previous year. By October, that number had risen to 4 billion, with 2 million new users joining every day. By October 2020, 15% of the average social media user's waking hours were spent on the platform (Kim, J. 2020). y demonstrating "best practices" in consumer involvement, sustainable fashion firms help academics establish a benchmark for assessing fashion sustainability social media participation on a larger scale (Danielle Sponder Testa, 2020).

4.8. Accessibility

The eco-friendly policies and investments made by international retailers in their execution show that green retailing is no longer a choice but rather a crucial component of the business model. Green retailing is the practice of selling goods that are environmentally friendly (Lai, Cheng, & Tang, 2010). Additional characteristics of online stores that may be relevant in a sustainability perspective include: For instance, the desire from customers for less packaging waste and/or sustainable packaging options is continuously rising, and this has been a fruitful area to research in literature over the past few years (Theresa Maria Rausch, 2021).

4.9 Consumer Motivation

Personal motives include role-playing in which shopping is viewed as a chore, diversion, satisfaction, a method to keep up with the latest trends, sensory stimulation, and exercise (Mehta et al., 2014). In contrast to customers driven by utilitarian motivation, who purchase things because of their utility or other practical benefits, hedonic consumers do so because they love the shopping experience. Numerous antecedents of motivation have been uncovered through research (To, P.L., Liao, 2007). The argument that sustainable consumerism can be driven by a desire for "enchantment" or the sensory results of choosing alternative consumption rituals, such as

consuming locally and ethically produced food, is also supported by a sensory focus (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007).

4.10 Market Positioning

It's notable to note that even while environmental friendliness wasn't the main consideration, customers were nonetheless worried about the veracity of environmental claims made on eco-apparel (Saugat Neupane 2021). According to Harris et al. (2016) customers believe it is difficult to understand and distinguish eco-apparel, and as a result, they do not want to expend the extra time necessary to buy such clothing. Colourful eco-apparel with appropriate fashion and designs should be produced by eco-apparel manufacturers. The clothing sold by eco-apparel companies thus far is plain and uninteresting. In contrast to consumer preferences for more vivid and fashionable clothing, eco-apparel has simple, basic colours. Eco-apparel must take into account these elements to appeal to the majority of consumers. The majority of consumers will appreciate eco-apparel more overall because of the inclusion of these elements (Saugat Neupane 2021).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Green commitment is better explained by lifestyle or psychographic factors than by standard socioeconomic background criteria (Haanpaa, 2007). Individual environmental awareness is known to affect behaviour and decision-making. It is startling to learn that, even when environmental concerns are strong, ecologically responsible behaviour practices do not correspond to the amount of awareness and concern (Said, A.M, 2003). First and foremost, marketers need to make sure that consumers can quickly access all pertinent information on eco-friendly clothing. A smart place to start is by implementing an effective digital marketing plan for eco-friendly clothing (Wiederhold and Martinez, 2018). Saving time and requiring less effort—both physical and mental—are related to convenience. This includes elements like the distance to stores, the availability of goods or services, and the hours that are convenient for shopping (Gilboa, S., Mitchell, 2020). Customised offerings refer to modifications to the features of a good or a service as well as to changes to the shipment, packing, and transaction (Dabbous, A.,2020). Price, quality, convenience, and brand name are significant factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions, according to several studies published in the literature (Tallontire et al., 2001).

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