Eco Fashion: A Study of Consumer Perception and Preference in Bangladesh.

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to understand the current situation of Eco fashion and its position in the grassroots level in Bangladesh; what does the local consumer thinks about it and to find out what will be the possible obstacles in the way of Eco fashion to emerge in Bangladeshi market. Possible solution for development and what kind of Governmental help will be expected. Motivating the RMG sectors to develop the Eco fashion sector in Bangladesh is one of the reflecting intention. Raising consumer awareness about Eco fashion is the prime motto of this research.

In order to understand the consumer perception, a survey was held in Bangladesh. Basically, the survey was more focused about Eco fashion, what the consumer’s preference and perception regarding Eco fashion. The results and findings were really surprising. Most of the people in Bangladesh lack knowledge about Eco fashion. Those who have some knowledge are real basic.

Environment friendly issues motivate Bangladeshi people most towards Eco fashion. The main demotivating point regarding Eco fashion is its costing and price in market. All the participants in the survey morally supports ethical fashion without any doubt and does not matter whether it is about Eco fashion or about non-eco. But dramatically they lack knowledge about the proper meaning of ethical fashion. What they basically support is that, maximising benefits to people and community and minimising impact on earth which is the base of Eco fashion. Reasons; why Eco fashion is still outlined in Bangladesh is the RMG sector and the Govt. is not really conscious about the positive impacts with Eco fashion. Also the income level of our general people has a big impact towards the development of Eco fashion. People hear in this country are not motivated by what they see or feel. In Bangladesh people are mainly motivate by their income and society.

Public awareness regarding environmental issues has got massive importance and we are all aware about this. This is why Eco fashion is a hot topic now. But lack of knowledge and lack of attention is damaging the possibilities of Eco fashion to emerge in Bangladeshi fashion sector. It is high time to speak up and save something great for better future.

KEYWORDS: Eco Fashion, Customer Perception and perception, Environment,

Introduction:
Rich amount of studies on consumer manners towards environment friendly products has been conducted starting from early 1970 (Sudhir Sachdev, 2011). According to ISO (International Standard Organization); Eco-Friendly fashion stands for: “Identifying the general environmental performance of a product within a product group based on its whole life-cycle in order to contribute to improvements in key environmental measures and to support sustainable consumption patterns.” (Luz Claudio, 2007). In case of purchasing Eco friendly products consumers do not balance their preference for aesthetics and appeal of the garment and they do give importance towards ethical apparels too (Shaw, et al., 2006). Shaw also cited in his studies that, less attractive appeal of ethical fashion is another disturbing factor for the buyers and making this item less attractive towards consumers. when consumers goes to buy an apparel the most vital thing which matters is that the apparels must be stylish or trendy and retailers should always remember that as a seller (Shepherd, 2010). Necessity is more important than functional reason to buy apparel, for example saving our bodies from outdoor harsh weather condition. Moreover Eco friendly clothing are intended to save the environment and society from harms of textile
manufacturing which can be linked with functional performance of Eco friendly apparels (Scarpi, 2006).

Society and ecological values got more priority then only building profit in this new age (Anupama, 2010). Fulfiling human desire with lowest possible effect on the natural environment, this package can only be found in green or environmental marketing (Polonsky 1994b). Consumers are now more conscious about with every purchase what will be the effect or affect on society and to the surroundings (Hye-Shin Kim, 1995). Regarding the position of Eco friendly industry in foreign countries, good numbers of brands like H&M, Zara or designers like Marc Jacobs or Stella McCartney are pushing a lot (Fineman, 2001). "Ironically, supply seems to precede demand in the Eco-fashion industry" (Fineman, 2001). Despite the ever increasing volumes of clothing trade and overflow of conventionally made apparel and fashion related products, many businesses and retailers are still creating difference in the society by considering Eco fashion production and retailing as the core of their policies. Not only producing the Eco friendly garment but also making sure that the goods or clothing are prepared keeping in mind that, consumers are now giving importance of aesthetic value in buying Eco friendly products that should be always stored (Saad ali ,2015). For example, Heavy Eco, an Estonia based company is using prison labor from Estonia and Lativa, utilizing their creativity by producing Eco garments wear; selling it in the market. Buyers of these products are thinking they are purchasing these products for noble cause; and yes, these purchase profits goes for good. 50% profit earned from these business goes or the development of homeless and needy people of the society, lowering the criminal activity for earning. Moreover it also helps the prisoners to develop a positive thinking that, they are also contributing for the society (Toomas Plunt, 2011).

In 2007, Newholm and Shaw called for researches on moral consumption patterns across cultures. The Green Advisory Board came up with a list of criteria for Eco fashion development. The list consists: reasonable/ moral trade; native; custom/tailor made; organic/natural textiles and materials; recycled/reborn; vintage/second hand; vegan/animal free/cruelty free; Eco printing; fabric waste reduction; green marketing; socially responsible; resource efficiency; and Eco certification (Eco Fashion Week, 2010). Before now, Eco fashion has not been widely introduced in Bangladesh. As far as it could be tracked, I found no previous study or reference on Eco fashion in Bangladeshi prospective. To develop Eco fashion sector in our country first we need to understand our customer preference and their perception. This is why I came up with this survey based research idea. This study will help to emerge Eco fashion in our fashion industry, RMG and also in our local market.

Concepts Relationship with Eco fashion

Understanding the fundamental definitions of what environment friendly fashion means is important to analyze consumer view regarding ecological friendly consumer perception. Because of having so many different terms in the fashion industry makes it hard for the consumers to make an Eco friendly purchase therefore it is not easy for them to distinguish among two different product or choose the Eco friendly one. So for better understanding about the consumers' view about Eco fashion it is important to have some knowledge about few important terms (Thomas ,S, 2008).

a. Eco Fashion

Any kind of fashion or textile or garments or merchandise which has positive impact or very low bad influence on environment or society is termed as Eco fashion which can be found from early nineties (Thomas ,S, 2008).

All kind of outfit that has been manufactured using biologically friendly process is known as Eco clothing. Biological or living textile, sustainable materials such as hemp, non-textile material; for example bamboo or used plastic bottles all are included in this. Not necessarily made from organic fibre but also second hand or used products such as outfits made from recycled clothing including old, textile or other materials which are also known as re-used. (Mintel, 2009)

b. Organic

Minimum 70% organic or natural fibre is required in manufacturing of apparel; for example cotton. GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) is the largest and genuine association to certify the development of textile which is made up of natural fibre while keeping high level clarity in the supply chain of the textile.

Two things that the manufacturers must safeguard; first one is chemicals and bleaches used in the
Methodology

In order to understand the perception of consumers on Eco fashion products, a set of studies (qualitative and surveys) were conducted with Bangladeshi citizens. At first this research method was completely based on online survey. For that I used Google survey form presented by widely used googledrive.com. The reason why I choose this research to be based on survey is; never before a survey was held on this topic in Bangladesh. The main problem faced during the survey was, most of our Bangladeshi consumers thinks that all the products from our Bangladeshi fashion houses are Eco friendly (basically they think Eco fashion is all about waste management, but in reality which is not, it is only a part of Eco fashion). On the other hand others don't understand what is meant here by Eco fashion. On one glance, a lot of people think that, Eco fashion means fashion with living things. For example- ear rings of real tree leaf (jewelleries) and so on like fashion items made out of animal skins. So describing what is Eco fashion to them properly at first and then getting the survey form fill upped from them was a great challenge.

After a long 1 month from the day the survey was declared, I got only 277 survey form fill upped. It was not enough for me to satisfy myself. So then I decided to take the more traditional approach; the face to face field survey with real people and proper survey. After spending more 15 days I finally finalised more 100 survey papers to complete my research. Hereafter I will point the online survey as virtual survey and the field survey as face to face survey. From the virtual survey I finalised 250 (a round figure) responses to calculate the ratio.

So the total summary ratio of my survey on Eco fashion is drawn from 350 survey results. I have presented total 15 questions and all 15 questions were mandatory to complete the survey. A very important thing to mention is that I asked only Bangladeshi nationals to complete the survey form because as this survey theme is more dedicated about what Bangladeshi consumers view about Eco fashion, so this request was essential. There was no age limit to fill up the form. Also in the virtual survey there I put no importance to fill up names or age. But on face to face survey I made a separate section for age and names to fill up. I will now go through briefly about the survey questions and the survey ratio on the total responses.

The lacking of this survey is, all the survey participants are well educated or students. Their income source varies from high class or higher middle or lower middle class. Students mostly depend on their family income in Bangladeshi context. So this survey results do not show the perception of uneducated or self-educated or in most of the case lower income source dependent's idea about Eco fashion. Also the sample of 350 Bangladeshi consumers means that the results cannot be widely generalized.

process are not or least detrimental to the environment and the second one is manufacturing site, socially the wet treatment plants must have water treatment plant to treat the industrial waste affluent which is actually harmful for the environment if mixed in the natural water bodies (GOTS, updated 2012).

c. Ethical Fashion

As a synonym of Eco the Term ethical is introduced but ethical is diplomatically more trustworthy (SAAD ALI, 2015). Ethical is very much linked with moral responsibilities and honest commercial performance. Human beings, atmosphere, wild life and consumers will be the vital beneficiary of this moral practice. (Thomas S., 2008).

d. Environmental Friendly

Environment friendly refers to commonly natural fibers because of their facility for biodegradability and endurance with easy to wash and care quality and well prospects for recycling and reprocess (Thomas, 2008).

Previous studies which have tried to identify consumer’s approach towards Eco fashion have shown an impartial or cold view (Butler and Francis, 1997). As observed by various scholars around the world, the goal is no longer green user (Newholm and Shaw, 2007; Finisterra do Paco et al., 2009). In summary, in this study we want to understand; 1) the Bangladeshi consumer concern and the knowledge gap they have regarding Eco fashion and 2) the awareness levels of at least some of the sustainability dimensions are inter-correlated and such interrelationships can be used to identify and segment Eco fashion consumers. As this is the first attempt to understand their view via a short survey, now we have the real life view of the customers about Eco fashion. In order to understand the view of Bangladeshi people and Bangladeshi customer, the studies (survey) were conducted in Dhaka, Bangladesh; with only Bangladeshi citizen.
SURVEY RESULT:

Are you aware of Eco fashion; this is the first question which is to be answered in the survey paper both on virtual and face to face survey. The answers were quite positive. More than 78.6% people answered that "yes" they are aware of Eco fashion. 8.9% (33) said no and 12.5% (44) said heard about it. But in the face to face survey process there was also an option open for the answerers so that they can say or describe their words about the question and 1 eye catching answer was like;

"I understand that Eco represents environment but what does that mean exactly, not sure" (Mariam, 21)

![Figure 1: Awareness on Eco fashion](image)

It is quite positive that with 273 votes; 78.6% of positive answers to this question quite everyone supports to stand to protect the environment. Although they are not completely aware about the possible meaning of Eco fashion as this is a common term mostly used in fashion related studies. The possible solution to raise more awareness about Eco fashion and give the general people a clear idea about what is Eco fashion, Government can use media to reach people. After all Eco fashion affects the RMG sector of Bangladesh in a good way.

With the second question in the serial," what is your current perception of Eco fashion"? Around 30.4% (107 votes) said its fashionable/trendy and 28.6% said it has interesting designs although 10.7% and 8.9% survey result was opposite where they think that Eco fashion got low range of designs and low variety of colour/patterns to offer. Some option like ' Dreary/boring 'hippie' or 'uncomfortable fabrics' were supported by none. 21.4% (75) people said they have no Eco fashion clothing.
The next question was doing you really like Eco fashion product? With highest number of rating 67.9% (238) answers were positive. 25% (87) of all of them supported the point that they do like Eco fashion clothing only when quality is important. 7.2% (18+7 votes) of answerers presented negative answers to this question.

Figure 2: Current perception of Eco fashion

The fourth question was about whether the answerers have ever bought Eco fashion products. 48.2% replied positive and 28.6% replied negative. Another 23.2% of them supported the view that they have thought about it to buy/use which also presents a positive view.

Figure 3: Consumer's attraction towards Eco fashion
The next question got only two options to answer, whether it is positive or negative, if general people could get Eco friendly fashion that was similar in design to high street brands will they consider switching to an Eco alternative. 78.6% (276) answers were positive and the rest were negative with a number of 21.4%. In my view people who answered negatively didn't have understand the question properly. I do not understand when Eco friendly fashion designs are upgrading similarly with top brand designs why consumers are afraid to switch to an environment friendly alternative.

However, as the previous questions were more focused to guide and gather knowledge about our consumer's knowledge about Eco fashion. The next two questions were more focused on debates regarding financial matter. Around 64.3% (226) of all of the answerers thinks that Eco fashion prices are higher than other fashion. 35.7% (124) of them replied negative that they don't agree that the price is higher.
So that I wonder to know how much our consumers are eager to accept Eco fashion. That is why I pointed out this question that, how much extra are they willing to spend for an Eco piece of fashion compared to non-Eco fashion. The highest level of answerers with 41.1% answered anything reasonable. This is quite impressive. Following this answer 17.9% said 5% extra spend, 16.1% answered they will spend 10% extra, 12.5% said 20% and with 6 votes 1.8% answers were in favour of 30%; which all are quite impressive sign. Only 10.7% of the answerers are not willing to pay extra. This is no surprise that there will be always people not in favour and this is natural and of course good in a sense.
The next question was directly pointing on the answerer's knowledge whether do they know about the environmental positive impacts of Eco fashion. In virtual survey there was no option for any comment to place on this question but in face to face survey there was. A round figure of 75%; 262 survey takers placed 'yes' as an answer. 17.9% on 'heard about it' option and only 7.1% (25) replied negative. It is quite impressive that our consumers are already aware about the positive impact. Only one answerers placed an 'other' view on this question, "the first question on the survey form and this question looks like pretty same" (Rajib, 19)

My answer is "no", because the first question is about what they know about Eco fashion and this present question is asked to have better knowledge about the depth of the consumer's knowledge specially on Eco fashion's environmental issue.
Question number nine and eleven seems like posing the same motto but which is not. Question number eleven poses for a more basic conditions like income, weather, social or traditional condition based on which whether Bangladesh is a suitable place yet to adopt Eco fashion. What do the basic consumers think? It can be assisting from the answer that, consumers think that, yes the market is ready to accept Eco fashion but the contradicting ratio was also high. 35.7% placed 'maybe' where 48.2% said 'yes'. 8.9% people stick with the answer 'no', 3.6% were 'not sure' and 2 answers were depending on 'I don't have any idea'.

On the other hand in question number nine which is about "will Eco fashion be able to take over other fashion tradition in country like Bangladesh"? 51.8% said 'yes' and 26.8% pointed 'may be' which is a quite
positive view. 17.8% (6+4) placed a negative view on this question and

Only 2 answers preferred not to answer this question. This question was not about whether Eco fashion is introduced widely will the consumers left the traditional pattern but about how much they are eager to be the part of a plan to save the world. That is why in question number thirteen, I directly indicated this point and asked their view. Will they change to an Eco fashion alternative as fashion industries have large impact on the environment? Again a lot of positive approach gathered here as 58.9% (207 votes) said 'yes' and 33.9% replied with 'may be'. Only 24 answerers; a very low number left with negative answer; only 7.1%.

Figure 10: Over taking other fashion tradition/current tradition of fashion in Bangladesh

Figure 11: Consumer’s willingness to be a part of good impact of good impact on the environment by changing to an eco fashion alternative

In my view, any kind of fashion helps to maintain social standards. Particularly when it is about something moral, it always does matter. That is why on the next question; question number twelve, I tried to figure out what the Bangladeshi consumers think, whether Eco fashion maintain social standard. I find out that, around 8.9% thinks not and 23.2% are not sure about this matter but on the other hand 238 voters; 67.9% of all of them presents the similar view with me.
On the next question, I thought to ask what if Eco fashion were brought into more mainstream markets in Bangladesh would the consumers be more likely to buy that. With only 3.6% of negative answer other showed a positive view in respect of this view. When 78.6% (276) replied with only 'yes' option other 17.9% answered that they already buy Eco fashion and shows a very great amount of positive signal regarding this matter.

Now in the end, I asked the most important and primary 2 questions to the survey answerers that, 'what is the main reason to buy Eco fashion and reason for not buying? In answering the first question 263 voters; 75% supported that the main reason to buy Eco fashion is its 'good for the planet'. It looks like people are more aware and morally anxious about climate safety then they were before. Only 5.4% support 'Better Quality and Better Design (7.1%) in reason of buying Eco fashion. It is clear and very much clear that when saving the planet and personal interest both are in option and only one to choose, more people are showing positive signs by sacrificing personal interest. 12.5% people choose to have "other" option as they thinks fit.
59.3%; 207 people have chosen the option 'not easily available in Bangladesh' when the question reasons for not buying Eco fashion was asked. This is true fact that when people are aware about this fashion trend, only if Eco fashion can be made available in domestic market for consumers, it will be a positive thing which will have impact on consumers buying more and more Eco fashion. 24.1% (84) pointed out that Eco fashion is 'too expensive' and 13% thinks that it has 'poor designs'. Only 3.7% presented other views. One of them was-

"Having low knowledge and no or little media coverage on this issue is a reason I think why people are not buying Eco fashion" (Reety Dey, 26)

Yes; obviously, I do agree with that view. Bangladesh is now progressing fast. Media coverage is the easiest and fastest way to reach wide range of people. Of course there should be programmes or reports on these kind of issues. Issues that should be brought into account which is good for all and for the environment.

**Conclusion:**

To conclude, it should be brought into mind that, 'an Eco fashion item is a fashion item, which implies price and style as determinant choice criteria (Butler and Francis 1997). Our results from the survey
presents a lot of positive attitudes towards green fashion in line with studies conducted in the past (Butler and Francis, 1997). Our qualitative results shade light on possible impression and a bright future of Eco fashion in Bangladeshi market.

On an overview of the findings of my survey studies, anyone can easily point out some certain matters very easily. Our consumers have very low knowledge about Eco fashion specially those whose income are below level. But one thing to point out that, most of them are afraid because they think the price is high and will be out of their budget; this is absolutely false. Because of having low knowledge this problem is happening. Bangladeshi consumers are warmly welcoming the new fashion tradition and positive signs are high in number. Environment protection, Health impact and ethical concerns are the best ranked motivations to engage in an Eco friendly fashion purchase. Yet, cross cultural differences appear clearly in the appeal of Eco fashion / organic fashion.

Overall we can conclude that, there is a need to create awareness and inform better the consumers on the nature of organic fashion. Especially in our country Eco fashion has to be "glamorized" and become more appealing to the young generation which the early adopting group of most trends in the fashion industry. In the past, results were consistent in showing that highly educated consumers are more concerned with ethical and green issues (Finisterra do paco et al., 2009; Mintel, 2009). Also, younger consumers might be more interested both in fashion and in brands endorsing social responsibility credentials (LaFerla, 2007).

From my survey study, it can be easily seen that, our present situation is quite same about Eco fashion compared to the past survey reports based on continental European countries. But with the help of modern communication technology it is really easy now to reach more people at a time. I hope that more and more awareness will be raised in people for the betterment of the RMG sectors in Bangladesh. Hope this exploratory paper will open faithful avenues for researchers on Eco fashion issues.

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