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Shopping With a Social Conscience: Consumer Attitudes Toward Sweatshop Labor

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Abstract

This article addresses the global sweatshop issue and the market forces that influence workplace conditions, focusing on the role of the final consumer in ensuring an ethical marketplace. Opinion poll data provide evidence of consumer willingness and ability to shop with a social conscience, while consumer research offers insights into the consumer decision-making process. Exploratory research using a projective technique suggests how qualitative methods can shed additional light on consumer attitudes toward use of "No Sweat" labeling.

Key Words

Attitudes, Consumer Behavior, Projective Technique, Sweatshop Labor, Social Responsibility

THE GLOBAL SWEATSHOP ISSUE

The increasing globalization of business and expansion of international trade has accelerated the geographic, economic, and cultural separation of producers and consumers. More and more goods purchased by Americans are imported, making outsourcing and "off-shoring" topics of heated social and political debate. The apparel industry has been particularly aggressive in its use of international sourcing, resulting in U.S. imports from more than 150 countries, many of them underdeveloped (Emmelhainz & Adams, 1999).

While U.S. apparel manufacturers have historically relocated production in search of cheap labor, first from the unionized Northeast to the low-wage, nonunionized South, Bonacich and Appelbaum (2000) traced the beginnings of offshore sourcing to the 1950s. The shift to imports accelerated in the 1980s and continued to increase as U.S. retailers (producing their own private-label lines) joined manufacturers in the

"race to the bottom" to find the cheapest labor. Import share of domestic apparel consumption increased from about 2% in the 1960s, to 15% in 1980, 26% in 1988, and 31% in 1993 (Murray, 1995). By 2001, about two thirds of apparel worn by Americans was produced outside the United States (D'Innocenzio, 2001), and more recent estimates of U.S. apparel import penetration place it at about 75% by wholesale dollar value and 96% by number of garments (American Apparel & Footwear Association [AAFA], 2002).

Practices associated with sweatshops, including violation of wage, child labor, safety or health laws, and labor abuses including forced overtime and sexual and physical harassment have a long history and can be found in domestic and foreign factories (Firoz & Ammaturo, 2002; Ross, 2004; Smithsonian Institution, 1998). Cheek and Moore (2003) attributed the reemergence of apparel production sweatshops in an era of technological advances and prosperity to several interrelated market factors. These include the fragmented structure and operations of the apparel industry, economic globalization, the rise of multinationals and retail conglomerates, and the growing trend toward private labeling.

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Fueled by consumer demand for low-priced fashion apparel, marketers and retailers put pressure on contractors and subcontractors, often located in developing countries, to keep manufacturing costs down. Newly industrializing countries welcome garment production, which is labor-intensive, requires little start-up capital, and boosts exports. Competitive bids can most easily be achieved through starvation wages and substandard working conditions, especially where government regulations are absent, weak, or not enforced. Workers, who may be desperately poor, uneducated, and/or undocumented, are in no position to bargain for better treatment.

Although not all apparel manufacturers can benefit from the practice—because of differences in size, type of market, need for access to domestic designers, and turnaround times—overseas contract manufacturing has long been an accepted method of reducing costs. For a labor-intensive industry such as apparel manufacturing, even allowing for differences in productivity, firms can reduce costs by paying \$1.70 in Mexico, 86 cents in China, or 23 cents in Pakistan, compared with \$12.17 per hour for U.S. workers (Sweatshopwatch.org, 2004; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004). “Official” hourly compensation rates for less developed countries may tell only part of the story, as actual wages that factor in forced overtime, fines on workers, and other costs to the worker may be much lower. Thus, a garment worker from Bangladesh can toil 14 hours a day, 7 days a week to earn about 14 cents an hour, or approximately 5 cents for sewing a Disney garment that retails for \$17.99 in U.S. malls (Greenhouse, 2002).

It should be noted that sweatshops are not universally condemned. Low-wage plants making apparel and shoes for export are hailed by some as a sign of industrial progress, a necessary first step toward prosperity in developing countries, and far preferable to unemployment or alternative work, for example, prostitution (Kristof & WuDunn, 2000; Myerson, 1997). But critics maintain that “there should be a floor beneath which no one has to live” (Hayden & Kernaghan, 2002). Bonacich and Appelbaum (2000) pointed out that the less

workers make, the less they can buy, which applies to both foreign workers and the U.S. workers they displace. “By continually trying to push labor costs ever lower, the apparel industry kills the goose that lays its golden egg” (p. 79).

Whereas many actors and forces in the marketing channel and environment serve to keep goods made by exploited labor on the market, others attempt to reduce the problem. The media play an important role in shining the “spotlight” on sweatshops and child labor (e.g., Schanberg, 1996), motivating some firms to take steps to curb abuses (Miller, 1997; Spar, 1998). Key players have shown a willingness to work together on solutions to the sweatshop problem. In 1996, a White House Task Force (the Apparel Industry Partnership) composed of industry, labor, and consumer and human rights groups was formed to create a code of conduct on wages and working conditions (Emmelhainz & Adams, 1999; Greathead, 2002; Greenhouse, 1997). The resulting Fair Labor Association (FLA) has won industry, nonprofit, and university support for its factory inspection and certification program (Pereira, 2001). A few companies, including Adidas, Levi Strauss, and Liz Claiborne, have taken the next step and posted their factory labor audits on the FLA Web site (Bernstein, 2003).

As Cheek and Moore (2003) concluded, apparel sweatshops will continue to exist as long as the industry expands and globalizes, making it more difficult to determine how and where apparel is produced; unethical retailers and manufacturers overlook labor regulations; ethical retailers and manufacturers find it difficult to monitor factories; and consumers demand low-priced apparel without considering their source. We now turn to those consumers.

ROLE OF THE CONSUMER

Karpatkin (1999) proposed that a “fair and just marketplace” be accomplished through the activities of a triangle of government, citizens, and business, with separate and overlapping roles and

responsibilities. While the government must regulate and legislate to ensure a level playing field, companies must be more responsive to public concerns and take responsibility for their own actions. Citizens can work through organizations and community groups, as investors who influence business behavior, through litigation, and as informed consumers. In introducing expanded coverage of labor issues in her own publication, *Consumer Reports*, Karpatkin (1998) wrote, "Consumer pressure can force companies to adhere to regulations, and it can stimulate better codes, inspections and labeling. When consumers exercise the right to choose, they become the ultimate arbiters of human decency in the marketplace" (p. 7).

Some evidence exists of consumers' power to persuade companies to "do the right thing." Assisted by organized interest groups, consumers have increased corporate attention to the environment (recycled products, less packaging, sustainably-grown coffee), health (organic and low-fat foods), and concern for animals (product testing, dolphin-safe tuna). For example, boycotts were an important form of consumer activism for environmental protection and animal rights (Friedman, 1995). With respect to worker exploitation, consumers have expressed their concern at previous times in history, for example, via boycotts of grapes and lettuce in the 1960s. More recently, pressure from German consumers resulted in the industry's adoption of "Rugmark" labeling of Indian-made carpets, certifying those made without child labor (McCarthy, 1996). Various grassroots efforts are under way to ban products made in sweatshops from college stores or entire municipalities (e.g., United Students Against Sweatshops; Bangor, Maine "Clean Clothes Campaign").

Others have pointed out the importance of the consumer's role in ensuring an ethical marketplace. Human Rights Watch attributed growing global support for human rights to U.S., Canadian, and European consumers' desire to avoid complicity in repression through their consumption of goods manufactured under

abusive labor conditions (Senser, 1997). Zadek (1997) observed the arrival of the "ethical consumer" in the United Kingdom, citing surveys suggesting that 86% of British consumers "were more likely to buy products positively associated with a social or environmental issue," and 66% would be willing to boycott products because of ethical concerns. It is estimated that about one third of the U.S. adult population could qualify as lifestyles of health and sustainability (LOHAS) consumers, "the kind of people who take environmental and social issues into account when they make purchases" (Cortese, 2003). Members of such a segment would be willing to pay a premium for products and services made in a way that minimizes harm to the environment and society.

Davidson (1998a) suggested that sellers' and manufacturers' ethical behavior should be considered an important attribute in consumers' purchase decisions, akin to price and quality. Elliot Schrage, Columbia Business School professor and adviser to companies on how to improve factory conditions, is quoted as saying that "the principle that the conditions under which products are made is a legitimate concern for consumers is now well established" (Greenhouse, 2000).

SHOPPING WITH A SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

How can apparel consumers act on their desire to shop with a social conscience? They are advised to seek information, to purchase from approved lists of socially responsible companies (e.g., Department of Labor *Trendsetters*, Co-op America *Greenpages*), and to request information about retailers' sourcing policies and companies' codes of conduct (Brown, 1994; Halbfinger, 1997; Holstein, 1996; "Shame of Sweatshops," 1999). But information is only as useful as it is accurate, because sweatshops leave no evidence of labor exploitation on the goods themselves. Although some have proposed that achievement of certain labor standards be a prerequisite for participation in trade agreements, for the most part, trade and labor standards are not linked (Burnett & Mahon,

2001). Moreover, "Made in USA" labels may not ensure that the product was made under fair working conditions, because sweatshops exist domestically and in U.S. territories such as Saipan. In some industries, especially apparel, domestic products may be hard to find, and union labels even more scarce, making it difficult for consumers to exercise their preferences.

At the extreme, shopping with a social conscience may call for boycotts, especially of repressive regimes (e.g., Burma/Myanmar). However, like many other "good deeds," ethical shopping may have unintended negative consequences, and most organized groups recognize the need to preserve jobs in the developing world. Attempts to end child labor in impoverished countries where children may be a family's only economic "asset" must be carefully considered by activists because of potential backlash effects. Closing factories might force children into other, more dangerous occupations, including prostitution. Alternative solutions such as controlled hours, providing education, meals, and health care have been proposed ("Consciences and Consequences," 1995; Fairclough, 1996; McCarthy, 1996).

CONSUMER ATTITUDES—SURVEY EVIDENCE

Are consumers concerned enough to alter their shopping practices? Some recent polls and surveys have measured consumers' willingness to use their purchasing power to shop with a social conscience. Although a social desirability bias (to give the "acceptable" answer) surely affects the responses, the data are fairly consistent and reveal some trends.

Willingness to Pay More, Shop Elsewhere

In 1996, *U.S. News and World Report* reported the results of its own sweatshop poll: 89.3% of respondents said they were willing to pay a few more cents for "peace of mind" when buying, and 70.2% were willing to pay a few more dollars (Holstein, 1996). In a survey connected with his stakeholder

analysis of the California strawberry industry, Davidson (1998b) found that 85% of respondents would be willing to pay more for strawberries to ensure improvement of working conditions.

A national poll on attitudes toward sweatshops was conducted for the Center for Ethical Concerns, Marymount University in 1995, 1996, and 1999 (Marymount University, Center for Ethical Concerns, 1999). In 1995 and 1996, the survey focused on domestic garment production, whereas the 1999 poll broadened the scope to global production. In 1995 and 1996, approximately 83% of shoppers were willing to pay \$1 extra on a \$20 item if it were guaranteed to be made in a legitimate shop. About 4 out of 5 respondents both years said they would avoid shopping at a retailer that sold garments made in sweatshops. When the study was repeated in 1999, the percentage of consumers willing to pay \$1 extra on a \$20 garment had increased slightly to 86%, but only 75% of respondents would avoid retailers who sold garments made in sweatshops.

A poll conducted for the National Consumers League in April and May of 1999 explored consumer attitudes and perceptions with respect to a variety of marketplace issues (Harris, 1999). The top source of concern for respondents was the use of sweatshops or child labor in the production of goods—61% said it worried them a great deal. If there was a label on some products to indicate that they were made without the use of child labor, more than three quarters (77%) of respondents said they would be very or somewhat likely to look for it, and 55% would be willing to pay more for products with such a label.

Perceived Responsibility for Labor Conditions

In 1995 and 1996, in the wake of publicity about undocumented alien workers smuggled into the country, respondents to the Marymount poll were asked to allocate responsibility for preventing sweatshops in the United States. The 1999 survey broadened the question to sweatshops in general, without reference to location. From the resulting responses (see Table 1), it appears that respondents

Table 1. Responsibility for Preventing Sweatshops

Which of the following should have responsibility for preventing sweatshops?	1995	1996	1999
Manufacturers	76%	70%	65%
Retailers	7%	10%	11%
Both	10%	15%	19%
Neither	3%	1%	2%
Don't know/refused	4%	4%	3%

Source. Marymount University, Center for Ethical Concerns (1999).

Table 2. Usefulness of Information Types

What would help you to avoid buying clothes made in sweatshops?	
A label that says the garment was made under fair labor conditions	56%
A published list of stores and companies that have been identified as using or tolerating sweatshop labor	33%
Both would help	4%
Neither would help	3%
Don't know/refused	4%

Source. Marymount University, Center for Ethical Concerns (1999).

credit manufacturers with the dominant responsibility for sweatshop conditions. However, there is a definite shift over time from manufacturers to retailers, or both.

When asked about responsibility for monitoring labor conditions under which products are made, respondents to the National Consumers League survey (Harris, 1999) answered as follows: government (36%), companies (31%), independent watch groups (28%), no need (3%). When government was removed from the list, respondents favored self-monitoring by companies (55%) over independent watch groups (42%). This finding is contrary to current demands of activist groups such as the Workers Rights Consortium, which favors independent monitoring (and surprise inspections) but may reflect perceived responsibility for, rather than faith in, corporate self-monitoring.

Consumer Information Needs

The 1999 Marymount survey also included a new question regarding consumers' ability to shop with

a social conscience: "What would most help you to avoid buying clothes that were made in sweatshops?" As shown in Table 2, the responses indicate a definite preference for labels (56%) over lists of stores and companies (33%).

In her study of 219 female apparel consumers, Dickson (1999) found that respondents felt more concerned than knowledgeable about issues affecting apparel industry workers. Responses given when asked about possible solutions are presented in Table 3.

As in the Marymount study, a label was perceived to be more useful than a list in assisting consumers with purchase decisions, suggesting the importance of a "No Sweat" or "Child Labor-Free" type of label. Support for government regulation is consistent with the perceived responsibility for monitoring labor conditions noted in the previous section.

Summary of Survey Findings

Keeping in mind the social desirability bias that might inflate percentages, it is clear from the

Table 3. Solutions for Apparel Industry Issues

Issue	Mean (7- point Likert-type scale)	% Agree or Strongly Agree
Sale of products made by child labor should be banned.	5.9	73.6
I wish that there was a label on jeans telling consumers if they were made by socially responsible manufacturers.	5.7	63.6
There should be more governmental regulations protecting workers in the clothing manufacturing industry.	5.4	55.4
I would boycott buying clothing from businesses that do not act responsibly toward their employees.	5.0	41.5

Source. Adapted from Dickson (1999, Table 4, p. 50).

surveys cited that many consumers are aware of, concerned about, and willing to address the sweatshop and child labor issue through their purchases, including paying more for “peace of mind.” Although consumers perceive manufacturers as having primary responsibility for preventing sweatshops, retailers are beginning to share more of the burden as production is globalized, and consumers are willing to shop accordingly. Government is expected to play a role, by regulating and monitoring labor conditions and banning sale of products made by child labor. With respect to information, consumers consider labels more useful than lists of companies and stores in guiding them toward more socially conscious purchases.

CONSUMER RESEARCH

At least three types of consumer research appear relevant to the issue of consumer attitudes toward how their products are made. First, consumer perceptions of foreign-made goods have been studied extensively in the context of country-of-origin research (e.g., Baughn & Yaprak, 1993; Granzin & Painter, 2001; Klein, 2002; Shimp & Sharma 1987). Whether motivated by patriotism, or positive or negative stereotypes, consumers’ judgments of product quality can be influenced by the extrinsic cue, “Made in _____.”

Second, research on socially responsible consumers (e.g., Antil, 1984; Webster, 1975) helped to identify

demographic and psychographic characteristics of those more likely to consider the public consequences of their private consumption. Although much of the early research on social responsibility focused on environment-related and energy conservation behaviors, socially conscious consumers have been identified by their desire to express social concerns through their purchasing power (Roberts, 1995).

The third body of research relates to consumer ethics (e.g., Muncy & Vitell, 1992), including ethical decision making and consumer reactions to the ethical behavior of the firm. Recent studies have focused on consumer response to socially responsible behavior of the firm, including cause-related marketing (e.g., Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Webb & Mohr, 1998).

Three studies have directly addressed the issue of consumer reaction to corporate use of sweatshop/exploited labor. Folkes and Kamins (1999) explored the effect of product attribute information and information about a firm’s ethical behavior on consumer attitudes. Using an experimental design with a telephone as the stimulus, product information (superior or inferior sound performance) and information about the firm (three types of ethical behavior related to use of child labor) were manipulated. The authors found that information suggesting unethical behavior by the company was sufficient to elicit a negative attitude, even in the presence of positive product attribute information. Consumer

attitudes toward superior products also varied, depending on the type of ethical behavior engaged in (e.g., refraining from unethical behavior vs. acting prosocially). Folkes and Kamins concluded that “in regard to product evaluations, virtuous behavior is not a substitute for product quality, nor does superior product quality compensate for unethical behavior in influencing attitudes toward firms” (p. 257).

Dickson (2000) examined the influence of personal values, beliefs, knowledge, and societal attitudes of female apparel consumers on their willingness to purchase from socially responsible businesses (represented by companies on the Department of Labor “Trendsetter” list). Importance of certain personal values included in the survey (identified as more “macro-societal” in nature) had a direct impact on suspicion of business intentions but no other direct influence on attitudes. Greater knowledge of apparel industry practices was significantly related to greater concern for workers, which in turn predicted support for socially responsible businesses. Perceived effectiveness and more negative perceptions of foreign industry were also associated with support. However, intention to purchase a pair of jeans from the Trendsetter list was significantly related only to past purchase experience with the Trendsetters and product attributes related to style. Dickson concluded that “educating consumers to buy from socially responsible businesses will result in little change in purchasing behavior unless the products these companies sell are exactly what the consumer wants.” Addressing the issue of consumer willingness to make sacrifices in order to behave “responsibly,” Dickson stated,

Clothing consumers who consider purchasing solely from retailers and manufacturers that assure they do not use sweatshops may view this act as a cost that prevents them from selecting from the full range of available products. On the other hand, consumers may not feel restricted by the products offered by socially responsible businesses, they may simply be overwhelmed by the complexity of attributes that can be used in decisions to purchase clothing. (p. 28)

Noting that most social labeling campaigns (e.g., Rugmark, “Crafted With Pride in the USA”) have not been studied or do not appear to be effective in changing consumer behavior, Dickson (2001) set out to identify the market segment of socially conscious consumers who might respond to a “No Sweat” label. A large-scale questionnaire survey was used to determine the utility of “No Sweat” labels for apparel consumers through conjoint analysis using five product characteristics (label, price, quality, color, fabric) in a hypothetical purchase task.

Ninety of the 547 respondents (16%) were identified as “No Sweat” label users, and they differed from the nonusers in the sample by being more supportive of socially responsible businesses; more concerned about sweatshop issues (though no different in beliefs or knowledge regarding sweatshop issues); and more likely to be female, unmarried, with less educational attainment. Dickson found no differences in age, income, or employment status between respondents identified as label users and nonusers. By contrast, in their study of consumer response to cause-related marketing, Webb and Mohr (1998) found socially concerned respondents to be in the groups with the highest education and socioeconomic status.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Given the complexity of influences on the purchase of products such as clothing and the vulnerability of sweatshop-related surveys to social desirability bias, it may be appropriate to probe consumer attitudes and behavior in more depth using qualitative methods. Whereas quantitative methods address the who, what, when, and where of consumer behavior, qualitative approaches focus on the “why,” thus providing complementary insights and explanations (Day, 1998; Mariampolski, 2001). How do consumers really feel about the conditions under which their products are made, and how does that influence their purchases? A less structured exploration of

the decision process might yield useful insights into the reasons and conditions associated with attitudes expressed on surveys.

Qualitative research methods can take the form of observation, focus groups, depth interviews, or projective techniques. For example, Mohr, Webb, and Harris (2001) used depth interviews to probe 48 consumers' views concerning social responsibility of companies and its impact on their purchases, from unresponsive to highly responsive. The semistructured format of the interviews allowed for deeper analysis of cases and themes.

Projective techniques seem particularly well suited to exploration of consumer attitudes toward the sweatshop issue at a deeper level, while circumventing or at least reducing the influence of social desirability bias. In contrast to direct questioning, these techniques use ambiguous stimuli (e.g., Rorschach ink blot) to enable respondents to project their beliefs and feelings onto a third party or into a task situation, thus expressing hidden, or even subconscious, motives, opinions, and emotions. Examples of projective techniques include word association, sentence completion, third-person techniques (e.g., role-playing), and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). The TAT uses pictures or cartoons depicting a product- and/or consumer-related situation, and participants are asked to tell a story or describe what is happening in their own words (Zikmund, 1994).

TAT Exploratory Study—Method

Given poll respondents' stated desire for "No Sweat"-type labeling (55% to 86% concerned about, and willing to pay to avoid, sweatshop labor) and survey results regarding its limitations (only 16% identified as "No Sweat" label users), exploratory research was undertaken in the fall and winter of 2001-2002 using a TAT designed to shed more light on consumers' underlying feelings toward such labels. A cartoon was made by modifying readily available clip art. It depicted a shopper looking at a garment with a label reading, "NO SWEAT—Guaranteed to be made under safe and fair labor conditions." A survey-type form was

created by listing three questions under the cartoon, with space for participants to record their open-ended answers: What is going on in this picture? What is the shopper thinking? What will happen next?

The instrument was pretested in October 2001 with the help of student volunteers from an MBA Consumer Behavior class, who were asked to administer the TAT to friends, family, or coworkers. In the pretest, none of the 11 participants who completed the task even mentioned the label and its subject matter in their recorded responses to the questions. Most felt that the shopper in the cartoon was thinking about other aspects of the decision process, for example, "Will it fit?"; "I wonder if it is on sale"; "I like the fabric." Clearly this suggested that without major cues, a "No Sweat" label may not even be on the radar of most consumers, further illustrating the social desirability bias of the poll responses. As a result of the pretest, the cartoon was modified further to make it clear that the shopper in the picture was indeed reading the label, via a dialogue balloon and alteration of the drawing to place the label in her line of sight (see Figure 1).

The revised instrument was administered to a convenience sample of consumers in January 2002 by students from another MBA Consumer Behavior class, using a uniform set of instructions. Participants were to be told only that they were helping a college professor with her research. Students were instructed not to discuss the subject matter with respondents before administering the TAT and to record only the gender and age of the respondent on the back of the form. Fifty usable TAT survey forms were returned. The sample represented a variety of ages, from teens to senior citizens, and female respondents outnumbered male respondents (where identified) by a 3-to-2 margin. They probably were skewed toward higher education and income levels, although this information was not solicited.

In contrast to the pretest, virtually all responses indicated that participants were aware of the "No Sweat" label in the cartoon, suggesting that



Figure 1. Survey Cartoon

Source. Microsoft Office 2000 Clip Art Collection, modified by author.

modification of the artwork had been effective. Verbatim answers to “What is the shopper thinking?” and “What will happen next?” were extracted from the TAT forms and copied onto cards. In a few cases where the answer to a question contained two distinctly different ideas, the relevant sentences or clauses were recorded on separate cards. The final deck was sorted by two judges (the author and a colleague) into clusters based on similarity of response. Keeping in mind the exploratory nature of this exercise, and the possibility that others might have sorted the responses slightly differently, the resulting categories provide some insight into what consumers might think about “No Sweat” labels and their role in the purchase decision.

TAT Exploratory Study—Results

Table 4 lists the six major types of answers to the question “What is the shopper thinking?” and examples of the verbatim comments. The largest category of responses ($n = 14$) was related to the content of the label and what it meant to the

consumer. Not surprisingly, respondents said that the “No Sweat” label made the shopper think about the source and conditions of production (e.g., who made the clothes, must be foreign made, definitely not made by Kathie Lee Gifford). Second in popularity ($n = 13$) were comments about the unusual nature of the label (e.g., new to her, unusual product description), no doubt prompted by the cartoon shopper’s own thought balloon noting that she had never seen such a label before. Three equal groups of participants ($n = 7$) raised questions about the credibility of the label (e.g., authenticity, legitimacy), other attributes and purchase considerations (e.g., quality, price, need for the garment), and the label’s effect on attitude toward the purchase (e.g., thinking positively, feels good, sparks an interest). The final category of comments ($n = 5$) raised the issue of corporate motives, both positive (show they practice safe and fair labor conditions) and negative (questioning previous labor practices).

As shown in Table 5, when asked to provide an ending to the scenario (“What will happen next?”), 17 respondents made a simple purchase prediction (i.e., will/will not buy). Slightly more negative ($n = 7$) than positive ($n = 5$) purchase outcomes were predicted, but an additional 5 respondents were noncommittal (might or might not buy). Thirty-three respondents elaborated on what would happen next, and these more detailed responses fell into three categories. The largest group ($n = 15$) commented on the positive effect of the “No Sweat” label on this and future purchases (e.g., buy with clear conscience, look for label in the future).

Ten respondents referred to the shopper’s use of the information, especially the need to grapple with and process it (e.g., check other labels, question salesperson, combine with other knowledge). Issues of confusion and complexity were raised by these participants, and one respondent even predicted that the shopper would run from the store! The third category of elaborate comments further demonstrates that “No Sweat” alone will not sell a garment. Eight respondents mentioned the role of other product attributes, including size, color, style, brand, and price, and

Table 4. What Is the Shopper Thinking?

Category (number of responses)	Examples
Source and conditions of production (14)	<p>The shopper is wondering who made the clothes.</p> <p>The clothes were not made in a sweatshop.</p> <p>This must be foreign made.</p> <p>The garment has been manufactured under U.S. labor standards.</p> <p>The garment is made not taking advantage of people who are trying to make an honest living.</p> <p>Now she can be sure that what she's buying wasn't made under sweatshop conditions.</p>
Unusual nature of label (13)	<p>She is wondering about the label—it is unusual.</p> <p>She never saw a label that something wasn't made in a sweatshop.</p> <p>The label is strange. She hasn't seen it before.</p> <p>What in the world is this?</p> <p>Unusual product description.</p>
Credibility of label (7)	<p>She is probably questioning the label's authenticity.</p> <p>Hmmm. This is odd. I wonder if it's a joke.</p> <p>Maybe you believe it, maybe you don't.</p> <p>She's thinking about whether or not the label is legitimate.</p>
Other attributes, purchase criteria (7)	<p>Do I like this item? Does the quality of the garment seem OK?</p> <p>How much does it cost?</p> <p>Do I really need this article of clothing?</p> <p>She is comparing value vs. price.</p> <p>How should I wash this product?</p>
Effect on attitude toward purchase (positive or negative feelings or intentions) (7)	<p>As she has noticed the label, she is thinking positively about the product.</p> <p>She probably feels good that it wasn't made in a sweatshop.</p> <p>She is happy or dismayed over the label's statement.</p> <p>It sparks interest in the clothing because it's made differently from other brands.</p> <p>She may purchase this sweater as a result of the "No Sweat" promise.</p>
Corporate motives (5)	<p>How socially conscious is this company?</p> <p>She is thinking that the clothing manufacturer is trying to make a concerted effort to show they practice safe and fair labor conditions.</p> <p>The shopper is wondering why the manufacturer felt it necessary to put the label on the item. Was this manufacturer accused of unfair and unsafe working conditions in the past?</p>

consumer considerations of need, mood, liking, and appropriateness (e.g., "right for her"). Some of these concerns about other purchase criteria had also been raised in response to the previous question, "What is the shopper thinking?"

Because of the limited scope of this exploratory research, it would be unwise to generalize too freely from the results. However, the TAT does demonstrate the role of such a qualitative

technique in providing additional insights into consumer feelings about sweatshop labor and their response to "No Sweat" labels, beyond what can be gleaned through surveys. Despite stated concern about child and sweatshop labor, willingness to pay more for peace of mind, and desire for informative labels, as measured by opinion polls, responses to the TAT scenario suggest that consumer attitudes are probably closer to the complex picture reflected in consumer research discussed above.

Table 5. What Will Happen Next?

Category (number of responses)	Examples
Straight purchase prediction (17)	
Buy (5)	She will purchase the clothing item. She will buy the product.
Might buy (5)	She may or may not buy the item. She'll make a choice to see if she wants to buy the shirt.
Will not buy (7)	The shopper will put the item back. The woman will not buy this product.
Elaboration on action and reasons for it (33)	
Positive effect of label (15)	She'll buy the blouse and feel good that she helped support a fair workplace. She will buy it with a clear conscience. She will consider this item more than others without the label. The shopper will look for more items with similar labels. The woman will think more about what that label means, and she will probably remember the manufacturer's name. She will always check labels whenever she goes shopping, making sure the article of clothing was not made in a sweatshop.
Grapple with information (10)	She will check a few other garments by that manufacturer and perhaps others in the vicinity. Then, she'll decide how important this information is to her and whether it will weigh on her decision to purchase the garment. If the shopper believes the label, she will try on the garment or will take to the cashier. If not deemed legitimate, the shopper may question sales personnel or just return the item to the rack. Depending on the previous knowledge of the shopper of the manufacturer and whether or not the manufacturer was labor conscious beforehand, the shopper may purchase the product. The shopper will put it down and run out of the shop thinking, "What an odd shop?"
Consideration of other attributes (8)	The woman will go ahead and see if the shirt is right for her. If it is, she'll probably purchase it. The shopper will not buy the clothing. To the average shopper, the brand or label on the clothing is more important than the guarantee the clothing was manufactured under fair and safe labor conditions. Is it in my size? My color? My style? If all of these questions are answered in the affirmative, a purchase will be made. If she likes the item and the price is right, she will buy it.

Judging from the initial pretest of the first cartoon, "No Sweat" labels may not be noticed at all without a concerted effort to make consumers aware of their existence. In the research, this was accomplished by modifying the cartoon before use in the actual exploratory research, to make it clear that the "shopper" in the picture was reading the label. In practice, it might require an educational campaign aimed at consumers. Once noticed, the

labels may stimulate shoppers' thoughts about the conditions under which goods were made, and the "No Sweat" guarantee may evoke positive feelings and eventual purchase. However, consumers might also question the label's credibility and/or the motives of the company that uses it, as they struggle to process the new information and integrate it with prior knowledge and experience. Finally, responses to this exploratory exercise are

consistent with Dickson's (2001) findings that the "No Sweat" label may be necessary, but not sufficient to have the desired effect—that is, other important choice criteria (e.g., price, style) must be satisfied for the labeled product to be purchased.

Although this might be viewed as a case of consumers saying one thing and doing another, it is actually a logical response, because one could not expect a customer to purchase a garment that was the wrong size or style, simply because it was manufactured under favorable working conditions. A lesson might be borrowed from the recalibration of green marketing (Stafford, 2003). Marketers of energy-efficient automobiles and appliances have learned to emphasize primary benefits (e.g., reliability, cleaning ability) and offer environmental features as added selling points, rather than try to change consumers' priorities.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This article has explored the consumer decision-making process in light of issues raised by globalization of apparel production. Pressures to cut costs have sent corporations on a "race to the bottom" in search of cheap labor. Companies, retailers, contractors, and consumers themselves have benefited, directly and indirectly, from the resulting exploitation. Whereas business and government have major responsibility for preventing worker exploitation through adoption and enforcement of codes of conduct and legal regulations, consumers also play a vital role in ensuring an ethical marketplace through socially conscious and informed product choice.

Polls indicate that many U.S. consumers are concerned about sweatshops and the use of child labor and may be willing to pay a premium for assurances that their products are ethically produced. Manufacturers are overwhelmingly perceived as having responsibility for preventing sweatshops, but some of the burden is also assigned to retailers, and shoppers express a desire to avoid stores that sell sweatshop-produced

garments. Consumers welcome government regulation to protect workers and ban products made by child labor, although labels are seen as a more helpful decision tool for shoppers than a published list of stores or companies.

In light of the social desirability bias inherent in opinion polls on such a subject, additional insights into the consumer decision-making process should be sought, most notably from research on country of origin (acceptance of foreign-made goods), social consciousness and responsibility (previously applied to environment-related consumption), and consumer ethics (especially response to ethical information about the firm). A complex picture emerges from recent consumer research on the role of sweatshop-related information in the consumer decision-making process. The consumer trying to shop with a social conscience must integrate ethical information about the firm with other product attributes, prior knowledge, and experience. Evidence from such research indicates that consumers vary in their concern about the issue, and only a small percentage will actually use information such as that provided by "No Sweat" labels. Thus, although up to 86% of polled consumers expressed a willingness to pay more for sweatshop-free garments, and 56% expressed a preference for labels to communicate that information, Dickson (2001) identified only 16% of survey participants as "No Sweat" label users in a hypothetical task situation.

Qualitative research methods might be employed to yield additional insights into the role of sweatshop-related concerns in the consumer decision-making process, to complement the knowledge already gained from the more structured polls, surveys, and experiments. An exploratory study using a TAT illustrated how the technique could be used to probe perceptions of a "No Sweat" label and its role in decision making. Many of the comments elicited from respondents are consistent with the consumer research findings discussed above, especially regarding complexity of the purchase decision, utility (and in some cases, added confusion) of such labels, and the overriding importance of other choice criteria. The

comments suggest that if adopted by apparel producers, mere exposure to the novel “No Sweat” labels (assuming they are noticed at all by consumers!) may be educational and prompt new ways of thinking about clothing purchases in the short and long term. However, not all consumers will develop positive attitudes as a result, because some will question the labels’ validity or the motives behind their use.

Additional structured and qualitative research is needed to identify and explain the factors that would encourage and enable consumers to integrate sweatshop-related concerns into their purchase decisions. Future qualitative studies might employ projective techniques, which were only pilot tested here (e.g., TAT using the same or other scenarios), or other methods including focus groups, depth interviews, or ethnographic research to probe for additional insights. Research questions raised by the results of our exploratory TAT include the following:

1. Under what conditions will a consumer notice a “No Sweat” label? We know that certain consumers (e.g., those identified as socially responsible or LOHAS) will be more sensitive to this information, but are there aspects of the shopping environment or label itself that would heighten awareness for the average consumer?
2. Does mere exposure to a “No Sweat” label increase consumer desire for, and consideration of, that type of information?
3. What personal benefits and/or more deeply held values can be linked to use of a “No Sweat” label? Depth interviews using a laddering technique (Reynolds & Guttman, 1988) might be employed to probe for underlying motivations (i.e., “Why is that important to you?”) that could serve as incentives for consumers to consider this product attribute.
4. At what point in the decision-making process would the consumer be more likely to use “No Sweat” label information? An ethnographic approach of observing and questioning a customer during the shopping process might be appropriate for such an investigation.
5. Under what conditions would a “No Sweat” label result in positive feelings or intentions versus adding to consumer confusion or raising suspicion about the company’s motives?
6. How credible is the claim on a “No Sweat” label? Is government certification needed, similar to that for organic foods? Firoz and Ammaturo (2002) have proposed a grade or Acceptable Labor Practices (ALP) number to be assigned by independent outside auditors.

Depending on the results of future research, efforts might be aimed at increasing consumer awareness and interest, providing more useful (and credible) information, improving regulation of marketing practices, or all three. Better understanding of this aspect of product choice should be of interest to consumer educators, marketers, human rights advocates, and public policy makers. Empowering consumers with accurate, user-friendly information they need to shop with a social conscience will finally enable them to, in Karpatkin’s words, “become the ultimate arbiters of human decency in the marketplace.”

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