

## **Will Reshoring of Textile and Apparel Manufacturing Rise or Decline in the USA?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The clothing consumption in the USA has been increasing exponentially in the last two decades. This increase in consumption has also expanded the fashion retailing business in the USA. For the last few years, there have been different claims and counterclaims on whether reshoring initiatives will rise or decline. A group of people thinks that the reshoring trend has taken a reverse turn and declined gradually. In contrast, another group has stated that the increased offshore production costs and growing demand of 'Made-in-USA' products among American retailers and consumers have elevated the reshoring movement in the USA. Academic and market research investigations revealed that recently reshoring of the textile and apparel manufacturing industry has significantly impacted the retail industry as well as the overall economy through creating myriad job opportunities. This comparative position paper supports the promising growth of reshoring of the textile and apparel manufacturing industry in the USA based on the dissection of claims and counterclaims.*

**Keywords:** Reshoring, textile and apparel, Made-in-USA, supply chain

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### **Introduction**

The textile and fashion supply chain has shown different dynamics with three sourcing models such as offshoring, near-shoring and reshoring that have been adopted

and applied to different extents by US fashion retailers. Reshoring is considered as a location-based decision where the aim is bringing back domestic manufacturing facilities to the home country (Gray et al., 2013). Since the beginning of the reshoring

movement, it has been a highly discussed topic in the USA. A group of manufacturers also started an industry driven effort, namely Reshoring Initiative in 2010 with an entire focus to fulfil this basic concept. Besides, bringing back manufacturing jobs was one of the main focuses during the U.S. presidential election in 2016, which also reinforced the further reshoring movement (Lazarus, 2018). However, there are mixed perspectives among manufacturers, retailers, market statisticians, academic scholars, consumers and even politicians about the growth of reshoring in the USA, published in press news and business blogs. On the other hand, academic scholars have barely investigated the impacts of reshoring on the economy and its potentiality of bringing textile and apparel manufacturing jobs back (Vanchan, Mulhall and Bryson, 2017). Therefore, information from various sources including academic and business journals, reshoring-based websites and credible press news has been used to reinforce the position in support of reshoring growth.

As per market surveys, jobs are consistently increasing in US domestic manufacturing industries (Tate, 2014). According to the Boston Consulting Group (2015), more than 200 US companies with a capacity of \$1 billion sales would increase manufacturing facilities and domestic market sourcing by 20% within 2020. Although market researchers predicted that heavy or large manufacturing industries would be the major beneficiaries of reshoring, market statistics showed that the reshoring movement will greatly benefit the textile and apparel manufacturing industry". (OECD, 2017; Vanchan et al., 2017).

Reshoring activities have momentum in the USA due to increased labor wages in the Asian countries (Moore, Rothenberg, & Moser, 2018) and US consumers' growing interest in purchasing 'Made-in- USA' products (Davidson 2013; Vanchan et al., 2017). Nevertheless, some market research studies argue that reshoring would be

difficult to continue in the future (Lazarus, 2018; Nash-Hoff, 2013).

In the current paper, the two most compelling counterarguments (arguments in favor of declining reshoring trend) have been refuted with the evidence of statistics, business journals, scholarly published articles, and reviews of market researchers. In addition, persuasive arguments in favor of the growing trend of reshoring have been discussed with reliable data and facts to reinforce our position; rising reshoring trend is very promising in the coming years.

## 2. Counterarguments

The counter arguments include the thoughts that depict the reasons of why the reshoring of the textile and apparel manufacturing industry may decline. Here, the two most debating counterarguments have been considered based on the pricing of offshoring and potential reviving of the manufacturing industry. In this section, the counterarguments are refuted with relevant source of information.

**2.1. Counter argument I:** Reshoring trends have reversed due to increased sourcing of low-cost fashion products from China and other south Asian countries.

This counter argument presents some claims on US retailers' growing inclination towards offshoring or outsourcing low-cost fast fashion items for various reasons. Identifying or determining consumers' purchasing decision has always been a crucial factor for fashion retailers (Phau, Teah, & Chuah, 2015). Long (2017) reports that consumers give maximum priority to low-priced items while making purchase decisions. As a result, retailers continue to source cheap fashion items from developing countries, which has been increased even more in 2019 (A.T.Kearney, 2019). Availability of cheap labor in South Asian countries, higher production cost in the USA and shortage of manpower in US manufacturing industries have resulted in a downward movement of

reshoring trends (Abraham, Levering, Gott & Van den Bossche, 2018). Besides, China's vast production capacity, availability of raw materials and advanced textiles, and apparel manufacturing technology trigger retailers to such offshoring activities (Rashid, Barnes & Warnaby, 2016).

### 2.1.1. Refutation I

Researchers found a correlation between consumers' product choice and country of origin, and sustainability (Ashby, 2016; Chakraborty, 2016; Rashid, Barnes & Warnaby, 2016). Researchers also reported that Generation Z consumers in the US are now more concerned about country of origin or 'Made-in- USA' products than earlier (Ashby, 2016; Pal, Harper, & Vellesalu, 2018; Phau et al., 2015). Fair trade, environment friendly production or green products highly influence their shopping behavior (Ashby, 2016; Pal, Harper, & Vellesalu, 2018; Phau et al., 2015). The Kearney's Index perceived that the overall US imports have increased in the last few years, but it did not consider the other factors of reshoring preventing the further growth of import level; for instance, inaccuracy in estimating the change in product price, determining currency exchange rates and respective economic development of each country (Reshoring Initiative, 2018a). Also, Desai, Nassar & Chertow, 2012; Vanchan et al., (2017) mention reshoring has become an inevitable alternative to offshoring as labor wages are gradually increasing in China. Consequently, an indication of increasing the reshoring activities is implied by the report from Reshoring Initiative (2018a), which observed reshoring increased by 50% in 2017 compared to 2016.

### 2.2. Counter Argument II:

Manufacturing jobs have declined and will decrease further in the USA. So, reshoring will not create any impact on the textile and apparel manufacturing industry and its employment opportunities.

Some academic and market researchers assume that textile and apparel related job facilities will continue to decrease by 18% by 2026 (Bls.gov, 2018; Saki, 2016). People in America are now more inclined to get jobs in service industries. The change in consumer mindset and high pay scale in service industries have resulted in reluctance to seek manufacturing jobs. Therefore, reshoring may not revive textile and apparel manufacturing jobs too (Saki, 2016). Saki (2016) also suggests that the US fashion industry could increase its investment into disruptive technologies such as smart clothing, 3D printing and artificial intelligence, instead of concentrating on reshoring or traditional manufacturing, since the textile and apparel manufacturing jobs might not increase in the future.

### 2.2.1. Refutation II

The trend of manufacturing jobs is changing around the world. The young people of China are now less interested in manufacturing and engineering jobs (China Daily, 2018). Market studies showed that reshoring contributed to the textile and apparel manufacturing industry in the recent years (Glaser, 2017; Moser, 2017). Additionally, many researchers believe that disruptive and emerging technologies, including robotic manufacturing, would assist directly or indirectly in reshoring and creating a new vacancy in the textile and apparel manufacturing industry (Glaser, 2017; Friedman, 2017). The US government has taken initiative to encourage international retailing companies for foreign direct investment (FDI) into the USA that will certainly create new scopes in the USA (Yu & Kim, 2018).

### 3. Arguments

In addition to refutations, here we present some strong evidence from academic and business journals that eventually lead to promising growth of reshoring.

**3.1. Argument 1:** Benefits associated with domestic manufacturing and ‘Made-in- USA’ concept have positively impacted the reshoring movement.

Recently, US manufacturers and retailers have concentrated more on domestic sourcing. The advances in industrial engineering and ergonomic research are developing new approaches to enhance working efficiency as well as reduce manufacturing costs (Kunz, Karpova & Garner, 2016). Effective reshoring strategy can be highly beneficial for fashion retailers to reduce under-volume and over-assortment errors, merchandise plan errors and lost sales (Yu & Kim, 2018). Again, in the case of fast fashion items, reshoring has enabled the retailers and manufacturers to respond more quickly to any uncertain change(s) in market demands (Desai et al., 2012). Moreover, the USA government’s nationwide program, SelectUSA, Walmart’s investment in American Pride’ and its support for Richelieu’s manufacturing facilities in Los Angeles have created new jobs in manufacturing industries (Yu & Kim, 2018). In this regard, government is now also offering incentives to the companies that are reshoring production to the USA (Reshoring Initiative, n.d.). Over the last decade, Walmart has purchased USA manufactured products worth more than \$250 billion, which created more than 300,000 jobs (Furner, 2021). Brandon-Jones, Dutordoir, Neto & Squire (2017) showed in their case study that reshoring’s positive impact on return on investment would inspire companies to relocate the production plants to the USA. Reshoring of the textile and apparel industry ranked 3rd in total reshoring of manufacturing to the USA (Rodrigo, 2014). From 2010-2017, a total of 952 companies have involved themselves in US textile and apparel manufacturing based foreign direct investment (FDI) and reshoring (Reshoring Initiative, 2018b). Global sourcing has become more difficult due to an unpredictable economic environment, political instability and global natural disasters. As a result, nearshoring and

reshoring would be necessary and effective alternatives in apparel sourcing (Ha-Brookshire, 2017), thus indicating that reshoring activity will grow in the USA. Manufacturing of N95 masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) in the USA during Covid-19 pandemic also proves the capability of US textile manufacturing industries. It shows that the textile and apparel manufacturing industry in the USA might not need to solely depend on importing clothing and medical textiles from China and other Asian countries in the near future (Chakraborty & Biswas, 2020).

US consumers’ growing tendency of buying domestically produced garment products has also inspired retailers and brand managers to start reshoring. Accordingly, apparel-manufacturing jobs went up to 144,000 in 2013 from 44,000 in 2008 (Kunz, Karpova & Garner, 2016). Patriotism driven US consumers are willing to pay more for ‘Made-in-USA’ products (Armstrong, 2017). Millennial consumers are considered as the most influential target group market in the USA. Millennials positive attitude towards purchasing ‘Made-in- USA’ apparel products has largely contributed to the rise of reshoring (Padilla, Espinosa, Biernesser-Kuhn, Clark & Dabas, 2017; Vanchan et al., 2017). Brooks Brothers, Juicy Couture, Shinola and many other small and large companies now manufacture and assemble fashion products in the USA. Furthermore, American consumers now prefer and are purchasing ‘Made-in-USA’ products despite paying higher prices for apparel and fashion products (Yu & Kim, 2018). Reshoring can enable manufacturers and retailers to speed up their customer service process through shortening their supply chain (Lu, 2015). Moreover, different brands, online vendors and independent organizations now facilitate consumers with identifying companies that produce ‘Made-in-USA’ products (Freund, Roop and Colby-Oizumi, 2018). Therefore, it can be inferred that consumers’ growing preference for ‘Made-in-USA’ products will expand reshoring activity in the forthcoming years.

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**3.2. Argument 2:** Increased labor wage and production cost in offshoring countries have accelerated reshoring.

China, Vietnam, India, Bangladesh and Cambodia are five of the top ten apparel product suppliers to the USA (SJ Research, 2018). However, labor wages are increasing gradually in each of those countries (Davis, 2018; Donaldson, 2016; China Daily, 2018; Scarano, 2017). Moore et al. (2018) mentioned, “China is the top supplier of apparel to America with 41.5 percent of the apparel imports, but it has lost shares of this market as the minimum wage in China increased” (p. 1028). Political instability in South Asian countries also brought various complexities to the fashion business and sourcing (Kenneally, 2014).

Researchers have found that offshoring increases unsold inventory and errors in sales forecasting. As a result, it affects manufacturers’ and retailers’ overall financial benefit (Yu & Kim, 2018). Furthermore, Yu & Kim (2018) also stated that offshoring of products from remote countries increases financial risk and lost sales. Researchers showed that reshoring of apparel production would enable retailers and manufacturers to decrease production cost and increase profitability (Moore et al., 2018; Tate & Bals, 2017). Increasing logistic costs, fluctuations in labor wages among clothing manufacturing countries and long lead times are making it difficult for retailers to provide good quality products at affordable prices (Crawford, 2018; Fratocchi et al., 2016) that validate the reasons for slowing down offshoring and increase reshoring in the coming years.

**3.3. Argument 3:** Technological advancement and consumers’ interest for sustainable fashion have enhanced reshoring growth.

Technological development in the textile and apparel manufacturing industry has made it easier to automate manufacturing jobs and improve product quality (Emont, 2018).

Different US companies are now investing in advanced technologies such as robotic sewing machines (Reshoring Initiative, n.d.) and 3D printing to make the production and delivery process faster than ever before (Kabir et al., 2020). It will help manufacturers to produce apparel and fashion products at competitive prices (Vanchan et al., 2017). Besides, the growing job opportunities for dealing with these technologies will consistently raise reshoring activity (OECD, 2017; Vanchan et al., 2017). Quality of products is a strong dominant parameter towards consumers’ purchase decision (Chakraborty and Sheppard, 2016; Chakraborty, Hoque and Kabir, 2020). Therefore, companies have always taken it as an important factor while selecting their sourcing locations (Moore et al., 2018). Technological innovation such as fashion customization can ensure high product quality. Fashion companies also reported that consumers would get more benefits from the customization trends if fashion products are manufactured in the US domestic market (Freund et al., 2018). Moreover, the benefit of rapid on-site evaluation of product quality due to local sourcing will also enhance reshoring movement (Ashby, 2016; Robinson & Hsieh, 2016).

Researchers have found from their case studies that domestic manufacturing can help retailers and manufacturers to ensure a sustainable supply chain and co-ordinate the three-bottom line (economic, social and environmental) of sustainability. Besides, it also facilitates them to meet consumers’ growing demand for ensuring sustainability in the textile and apparel manufacturing industry. This concern among US consumers for having sustainable and transparent fashion supply chains will accelerate reshoring in the coming days as well (Ashby, 2016; Pal et al., 2018; Tate, 2014).

#### 4. Conclusion

To sum up, the aforementioned counter arguments presented in this paper are mainly based on the perception and findings that

reshoring has not risen to a satisfactory level in the recent years. Along with the rebuttals of these counterclaims, the arguments have presented that reshoring might increase and would continue to increase further. The financial benefits associated with reshoring, 'Made-in-USA' concept, increased manufacturing cost in overseas countries, technological development in manufacturing industry and growing demand for sustainability have supported these arguments. Therefore, from these discussions it can be inferred that reshoring of textile and apparel manufacturing is rising in the USA and will continue to rise in the coming years.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest.

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