OEKO-TEX®
CONFIDENCE IN TEXTILES

The Key to Confidence: Consumers and Textile Sustainability
Mindsets, Changing Behaviors and Outlooks

Questions & Answers

1 What were the criteria for consumers to participate in this study?

- Study participants had to be 18+ years old and the main decision maker and shopper for new clothing for the household. They had to have purchased apparel at least three times in the past year. A minimum of 300 per country also had to have purchased home textiles at least three times in the past year. The sample was controlled to mirror census data and to ensure a good representation of generational groups and parents in the ten countries in which the study was fielded.

2 For purposes of this study, how did you define "eco-friendly clothing" for the respondents?

- "Eco-friendly clothing" was defined simply as "clothing produced in an environmentally-friendly, sustainable way." As it is a term frequently used with respect to sustainable products in other categories, it was assumed that a simple definition would be universally understood.

3 Where did you find the facts about the textile industry's sustainability performance?

- It was important to us to use facts that are frequently found in public sources. Those selected had been published commonly in blogs, articles, books, and other open forums. We looked most specifically for those that had been published by established, credible media like Forbes, major newspapers, and highly respected organizations like the WWF. We presented the facts to the consumers as they are articulated in public media.

4 Why did you screen for parents?

- Parenthood is an important portal for many people to learn about and incorporate more sustainable lifestyle behaviors and choices. With parenthood, people start to think more about the 'purity' of the foods they serve and the safety and non-toxicity of other products, like personal care products or home cleaning products. We found in this study that once parents understand that textile products can be harmful, they also want to be more vigilant in this respect as well. Further, once parents begin living more sustainably, they generally maintain those good habits even after the children grow up.

5 Did country of origin have any impact on people's concerns about harmful substances in textiles?

- While we did not specifically explore countries of origin or consumers' opinions about specific manufacturing regions, 41% of people did say that they check the country of origin as a way to verify sustainability claims.

6 Are people willing to pay more for sustainable or certified textiles?

- After people became familiar with the statements about the textile industry, half indicated that they might be more likely to purchase eco-friendly clothes or home textiles in the future. And half of them stated that they would be willing to pay more for eco-friendly clothes or home textiles*. This suggests that for brands and retailers to leverage a willingness to pay more, discernible benefits should to be communicated to consumers (on the products, in stores, and in media) to ensure that people understand the rationale for the relatively higher price points.

  *Please note that a scientific examination of price sensitivity was not conducted as part of this survey.

7 Did findings about home textiles differ from findings about clothing?

- Responses to questions about home textiles were, in most cases, virtually identical to responses about clothing.

8 What about frequent fast fashion purchasers? How did they react?

- It was encouraging that those who purchase fast fashion frequently (at least monthly) were particularly interested in textile sustainability and eager to "do the right thing" when shopping. They were more likely than some other groups to say they'd look for certification labels in the future.

9 What is the significance of the mix of personal and altruistic motives you observed for interest in sustainability?

- The fact that people are thinking about their own close-to-home situation and, at the same time, 'loftier' aspects of climate change (the planet / the future) indicates a deeper level of thoughtfulness and concern. It adds gravitas and dimension to the issue.

10 Why are consumers today skeptical and likely to check if claims about brands or products are true?

- Over the past decade, there has been a decline in trust of established institutions due to political instability, corporate and economic mismanagement, abuses associated with trusted organizations, environmental decline, and so forth. People no longer feel they can believe what they read. Many feel they have been betrayed or lied to and their belief in established leaders has been challenged. As a result, people tend to feel that things are out of their control. Social media has accelerated this trend as people can find information quickly that offers a variety of perspectives, right and wrong. It is for this reason that transparency has become crucial over the past decade.

11 If people are skeptical about what they read, why are they so ready to believe negative facts about the textile/clothing industry?

- There are several reasons. First, these facts reinforce their disillusion about big institutions, including big business. Second, seeds of suspicion about the industry have already been planted. Awareness of working conditions, for example, was high and many people mentioned disasters like Rana Plaza in their open commentary. Those in textile manufacturing regions have first hand knowledge of the chemical use and environmental impact.

12 What does "shortcut to transparency" mean and why is it important?

- This relates, in part, to peoples' general skepticism and disinclination to take things at face value. There were several suggestions in the open comments that claims can be 'manufactured' and this belief means that even some CSR initiatives are called into question. People increasingly want "proof" that brands and manufacturers are "doing the right thing" – yet feel that determining if claims are valid is both difficult and time-consuming.
- Some state that they wouldn't know how to find the information they need; others state that such information is difficult to find. As such, a trusted brand name, retailer, or certifier can instantly provide resassurance that sustainability or CSR claims are valid – and a certification label can instantly give a brand's CSR initiatives added credibility. In other words, in consumers' world of rampant busy-ness, ease and speed are quite important.

13 How static are the 'Stages of Involvement' (Concerned/Convinced/Compelled) in your segmentation?

- Not at all. They can quickly change: this was proved by peoples' reactions to the facts. Once the facts about the industry were shared, their attitudes changed quickly and many suggested that they'd been 'called to action.' The survey demonstrated that increased awareness of the industry's concerns can create 'shock waves' that can quickly drive people to a higher level of textile sustainability commitment, thereby shifting them into a more 'involved' segment. And it's clear that the 'buzz' about the textile industry is growing.

14 What can brands and retailers do?

- The research suggests that brands and retailers should be prepared and start planning their communications and, perhaps, product strategies before a 'wave' of concern about some industry practices becomes a threat. Brands, even in conjunction with certifiers like OEKO-TEX®, should properly educate consumers and offer reassurances. They should align themselves with the solutions, rather than the problems ("There are problems in some parts of the textile industry but we offer solutions") and be specific about what they are doing to ensure their products are safe and responsibly made. They can talk about the benefits to the consumer – helping them be responsible clothing/home textile consumers and mitigating some of the guilt they feel when they buy new clothes. They should offer proof that their own claims to 'doing the right thing' can be substantiated by their actions.

15 How can I get more information about the survey results?

› A study of this magnitude generates a great deal of information. Deeper analyses are being undertaken and we are looking more specifically at specific subgroups. For example, we are studying attitudes and behaviors of key generations; in other words, how Millennials might be distinct from Generation X or Baby Boomers. We're looking more closely at the three textile sustainability consumer segments: Concerned, Convinced, and Compelled. We might report on regional differences or on specific types of shoppers, like frequent fast fashion purchasers, people who shop at eco-friendly stores or department stores, or luxury purchasers.

Don't see your question listed here?
Contact OEKO-TEX®.