

# Eco-label Cloth Market: A Study on Consumer Willingness to Purchase Organic Cotton Clothing

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to achieve a developing country's sustainable development in the clothing industry by exploring consumer behavior and their willingness to purchase Organic Cotton Clothing (OCC). Organic cotton clothing development in the fashion industry could play an important role in textile and environmental pollution and create new business opportunities for Eco-labelled clothes. An extended TRA model was employed to identify major factors that influence consumers' purchase decisions. Data were collected through a Web-based survey of 303 household residents in Coimbatore older than 18 years of age. The findings of this study stated that consumer environmental concerns and consumer attitudes positively impact the OCC purchase willingness of consumers. Also, authenticity and eco-labelled products have a significant impact on consumer purchase intention. Furthermore, respondents preferred Eco-labelled products over standard alternatives and were concerned about environmental issues. Retailers should focus more on environmental awareness of OCC textiles and authentic OCC items. Based on the findings, practical implications for organic cotton marketers and suggestions for future research are proposed..

**Keywords:** Sustainability, organic cotton clothing (OCC); purchase willingness; Environmental concern; Green Products

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## Introduction

In recent years, post-pandemic, the view on socio-economic development has changed, with attention being drawn to the depletion of natural resources, environmentally damaging production technologies, and growing consumption. Changes in thinking and actions that have taken place also apply to enterprises, including the marketing area, whose focus is on the purchaser. In addition to quality, price, and commercial criteria (e.g., appearance, packaging), consumers pay attention to other attributes of products, such as health, environmental impact, or safety. In this situation, Eco-labelled products are a category of products that are gaining importance in the face of environmental degradation and recognition of the concept of sustainable development. Despite the interest in the market, there is an inconsistency between positive buyers' attitudes and actual behavior. A positive attitude toward respecting the environment is not covered by real purchasing behavior. Consumers understand the seriousness of environmental issues, but their environmental attitudes do not necessarily lead to the choice of a green product.

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Green marketing refers to a business practice that advocates sustainable development. It comprises the marketing of goods and services that are considered to be Eco-labelled and promoting the preservation of the environment sustainably. Green marketing, especially in recent years, has begun to influence consumer and business activity. The idea of green marketing came into existence during the 1980s as a result of environmental degradation (Yazdanifard and Mercy, 2011). Today, the need for green marketing has heightened as environmental issues facing the world have become more pronounced.

Eco-labels are a promising means to support consumers in making sustainable choices. They function as extrinsic cues that work like information marks and provide useful information to the consumer about particular environmental properties and features of a product (de Boer, 2003). They are essential to transform production and consumption patterns towards a more sustainable economy because they allow consumers to choose more climate-friendly products and empower them “to influence how products are made” (Rex and Baumann, 2007:567). Importantly, in actual purchase situations, consumers perceive many product-related characteristics simultaneously that impact their choices, such as the price, appearance, or description of the product (Song et al., 2019). Such product-related characteristics (i.e., informational cues) jointly affect purchase decisions (Littlewood et al., 2016) and can either enhance or diminish their mutual value (Connelly et al., 2011). Hence, research calls for considering the effect of multiple informational cues on sustainable consumer behavior (Connelly et al., 2011).

Organic cotton has been defined as a niche-market product (Lin, 2009). Studies focusing specifically on organic cotton textile/apparel consumers are limited (Ellis et al., 2012; Lin, 2009). In the apparel consumption literature, multiple attempts were made to identify important factors that would influence sustainable consumption (Ha-Brookshire and Norum, 2011; Hustvedt and Dickson, 2009). Throughout recent years, there has been an upsurge in organic cotton products, which have experienced considerable growth in the apparel sector. Although cotton is an economically important crop for many countries and is grown worldwide, organic cotton is still a small component of total production, presently produced in countries on all arable continents. In total, 19 countries are growing organic cotton, with the top five growing countries (India, China, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, and the USA) accounting for more than 92 percent of production. However, few studies have investigated how reputation, price, and organic label impact consumer’s trust in organic claims and purchase intentions of organic cotton apparel. Considering the essential role of perceived quality and consumer trust in the organic clothing market and the emerging young consumer segment interested in sustainable consumption, this study aims to investigate the key factors that may influence young consumers’ perceptions of quality, trust, and purchase intentions of organic apparel products by surveying college students.

## **Literature review**

### **Organic Kasturi cotton**

An organic cotton garment is indistinguishable to the sight and touch of a garment made of conventionally grown cotton; hence, it is possible that consumers’ willingness to pay a premium for

organically produced cotton would have to arise from concern about the upstream effects of the cotton production (Casadesus-Masanell et al., 2009). Despite being natural, renewable, and recyclable, cotton has been criticized due to its excessive water consumption and growers' high use of pesticides and other insecticides (Chen and Burns, 2006; Ha-Brookshire and Norum, 2011). Producing cotton organically means only non-genetically modified plants can be used, and the use of synthetic agricultural chemicals such as pesticides and fertilizers is practically excluded (Organic Trade Association, 2016b). Kasturi Cotton India, the branding exercise for Indian cotton, which was initiated by the Ministry of Textiles (MoT) last year on World Cotton Day, has not given the expected results so far. The 1st ever Brand & Logo for Indian Cotton on 2nd World Cotton Day on 7th October, 2020 through Video Conferencing. Now, India's premium Cotton is known as 'Kasturi Cotton' in the world cotton Trade. The Kasturi Cotton brand will represent Whiteness, Brightness, Softness, Purity, Luster, Uniqueness, and Indianness. Cotton is one of the principal commercial crops of India, and it provides a livelihood to about 6.00 million cotton farmers. India is the 2nd largest cotton producer and the largest consumer of cotton in the world. India produces about 6.00 million tons of cotton every year, which is about 23% of the world's cotton. India produces about 51% of the total organic cotton production in the world, which demonstrates India's effort towards sustainability.

### **Green promotion**

Visual aesthetics surrounding the product's packaging can be used as an effective marketing tool when consumers do not have prior knowledge about the product. Packaging serves to contain, identify, describe, protect, display, promote, and make the product marketable. Agyeman (2014) believes that a consumer's choice of a green product is heavily influenced by the packaging. Laroche, Begeron & Barbaro-Forleo (2001) assert that green consumers, mostly women, examine the labelling of green products to see if they were manufactured with recycled materials. Furthermore, they tend to purchase ecologically compatible products, e.g., products that are CFC-free, biodegradable, or unbleached. Therefore, environmental advertisements can help enhance motivation towards buying green products. These promotional tactics, if implemented, will attract consumers and most likely influence their green purchase decisions.

### **Green price**

For apparel products, price has been found to be one of the most decisive factors impacting consumers' perception of the product and their purchase intention. Naturally colored organic, or green, cotton products are generally priced for an upscale market, running from about 10-30 percent more than comparable items made from conventional cotton (Lin, 2009). Some previous studies indicated that consumers are willing to pay higher prices for organic cotton products (Lin, 2009, 2010; Wang, 2007). Casadesus-Masanell et al. (2009) analyzed internal company data from Patagonia Inc. and found that consumers were willing to pay US\$6.58 more for an organic cotton flannel shirt. However, a few other studies reported different findings. For example, Gam et al. (2010) concluded that mothers, although willing to purchase organic cotton clothing for their children, were not willing to pay high prices. Ellis et al. (2012) found that although, on average, participants in their study were willing to

pay a 25 percent premium for an organic cotton t-shirt over a visibly similar t-shirt made from conventionally produced cotton, participants who paid for their own clothing or made purchase decisions alone were not willing to pay a premium. The participants in the Ellis et al. (2012) study were college students, and when faced with the reality of funding their own clothing purchases, it seemed they were not willing to pay more for organic cotton. The present study investigates whether the price of organic cotton clothing products affects consumers' perceived quality, trust in organic claims, and purchase intention.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)**

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) used to predict and understand consumer behavior, and their behavioral intention, developed by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1980 [29], is a belief-attitude-behavioral intention model. In the TRA model, when consumers implement a purchasing activity, they benefit from that behavior and gain approval from others. TRA seeks to predict consumer purchasing and intent [21]. TRA theory has been extensively accepted and strongly used in multiple studies such as marketing, consumer motivations, promoting recycling behavior, the intent to engage in sustainable behaviors, and the attitude toward luxury fashion goods [29]. Researchers also modified and added the TRA model to their research plan. A recent study's effects of government subsidies on green smartphones successfully used the TRA model and added new variables [21]. We will also find some variables that also affect consumer buying behavior. This study is also an expansion of TRA. In addition, consumer environmental concerns, fashionable products in organic segments, product authenticity, performance, and consumer economic conditions are also important research values in this study. Environmental concern is assessed as a subjective norm in the TRA in this research. This study also introduces brand responsibilities like original and authentic organic cotton products and focuses on fashionable organic apparel that can strongly affect consumer purchasing behavior.

### **Environmental Awareness and Concerns**

Environmental awareness and concerns have obtained great attention from consumers all over the world. When consumers are conscious of environmental issues, they raise concerns about the environment and human life. Previous researchers have also found that consumers who are more aware of the environment are more likely to be involved in ethical purchases. In this study, we similarly investigate with our target consumers whether environmental concerns have affected consumers' purchase intentions under OCC buying intentions. Hypothesis

Hypothesis H1. Environmental concerns have a significant positive impact on willingness to purchase OCC

According to the TRA model, attitudes affect the intent to engage in behavior, which affects actual behavior. Attitude is the level at which a person has a favorable or unfavorable opinion of behavior [30]. Many studies have already proved it in different research fields. Kim and Chung found that attitude

influenced consumer purchase behavior for organic skincare items [31]. In previous studies, Yan, Hyllegard, and Blaesi also mentioned that attitude predicts consumer purchasing intent for ethically produced fashion items [30]. Therefore, we assume that the results may be similar. Thus, we suggest the below:

Hypothesis H2. Attitudes have a significant positive impact on the willingness to purchase OCC.

### **Brand Responsibilities in Eco-labelled Fashion**

Brand responsibilities and awareness allow the retailer to provide a long-term ethical plan. It is also an important marketing strategy to attract consumers, especially in the Eco-labelled market. Eco-labelled brands also benefit if they are promoted with an image of nature with environmental and social responsibility [32]. In previous research, it has been found that ethical fashion and style are related important factors for making a decision and were also mentioned by consumers willing to boycott unethical brand leaders [33]. Some consumers have a different idea about OCC, and they still doubt its quality, finishing, and design. It is common for consumers to expect something good from green products when they make purchasing decisions [32]. This study investigates whether the fashion and trend of an organic apparel product affect consumers' purchase intentions. Therefore, in this research, we proposed that:

Hypothesis H3. Eco-labelled products have a significant positive impact on willingness to purchase OCC.

Some clothing brands claim their products are organic, but most of the time, they do not carry any certified organic label. Previous researchers have already noted that certified environmental claims can enhance consumers' confidence in the environmental performance of a product and the quality of the organic label product [34]. In addition, some consumers have doubted the authenticity of the product. This study investigates whether product authenticity affects consumers' purchase intentions for eco-friendly OCC products. We proposed that:

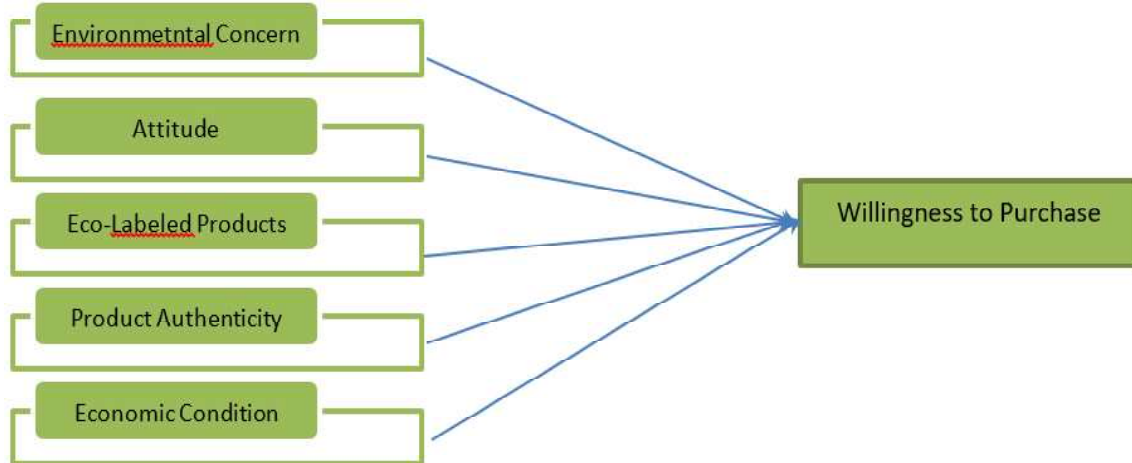
Hypothesis H4. Product authenticity significantly impacts the willingness to purchase eco-labelled OCC fashion.

### **Purchasing Power of “Green Clothes”**

Consumer purchasing power and economic growth are also important factors in their purchase decision, especially organic clothing, as many researchers mentioned that green products are usually available in the market at a higher price, and when consumers' income increases, their shopping budget also increases. Researchers point out that consumers are more interested in purchasing green products when their income and budget increase [32]. Consumers are willing to pay more for green and renewable products when they are aware of the environmental advantages. Therefore, in this research, we proposed that:

Hypothesis H5. Consumer economic growth and conditions can significantly influence consumers' willingness to purchase eco-labelled OCC fashion and their willingness to pay a premium.

Based on the above literature review and theoretical analysis, this study proposes the following conceptual research model. The model is illustrated in Figure 1.



## Methods

The choice of research methods must be fair and appropriate to the research problem and should be selected based on the study objectives. The survey was taken with household residents in apartments in north Coimbatore. Final data collection and all data evaluation were done through IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. Understanding both directions, as well as the strength of the relationship between the research constructs within this study, a Pearson correlation analysis was also done. Pearson's method of correlation evaluates the linear relationship between two variables. The coefficient can be between  $-1.00$  and  $1.00$ , where  $-1.00$  shows a negative relationship,  $0$  shows no relationship, and  $1.00$  is a positive relationship. After confirming that the coefficient of a reciprocal relationship is statistically significant, the strength of the relationship can be discussed and measured. Finally, a regression analysis is done to understand the impact of all variables because researchers utilize regression coefficients and their significance to estimate the importance of each construct. The most commonly used is multiple simultaneous regressions, where all IV regression calculations are taken at once. The regression coefficient gives an analysis of the direct impact of each IV on the DV when considering other IVs.

## Questionnaire

This research questionnaire was adopted from previous research. The first few questions are consumer demographic questions that determine their social position. The other question is to determine their involvement, knowledge, daily activities, attitude toward OCC, and willingness to purchase on OCC. Multiple-choice questions and a rating scale plan the question layout for this survey. This survey asks for responses to each item question, which is placed on a 5-point Likert scale with "1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree."

## Sample

This study was conducted quantitatively using the online survey method; the Google online survey form was used, and distributed survey links mainly using social networks. The survey was distributed to a random sample of more than 132 consumers. Overall, 132 valid questionnaires have been completed. All questionnaire surveys were self-administered to respondents of residents in north Coimbatore apartments. Out of 132 responses, 71.5% were female consumers, and 28.5% were male consumers. Almost 60.7% of respondents were employed, and the rest of them worked in business, were unemployed, and were students. The demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1

**TABLE 1 : Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

Variable	Description	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	71.5
	Male	28.5
	Others	0
Age	<18	1.3
	19-25	28.1
	26-35	64.4
	36—45	5.9
	>46	0.3
Education	Below undergraduate	5.3
	Undergraduate	28.4
	Graduate	46.5
	Postgraduate	19.8
Employment level	Student	20.8
	Employed	60.7
	Unemployed	6.3
	Business holder	11.2
Income level per month	Less than Rs 25,000	21.1
	Rs. 25,000 to 35,000Rs	19.8
	Rs 35,000 to 45,000	30
	Rs 45,000 to 55,000	22.1
	More than Rs 55,000	6.9

Table 2 shows the results of this analysis. Most of the correlations were significant at the p-level of <0.01. However, product performance (PP) correlates with purchase intention (PI) at the significance level of  $p < 0.05$ . There are some differences also; some correlations did not have statistical significance, such as FT and PI. Great correlation strength is between FT and PP, with an  $r$  of 0.635. In the other EC, AT, PA, and Econ constructs, this variable was significantly correlated with all other constructs.

**TABLE 2 : Inter-correlations for all constructs**

Variables		EC	AT	FT	PP	PA	ECon	PI
EC	Environmental concern	0.404 **	0.314 **	0.244 **	0.404 **	0.364 **	0.361 **	
AT	Attitude		—	0.292 **	0.258 **	0.448 **	0.509 **	0.483 "
FT	Fashionable and trend				0.635 **	0.379 **	0.295 **	0.111
PA	Product authenticity					—	0.578 **	0.526 **
ECon PI	Economic condition Purchase intention						—	0.592 **

**TABLE 3 : Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted r Square	Sig F change
1	0.68	0.462	0.451	0

Table 4 reveals that applying all the IVs at once creates a multiple correlation coefficient ( $R^2 = 0.462$ ). It implies that 46.2% present of the variance in the purchase intention of organic cotton clothing can be explained by all constructs taken together. The standardized beta coefficient ( $\beta_i$ ) is considered to compare each IV's influence size directly. Table 5 shows that economic condition (Econ,  $\beta = 0.362$ ) has the greatest impact on PI, product authenticity (PA) ( $\beta = 0.259$ ), AT ( $\beta = 0.198$ ), FT ( $\beta = 0.158$ ), and EC ( $\beta = 0.105$ ). Econ's positive sign of  $\beta_i$  means that a 1 standard deviation (SD) increase in Econ's generates a 0.362 SD increase in the predicted PI. The p-value facing every IV points out if that variable is important, adding to the calculation for explaining PI from the entire group of IVs. As a result, Econ ( $p = 0.000$ ), PA ( $p = 0.000$ ), AT ( $p = 0.000$ ), FT ( $p = 0.006$ ), and EC ( $p = 0.034$ ) are the sole constructs that are important in contributing to the explanation.

We provide a summary of this study's findings, both accepted and rejected hypotheses. This study examines the factors influencing consumer purchasing intentions toward eco-friendly organic cotton clothing (OCC). In addition, the authors strive to find the effects of those factors, including environmental concern (EC), attitude (AT), fashion and trend (FT), product authenticity (PA), and economic condition (Econ), as well as product performance (PP). The overall model generated from linear regression analysis is statistically significant. The findings of our studies are consistent with many previous studies.



In this study, HI EC toward eco-friendly OCC was found to have a positive effect on PI, with a standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.105 ( $p = 0.034$ ). Past research examined influencers of PI toward eco-friendly OCC among American mothers' willingness to purchase OCC [12]. It was revealed that the EC is significantly influenced by consumer involvement in OCC, and the effect was found to be positive ( $B$ ) of 0.33 ( $p = 0.04$ ). In addition, another researcher examined factors motivating male consumers Awareness of the environmental consequences has a positive impact on male consumers' engagement in eco-friendly clothing. Its results are also positive, and ( $\beta$ ) of 0.180 ( $p = 0.001$ ) [2]. In addition, a study on purchase intention towards OCC and the result shows that EC had an insignificant positive impact on purchase intention ( $\beta$ ) of 0.216 ( $p = 0.168$ ) [14]. The results of Table 5 show that there was a significant relationship between the environmental concern variable and the purchase intention in OCC ( $p = 0.034$ ,  $R^2 = 0.462$ ). The  $p$ -values were positive and statistically significant, indicating that participants with greater environmental concerns showed a higher intent to purchase OCC. Therefore, H1 was accepted. Furthermore, H2 is confirmed, as AT significantly and positively influences the PI, with a standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.198 ( $p = 0.000$ ).

Fashionable products are among the trendiest items, and consumers share and find the latest trends in real time [45]. In our studies, we also find that fashionable products have a significant impact on PI. Therefore, a lot of large retailers may have to rethink their design practices according to eco-consumers' requirements and introduce more organic cotton clothing.

Next, product authenticity (PA) was found to have a significant influence on PI ( $B = 0.259$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). H5 is supported. In addition, the positive sign indicates that more positive PA is related to greater degrees of PI. Previous studies also mentioned that the effect of authenticity on purchase intention is significant [46]. Recent studies also found that product authenticity had a positive impact on PI ( $\beta = 0.221$ ) for Iraqi Facebook users. It is recommended that marketers provide practical and honest information in their promotion messages [147].

In this study, economic condition (Econ) toward purchasing organic cotton clothing was found to be the highest of all constructs and has a positive effect on PI, with a standardized regression coefficient ( $B$ ) of 0.362 ( $p = 0.000$ ). The results in Table 5 show that consumer purchasing power and consumer economic growth positively influence consumer purchase intention. Therefore, H6 was accepted. Consumer economic growth and income always influence purchase intentions. Previous studies have shown that high-income respondents have a strong desire to purchase through social media websites [48]. However, a survey of Pakistani consumers found that there was no relationship between income and purchase intentions [49].

Finally, we determine the effect of environmental concerns, attitudes, and fashionable products on organic clothing segments, product performance, and economic growth on the purchase intention of consumers of OCC products. This study will find that the consumer market is already very aware of the sustainability movement and concerns about environmental issues. Consumers show a positive attitude toward OCC items. Consumer markets have a good potential for all kinds of organic cotton clothing. Retailers should be concerned and take the initiative in their eco-friendly clothing design practice, also take the initiative and emphasize the values of organic cotton in our environment and

human life. Fashion retailers should be concerned with promoting honest and transparent information to consumers because product authentication is one of the important factors in consumer purchase decisions, especially when consumers are aware and willing to purchase eco-friendly OCC items. This research can be conducted in different sectors and countries using the qualitative method through focus groups. This study will be beneficial for environmental improvement and economic growth efforts among policymakers, our academy, and all over the textile industry. This study enables them to design strategies that ensure interaction with consumers to promote desirable behavior toward organic cotton clothing products.

## Practical Implications and Future Research

Future research can examine both urban and rural contexts, such as income, by accurately presenting different population profiles such as age, level of education, and population. Furthermore, this research work can be replicated in other developing countries, and future research should include other theories or methods. Future researchers could verify the proposed research model on other products, such as home textiles and luxurious items that are made from organic cotton or other sustainable textiles.

## Appendix A

**TABLE AI : Research Survey Items and Sources**

Variable	Item	Source
Environmental concern	It is time for environmental groups to get more radical. I am extremely worried about the state of the environment. We are experiencing a serious negative impact from environmental issues.I feel personally helpless to have much impact on the environment.	[40,42]
Attitudes	Buying organic cotton clothing instead of conventional clothing would feel like the morally right thing to do. Buying organic cotton clothing instead of conventional apparel would make me feel like a better person. Buying organic cotton clothing instead of traditional clothing will feel more beneficial to the environment.	
Fashionable and trend	In my opinion, organic cotton clothing is only popular at the moment.Organic cotton clothing does not come in different styles that fulfil my needs.In my opinion, organic cotton clothing is not trendy and fashionable.	[37,41]
Product Performance	Organic cotton clothing is of good quality and has a better lifetime. Organic cotton clothing is not as high-quality as conventional cotton clothing.Organic cotton clothing will not be durable when cleaned (e.g., color fades, form changes)	[37]

Product authenticity	I suspect that I can't distinguish real organic cotton clothing. I only believe in organic cotton garments that have been authoritatively certified. I will be more likely to purchase eco-friendly OCC fashion if their apparel brand makes sure their product is authentic. Not all businesses claiming to sell organic cotton clothing are credible. Those businesses that often advertise environmental friendliness do not all sell real organic cotton clothing	[15,42]
Economic condition	I sometimes don't believe that some businesses claim that their clothes are organic cotton. The cost of organic apparel was the same as nonorganic apparel. I would be more likely to buy more organic apparel. I am willing to pay more for eco-friendly products (i.e., green, organic). Is the current financial development and growth affecting your shopping behavior? According to financial development, are you concerned that clothing and shopping expenses are increasing?	[15,32,41]
Purchase intention	I would gladly buy more organic cotton apparel if I could find it easily. I desire to buy organic cotton clothing if it's health and environment-friendly. I am willing to pay more for organic cotton clothing if it's fashionable and fulfils my needs. The next time I go shopping, I will likely purchase organic apparel products.	

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