

# Studying Consumer Brand Relationship and Segmenting Consumers of Green Apparel Brands

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**ABSTRACT:** The relationships that brands nurture with their present and potential consumers helps them to grow. Organizations continuously strive to build reliable brands as this leads to growth in revenue for a longer duration. The consumer-brand relationship evolves further when a brand is perceived trustworthy by the consumers. The organizations should focus on understanding the state of the relationship of their brands with consumers as it would lead to product improvement and further achieving the long-term goals.

In this research study a questionnaire has been prepared which can be used by organizations to find weak consumer-brand relationships among consumers of green apparel and suggest ways to improve it. Further consumer segmentation has been done using K -means clustering technique. The results of clustering can be used by green apparel brands to intensify consumer engagement, consumer retention and strengthening the consumer-brand relationship.

**KEYWORDS:** Green Apparel, Consumer behavior, Consumer-brand relationship, Green brands, Green marketing

## I. INTRODUCTION

Brand researchers have been closely observing the changes that brands bring in consumer behavior over a period of time. These changes have been insightful in understanding the altering consumer requirements and preferences over the years. More recently, researchers have found special interest in studying the consumer-brand relationship, which consumers build with certain brands. These relationships are similar to social relationship between individuals, which are either dictated by emotions or quid-pro-quo i.e. a courtesy or advantage allowed in exchange for something.

Brand relationships are an important and valuable relationship both from the consumer and

the brand point of view. A strong brand relationship leads to a sense of security for the consumers, where they can blindly trust the brand to protect their interests and continuously deliver quality products. While the brands benefit from repurchases and positive publicity from their consumers, on the contrary weak brand relationship can lead to dissatisfaction and individuals may switch to a different brand. Hence it is important for organizations to nurture and protect consumer-brand relationship.

It is crucial for organizations to capitalize on a strong relationship with their customers, as retaining an existing customer is far more lucrative than acquiring a new one. Further, building a strong relationship also reduces customer churn and brings about a sense of partnership between the customer and the brand, where both the parties work towards keeping the confidence of each other. Hence, making it vital for organizations to continuously measure and work towards improving their relationship strength. The present study proposes a conceptual model to represent the consumer-brand relationship for the consumers of green apparel brand. It further forms the base for devising a research instrument for measuring the strength of relationship and additionally segmenting consumers to plan the associated marketing strategies to improve their relationship strength with the brand.

Consumer behavior towards apparel purchase is a unique and important process undertaken by consumers frequently. As apparel is closely connected with fashion hence general marketing rules of value and quality may not necessarily apply. Furthermore, the growing influence of sustainability on consumers' lives is altering their way of living and their consumption choices. Apparel purchase is no exception, being the second most polluting industry globally, the apparel industry is making amendments in their

manufacturing and offerings. Brands are working towards preserving the environment and making conscious choices towards embracing eco-friendly processes, further offering green apparel which have low impact on the environment. As per the research of [1] apparel brands can be termed green if they follow any of the following: (a) apparel have been produced using eco-friendly processes, (b) recyclable or recycled material is used in its production, (c) its locally produced and long-lasting, or (d) uses natural or sustainable material.

Consumers are individuals that buy for self-consumption, further with rising trend of environmental preservation these consumers are making lifestyle changes to protect the environment through altering their consumption patterns. This phenomenon has given rise to new categorization that is known as green consumers. Green consumers are usually consumers that display greater concerns for the environment and consciously consume green products [2]. Past research by [3] have found such consumers to have received higher education and access to far more information on the topic, they display affirmative approach towards the environment conservation.

Globally, brands have found “green” as an important and growing market as have various organizations in India, which too have found this to have a promising future. The phenomenon of global warming, environmental degradation have added to the concern. Also, the growing green consumers’ base has added to the lucrativeness of this opportunity. Furthermore, green marketing has emerged as an important vertical in this space, which fosters production of green products and encourages sustainable consumption through marketing of these products. While this seems to be an inspiring present-day situation but much research has not been conducted on green brands and their responsiveness amid Indian consumers [4]. Additionally, apparel industry is considered to be the second most polluting industry globally just after oil, hence bringing substantial interest in the changing consumer behavior towards this sector. Thus, this manuscript proposes a method for brands to measure the strength of consumer-brand relationship and segment consumers on such basis. It also proposes to identify marketing strategies to improve this relationship and target each segment in a unique manner.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Green Marketing** Organizations across the globe have taken ownership of the adverse environmental

situation and are making amends in their raw-material usage, production process and subsequent marketing activities to redeem the situation. Green marketing is the promotion of activities or products that are recognized to be environmentally safe [5]. The concept of green marketing dates back to 1976, where researcher [6] defined it as an concept which is “concerned with all marketing activities that have served to help cause environmental problems and that may serve to provide a remedy for environmental problems”.

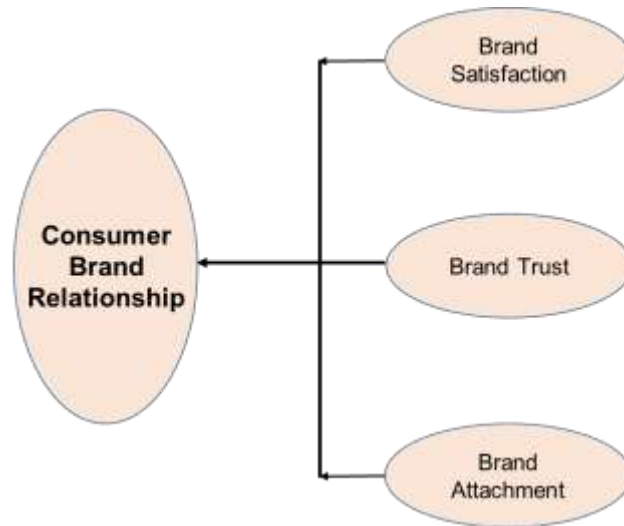
Green marketing is an element of the new marketing methods which refocuses, changes and advances existing marketing beliefs and practices, leading to a rather dissimilar outlook. It tries to form a bridge between the ecological preservation and marketing practices [7]. These changes have led to emergence of new classifications like green brands, green products and green consumers. Green brands are brands that have comparatively lesser adverse impact on the environment. These brands actively work towards informing consumers about the benefits of environmentally conscious products [8]. Further green apparel brands are brands that are conscious about their production and after-care process, with due concern towards the environmental preservation. The total market for green apparel is only 1% of the entire apparel market [9]. Hence, highlighting the opportunity in this market with the growing consciousness among consumers due to media awareness, government norms and global environmental changes.

### Consumer-Brand Relationship

Consumer-brand relationship are said to be similar to social relationships among individuals, research work of [10][11] has further constructed that the rules of social association also guides consumers’ interaction with brands. Additionally various processes involved in maintaining interpersonal association hold true for consumer-brand relationship too. These relationships comprise of cognitive views and emotional linkages with the brand, which in-turn affect consumer behavior for the brand[12].

For the present study the inspiration is drawn for the conceptual model from the work of [13] whereby the researchers define consumer brand relationship as a function of brand satisfaction, brand trust and brand attachment (Figure: 1). This study takes into account the green consumer-brand relationship with the green apparel brands.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Consumer-Brand Relationship**



**Brand Satisfaction**

Satisfaction is a result of fulfilment of a desired outcome through the use of a product or service, leading to an enjoyable level of consumption experience [14]. Many researchers [15][14] in the past have found a direct relationship between satisfaction and repurchase intension i.e. the higher the customer satisfaction the higher the chances of these customers to repurchase and hence a formation of customer brand relationship.

Green satisfaction is “a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment to satisfy a customer’s environmental desires, sustainable expectations, and green needs” [16]. Consumer satisfaction for green apparel brands can be improved through information sharing regarding the comparative environmental benefits of the brand.

**Brand Trust**

The inclination to depend on a second person based on the past experience and behavior of the person is known as trust [17]. Similarly, brand trust is the inclination to depend on a brand despite the improbability associated with that brand [18]. Furthermore trust resulting from the goodwill and environmental pledge of the brand is termed as green trust [19]. Various research work of [20][21] states that higher perceived quality of the brand boosts the consumer trust in the brand. This trust enables increased reliability on the brand when the brand delivers consistent performance over the various interactions with the consumer [22].

**Brand Attachment**

Brand attachment can be defined as the strength of the connection between the brand and

the self. This connection is characterized by the ease of recall and rich thoughts associated with the brand and its relationship with the self [23]. This relationship affects the strength of connection between the brand and the self, when this construct is strong it promotes brand lucrativeness and increases the customer lifetime value [24]. Previous research highlights the importance of positive reminiscences and their association with the brand, which builds a stronger attachment between the self and brand [25].

**III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The segment on research methodology includes:

1. Drafting Research questions
2. Designing a research instrument on the basis of extensive literature review
3. Reliability test conducted on the research instrument
4. Defining sampling technique and sample size for the final data collection

**Research Questions**

Taking inspiration from the literature review findings, the following research questions are proposed for the present research study:

1. To identify the factors that determine the green consumers’ relationship towards green apparels through literature review
2. To develop a research instrument based on the explored factors
3. To calculate the consumer-brand relationship index (CBRI) using the data collected.
4. To perform cluster analysis and extract consumer clusters from the data.

**Formulation of Research instrument**

A questionnaire was developed to study the brand relationship of the green consumers towards the green apparel brands after conducting extensive literature review. The research instrument (Annexure: I) was bifurcated into two parts-

1. Demographic information
2. Question comprising of 36 statements- Designed to study the brand relationship of consumers.

A pretest of the research instrument was conducted on 45 respondents to check the reliability of the instrument.

#### Establishing Reliability of the Instrument

Cronbach's alpha-test was used to test the reliability of the research instrument, in which a score beyond 0.60 states that scale consistency is acceptable [26]. The reliability test was run on the SPSS software on a sample of 45. The reported Cronbach's Alpha (Table 1) of the scale was 0.944, it suggested that the scale under question has a high level of reliability. Hence, the questionnaire was further circulated for data collection.

**Table 1:** Test of Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.944	.945	36

#### Proposed Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire containing 36 items was used to collect data from 206 respondents. The respondents were asked to rate the respective statements on a scale of 1-5 (1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree)

#### Sampling Technique, Sample Size and Data Collection

The survey sample for the study comprised of college students (undergraduates and postgraduates) enrolled in a reputed fashion college in New Delhi, capital of India. The questionnaire was administered to consumers of green apparel brands. The questionnaires were administered to students after obtaining appropriate permission from the head of the college and faculty members. The faculty members were requested to allow students to fill the research instrument during class hour. Among 210 completed questionnaires, 206 contained usable data. The sample of college students was selected as people in this age share

comparable characteristics with fashion front-runners and have the exposure to an array of information about the fashion industry [27]. These students usually have a positive inclination towards fashion goods and indulge in purchasing eco-friendly products for their consumption (ChainStoreAge, 2007; Crawford, 2008).

#### IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A focus group comprising of 6 members (table: 2), who were experts in the green apparel category was used to help assign a numeric weight to the three dimensions of satisfaction, trust and attachment. This weight was multiplied with the total score that was calculated by adding all the items for each respondent. The resultant multiplied score for all three factors Brand satisfaction, trust and attachment were added to get the final consumer-brand relationship index (CBRI) for each respondent.

**Table 2:** Weight calculation for each construct

	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Expert 5	Expert 6	Final Weight
Satisfaction	3	3	4	5	3	3	<b>0.31</b>
Trust	4	5	5	4	4	5	<b>0.40</b>
Attachment	3	3	3	3	4	4	<b>0.29</b>

#### Equation Formation for Calculating Consumer-Brand Relationship Index (CBRI)

$$CBRI = (0.31 * S_i + 0.40 * T_i + 0.29 * A_i)$$

where,

S= Satisfaction; T= Trust

A= Attachment; i= individual respondent

**K-Means Cluster analysis**

The Consumer-Brand Relationship Index (CBRI) data was subject to k-means Cluster analysis and 3 consumer clusters (Table 3) were extracted. Each consumer segment is assumed to represent

**Table 3: Final Cluster Centers**

	Cluster		
	1	32	3
Total_score	47.35	39.10	13.20

a homogeneous set of consumers having a similar state of relationship with the green apparel brand.

**V. RESULTS**

**Consumer segmentation, extraction of consumer profiles and proposed targeting strategies**

Consumers were divided into 3 segments based on the state of their consumer brand

relationship with the green apparel brands. The detailed consumer profile is depicted in Table 4. This profile was further used to generate respective marketing strategies for targeting each of the three consumer segments (Table 4).

**Table 4: Consumer Cluster Profiles**

Cluster No.	Cluster Name	Profile	Marketing Strategies
1.	Partners	Consumers in this cluster attribute very high importance to brand satisfaction as well as attach importance to consumer experience and fulfilment of consumer expectation as factors towards building a relationship with these brands. However, these consumers may not necessary believe that the brand is always working in their interest. Such consumers give importance to the reliability of brands and their ability to make good products. They have a high attachment with their green brand.	Higher customer satisfaction can be achieved by quality positioning and benefit positioning. These customers will trust the brands more as their perceived value for the brand goes up. Companies can do this by regularly focusing on their competitive advantage. These customers can be involved in co-creation.
2.	Budding partners	Consumers in	Consumer promotion tools can be

Cluster No.	Cluster Name	Profile	Marketing Strategies
		<p>this cluster are unsure of their expectations from the green brand but give moderate importance to their positive experience while using such brands. These consumers are low or unsure of the trust they have on the green brands. Also, they don't necessarily feel attached to their brands. These consumers don't necessarily want others to follow their choices of green brand.</p>	<p>useful to sway these consumers towards the brand. The promotional campaigns can be followed to drivers or enhance consumer perceived value and subsequently initiate loyalty programs for consumer retention. A well-developed relationship marketing program should be introduced.</p>
3.	Disconnected	<p>Consumers in this cluster do not have any expectations with the use of green apparel brands but give moderate importance to their positive experience while using such brands. These consumers don't feel any form of trust or attachment with green apparel brands.</p>	<p>A continuous stream of direct marketing campaigns will ensure that the brand retains its salience and remains in the 'evoke set' in the consumer mind. Brands will have to work hard to build relationship with this type of consumers.</p>

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

Cluster 1 is the most vital group of consumers as it comprises of individuals most appropriate to become consumer evangelists. These consumers believe in the brand, and will partner with the brand to make it successful and hence will be interested in co-creation. The brand should consistently work towards keeping such consumers informed about its developments, achievements and competitive advantages.

Cluster 2 is a significant cluster in terms of its size. The brands will profit by investing in these group of consumers. These brands should work on building relationship with these consumers by tempting them through offering promotional benefits and later rewarding them for their loyalty. Hence, increasing its appeal and building a connection for the future.

Green brands should work consistently towards creating long term relationship with its consumers. Strategies should be planned to



increase consumer engagement, enhancement of the perceived value of its green products, leading to consumer retention. For building a consumer brand relationship it is essential to work upon various aspects of brand trust, brand satisfaction and brand attachment components with the green consumers. It is essential for organizations to have a mechanism in place to identify its consumer base and work with the significant consumers and lead them towards brand partnership. Co-creation can play a significant part in building long term relationship by knowing the consumers better and working towards enhancing the green products to match their requirement. Hence empowering them to play a significant role in the success of the brand, leading to an enhanced consumer brand relationship for the green brands towards its green consumers.

## VII. LIMITATION & FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This manuscript illustrates green consumers and their relationship towards green apparel brands in India. The scope of this work is limited as it uses responses only from fashion studies students. Future researchers can focus on a larger, generic sample drawn across age groups and professional backgrounds. There is also scope of undertaking this research towards a single green apparel brand and using the same to draw comparisons between two or more brands. The CBRI index can help in bringing clarity about the relationship that consumers feel towards the selected brand.

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**Annexure I**  
**Questionnaire**

Q 1.	Name :
Q 2.	Mobile/ Phone no.
Q 3.	E-mail:
Q 4.	Gender : (a) Male (b) Female (c) Others
Q 5.	Age : (a) Below 18 years (b) 18- 24 years (c) 24- 30 years (d) 30- 36 years (e) 36- 42 years (f) 42& over

**Q6.** Please specify your choice by marking one option on a scale of 1 to 5 (1: strongly disagree and 5: strongly agree). Please select only one option per question.

S. No	Statements	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
1	When I buy eco-friendly apparel I am happy					
2	My urge to contribute to society is accomplished by purchasing green apparel.					
3	My need for preservation of environment is fulfilled on purchase of green apparel.					
4	I feel delighted with the green apparel purchase if it surpasses my expectations.					
5	If the purchase of green apparel is useful to me then I feel happy with the brand.					
6	I make repeat purchases if I have positive experience with the green apparel brand.					
7	Happy remembrances with the chosen green apparel brand makes me more confident about it.					

S. No	Statements	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
8	Consistent performance of my green apparel brand builds my confidence in it.					
9	I trust my green apparel brand for fulfilling its commitment to the environment.					
10	Happy associations with my selected green apparel brand makes me feel attached to it.					
11	Happy associations with my selected green apparel brand makes me emotionally connected to it.					
12	Discounts do not affect my choice of green apparel brand selection.					
13	Switching to an alternative green apparel brand will not make me happy.					
14	My chosen green apparel brand makes best products.					
15	My chosen green apparel brand is keen on my approval with its products.					
16	My chosen green apparel brand is inclined towards resolving my problems with its products.					
17	My chosen green apparel brand keeps my wellbeing at heart while making changes in their offering.					
18	My personality is depicted through my chosen green apparel brand.					
19	My-self-esteem is enhanced through usage of my chosen green apparel brand.					
20	I find my green apparel brand similar to me.					
21	I feel happy to display my green apparel brand.					

S. No	Statements	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
22	My choice of green apparel brand enhances my status.					
23	I desire my acquaintances to purchase my choice of green apparel brand.					
24	I wish to be influence environmental concern among people through my usage of green apparel brand.					
25	I would be happy to be a brand advocate for new product launch by my preferred green apparel brand.					
26	I firmly believe that my preferred green apparel brand consistently improves its product quality.					
27	My recommendation of my preferred green apparel brand depends on my confidence towards its ability.					
28	I trust the intensions of my green apparel brand towards the environment preservation.					
29	I feel my preferred green apparel brand is superior in its environment concerns compared to other brands.					
30	Eco-friendly commitment depicted by my preferred green apparel brand enhances my likability for it.					

S. No	Statements	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
31	Positive recommendations by others for my preferred green apparel brand encourages me to purchase it.					
32	My environmental concerns are in sync with my choice of green apparel brand.					
33	My choice of green apparel brand is dependent on its competence to produce green-apparel.					
34	My preferred green apparel brand delivers its promises.					
35	My preferred green apparel brand fulfills its responsibilities towards the environment.					
36	If my preferred green apparel brand promotes varied eco-friendly apparel, I would certainly acquire them.					