

Fashion and Environment: Antecedents of Ethical Consumer Behavior

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Abstract: Environmental problem is not a new issue currently but some of us unconsciously ignore about that. There have a lot of factors that contribute towards this problem and one of them is from the fashion consumption among the consumers. With the rise of globalization, the increasing in products usage occurs at the same time people are educated to become more aware on the importance of environmental protection. Ethical fashion consumption is one of the environmental systems that need to be considered in Malaysia. The study on the ethical fashion consumption is comprised of a few factors that drive consumers to be more ethical such as individual benefits, emotional benefits, self-identity, motivation and so on. Some consumers would willing to purchase as long as the product met other important criteria (price, quality and style). Some are claiming they would boycott a company if they were made aware that it was using unethical practices, particularly if child labor or animal cruelty were involved. However, not only focusing on consumption but disposing of fashion should also pay attention as it increases at a rapid rate. Textile will impact on the landfill spaces caused by the synthetic material used which are difficult to compose under landfill condition. Thus, the objective of this study is to investigate the antecedents of ethical fashion consumption focusing on consumer values, beliefs and norms. An online survey will be conducted among 384 consumers in Malaysia. Convenience sampling will be used in this study. Data will be analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling using Partial least Squares (SEM PLS).

Key words: Ethical consumption, fashion consumption, values, beliefs, norms, partial-least squares

INTRODUCTION

The environmental problem is not a new issue currently but some of us unconsciously ignore about that. There have a lot of factors that contribute towards this problem and one of them is from the fashion consumption among the consumers. With the rise of globalization, the increasing in products usage occurs at the same time people are educated to become more aware on the importance of environmental protection. For years ago, fashion has long been implicated in debates as it related to the wasteful consumerism continuously can educate consumers to be more ethical to regard apparel and the 'good life' as almost synonymous (Buchholz, 1998; Gibson and Stanes, 2011). The idea that consuming in a right way is suggested, as it can help in protecting the environment by practicing the right way to dispose it. Fashion, often expressed through clothing items is defined as "temporary cyclical phenomena adopted by consumers for a particular time and situation" (Sproles, 1979). It serves many purposes in the everyday lives of people such as it protects the body from the elements,

covers the body for modesty purposes and serves as an expressive medium (Higgins and Eicher, 1992). Ethical Fashion Forum defined ethical fashion "represents an approach to the design, sourcing and manufacture of clothing which maximizes benefits to people and communities while minimizing impact on the environment". The ethical fashion industry follows an ethical production cycle which creates social and environmental value. However, not only focusing on consumption but disposing of fashion should also pay attention as it increases at a rapid rate. Textile will impact on the landfill spaces caused by the synthetic material used, which are difficult to compose under landfill condition. The annual statistics show that the import corresponds to 16.5 kg of clothes per person. At the same time, the amount of textile waste has increased. Textile waste total 26.8 kg per person from which 10.5 kg comes from the household.

Besides, the use of raw material in textile processing has the worst impact of ecosystem. For example, Leathertex which develops embossed geometric imitation leather and Mozartex which offers high-end fake leather to

Burberry are used widely in fashion clothes, interior materials and case covers for tablet PCs or cell phones. In addition, faux-leather products still contribute to pollution as their non-biodegradability and the production of toxic gases when they burn. Thus, with the introducing of bio-based polyurethane and nanocellulose, Eco-Friendly Faux Leather (EFFL) has been improved in enhancing their functionality, disposability and at the same time reduce the cost than natural leather.

In fact, there have several antecedents in encouraging consumers towards green behaviors and disposal. Personal values, pro environmental and personal norms have an impact towards consumers purchasing and disposal in this study. Conspicuous is the personal values that will be the focus of this study. While belief and norms on the environmental concern are also will be studied in terms of Ethical Consumer Behavior (ECB) and disposal in apparel aspects.

Problem statement: As noted above, the global apparel industry contributes significantly to pollution and ecological hazards since the manufacturing of yarns, fabrics and apparel requires considerable amounts of non-renewable energy, harmful chemicals and natural resources (Hethorn and Ulasewiz, 2008).

Few researches have been performed within the context of apparel consumption. It presumably because the textile and apparel industry is considered as an environmentally unfriendly field and the market for environmentally friendly apparel is relatively small. In addition, the study on how people dispose of clothing still unclear. The past studies mainly analyzed on the methods of clothing disposal.

For this reason, a further empirical investigation is needed in the local context to explore the relevance of existing theories, concepts and scales that are associated with pro-environmental behavior and more specifically those that relate to environmentally responsible clothing disposal behavior.

Research objectives: The objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between consumer values (conspicuous), pro-environmental beliefs, personal norms and ECB. This study also needs to identify the most important variable that influence ECB and also needs to identify the methods of clothing disposal.

The theoretical contribution of this study is based on its use of the Value Belief and Norms (VBN) theory (Stern, 2000) as underlying approaches to understanding consumer clothing disposal behavior in the Malaysian context. The theory also addresses the values and belief of Malaysian consumers about the environment, relating

to personal norms that possess by them, then resulting in Ethical Consumption (EC) and disposal behavior. Thus, this study developed the new concept of ECB as underlying approaches to understanding consumer clothing purchase and disposal behavior. The study has provided empirical evidence on the factors influence ECB, so it helps policy makers, fashion industry and advertiser/media organize it. In the context of Malaysia, we know that Malaysians are well aware about the environmental problems that arise in this country. However, from the surveys conducted, they are reluctant to do something about it. They need to be pushed and motivated to help out. So, this study can help the government educating and providing related programs to encourage the ECB among the consumers, revise and amend related acts.

Literature review

Ethical consumption dimensions: Ethical consumption is not a new issue among the consumers nowadays. The simple definition for this term is involving the purchase of any products that are ethically produced and sold regarding to the environmental issues, human rights, animal rights, the boycott of unethical practices companies and also disposable actions such as recycling and controlling excessive consumption (Cherrier, 2009; Newholm and Shaw, 2007; Auger *et al.*, 2003; Harrison *et al.*, 2005; Jackson, 2005). Basically, they have a few dimensions which cover a wide range of aspects. Among them are religiosity (Albrecht, 2012; Hanzae and Ramezani, 2011; Arthur, 2009), reduced consumption (Nepomuceno, 2012; Boujbel and D'Astous, 2012; Iwata, 2006), locally made (Long and Murray, 2012, 2013), disposal (Jung *et al.*, 2016; Shim, 1995), environmental concern/green consumers (Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2003; Shaw and Shia, 2003), fair trade (Toulouse *et al.*, 2006; Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2005), voluntary simplicity (Wu *et al.*, 2013; Etzioni, 2009), boycotting (Yuksel and Mryteza, 2009), counterfeit (Jeffery *et al.*, 2011), animal welfare (Bergqvist and Gunnarsson, 2013) and organic food (Honkanen *et al.*, 2006).

In terms of religiosity, Albrecht (2012) studied the relationship of values and identity in female Muslim students' dress practices at the University of Pretoria. The result indicates that female Muslim students at Pretoria come from cohesive communities which considering that individuals hold on to their ethnic identity and prefer to associate with others who have the same cultural background. Arthur (2009) in her research on religion and dress conclude that many religious groups have developed cultural norms with regard to dress. Dress

codes, both formal and informal exist as a means of showing group identity. Members of religious groups actively construct their own lives and use dress symbolically to express religious beliefs, adaptation to social change and the conformity to social norms and religious authority.

Voluntary simplicity may be described as the reduction of paradigmatic consumption without regard or the increase of ethical paradigmatic consumption. Micheletti (2010) in his study indicates that voluntary simplifiers are motivated to adopt the lifestyle for different reasons. It shares a common set of values and concerns that encourages them to adopt a life in which overconsumption is shunned and spend time creating a life of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Gistri *et al.* (2009) investigating on how people consume counterfeit luxury products. The result found the consumers of fakes accumulate facts that increase their knowledge of the originals with the aim of picking a 'good counterfeit' that will render the personal and private use of the product highly gratifying all the same. Perez *et al.* (2010) explore the relationship between the consumption of counterfeit luxury goods and identity construction. They realized that consumers of counterfeit luxury goods build their own identity in which they perceive themselves as "savvy" individuals.

Country of origin influences most consumers buying decision. Consumers in emerging countries believe that products from their own country are inferior compared to other countries (Kinra, 2006; Wang *et al.*, 2008). Schultz and Block (2015) mentioned that there is no difference of Australian consumers' attitude toward luxury brands made in Australia (locally made) or the USA, as both these countries have a strong brand presence in the global fashion world.

A study done by Deth found parental modelling is the most important predictor of youth political consumerism and young political consumers also engage in civic and political activities. Moreover, youth boycotts and buy-cotters appear to exhibit differences in political ideology and motivations for political consumerism. So, this study showed parental modelling is the most influence towards their children in boycotting certain products or brands. It assumed that the children receive early education from their parents, thus, it shapes their behavior in daily life.

In terms of environmental concern, Bassar *et al.* (2010) identified women are more likely than men to exhibit environmental values and behavior and particularly in the Scandinavian countries to purchase products with a view to ethical or social considerations. At the same time, other data sources show that in Canada, men are more inclined than women to participate in a boycott.

Doran (2010) studied the nature of the interaction between sets of values and the consumption of fair trade products. Universalism values were found to have a significant influence on fair trade consumption, whereas benevolence values did not despite their shared goal and value theory.

Animal welfare could be considered as one of the EC consumption dimension too. Bergqvist and Gunnarsson (2013) studied the ethical implications of finfish aquaculture, regarding fish welfare and environmental aspects. It identified that current aquaculture practices are affecting fish welfare during all four of the cited stages, both on physical and mental levels as well as on the ability of fish to carry out natural behaviors.

Honkanen *et al.* (2006) investigate the role of ethical motives in consumers' choice of organic food. It founds that environmental and animal rights issues had a strong influence on attitudes towards organic food, suggesting that the more people are concerned about these issues, the more positive attitude they have towards organic food and the more likely it is that they will consume organic food.

Conflicting opinions about ethical consumption: Some researchers argued and have different opinions regarding to Bassar *et al.* (2010) identified some of these critics which individualized political action requires relatively little effort while attractive due to its relative simplicity will never be as effective as legislation and regulations when it comes to 'changing things'. One of the obstacles occur in getting more effective forms of political action is the consumers are unable inability of consumers to receive and adapts the huge amount of information needed in making ethical purchasing decisions in every occasion. Other researchers point out that some 'socially acceptable' or 'green' products are not necessarily so, especially when it is designed and produced following the ethical processed and standard stated. Finally, the truly cynical believe that EC is just a way for the more fortunate to stand out socially without being concerned for anything other than their personal prestige and their reputation, for example, to appear green or morally superior to others.

In contrast to these viewpoints, others support their arguments with historical examples which are consumers can have a great deal of power and right and they also can influence over corporate conduct and government policy. For example, organized movements against sweatshops in the garment industry led some large companies to overhaul their practices by opening their doors to independent monitoring, increasing minimum salaries and improving health and safety conditions in their factories.

Some experts also point out that, for many young people, EC constitutes a new and important way to become politically engaged. Finally, recognized fair trade certification agencies like TransFair Canada claim that there is a real improvement in working conditions when this production process is put in place.

Dependent variable

Ethical fashion: Joergens (2006) defined it as “fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labor conditions, while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton”. Several academic studies have been done by a few authors in promoting ethical fashion consumption such as eco-conscious apparel consumption (Connell, 2011), purchase intention for apparel produced using recycled fibers (Hines and Swinker, 1996), clothing choice based on labor abuse (Valor, 2007), consumer purchase intention for organic cotton apparel (Hustvedt and Dickson, 2009), disposal of fashion clothing (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007), attitudes toward buying fashion counterfeit goods (Kim and Karpura, 2010), ethical issues and consumer fashion purchase behavior (Joergens, 2006).

There is some evidence that the trend of purchasing more ethically responsible goods has not gone unnoticed in the fashion industry. Consumers seem to have a narrow view of green fashion, focusing on organic clothing and ignore the wide-ranging complexity of sustainability encompassing environmental and social concerns (Cervellon *et al.*, 2010; Hethorn and Ulasewicz, 2008). Respondents were unwilling to pay a premium purely for ethical fashion. However, some participants in France stated they would be willing to pay extra if it coincide with self-fulfillment criteria or even as a redemption for other “bad” behavior. Finding proposed that this incorporates ethical fashion, with price, style and quality being at the forefront of choice. Additionally, participants stated they would be hypothetically willing to purchase ethically as long as the product met other important criteria (price, quality and style). Some researches such as Ritch and Schroeder (2012) and Joergens (2006) indicate that consumers do not necessarily purchase apparel based on the clothes production standards.

Jung *et al.* (2010) study found that when esthetics, brand and sustainability information regarding products is provided to pro-environmentally conscious consumers, they are willing to engage in a positive attitude toward these products by means of the heuristic route. This has been witnessed in the TOMS brand case in which the brand, sustainability and esthetic drives of TOMS have generated great popularity, appealing to many ethical consumers who are searching for more value in their purchases. That is, when consumers buy ethical products, they consider both sensory pleasure and pragmatic benefit.

A study done by Perez *et al.* (2010) found that members in online communication are interested in sharing precise knowledge on a variety of aspects linked to the sustainable supply chain including fabric, materials, manufacturing processes, transportation, distribution and recycling or re-use of fashion items. Through this session, the level of awareness towards a sustainable environment increase by knowing the right way to consume and dispose. In addition, the role of the members evolves toward educating newcomers and sustaining the development of the green fashion sector shown in Table 1.

Jeffery *et al.* (2011) investigates the sentiments consumers have towards counterfeit luxury apparel and personal electronics goods. It finds that consumers rated the perceived fashion content of luxury apparel items higher than luxury personal electronics items while the functional importance of luxury personal electronics was found to be more significant than the fashion content of those items.

Clarke and Holt in their study found some consumers are more knowledgeable. They have information about the way clothes are made and alive to the historical lineage of their making and use, their symbolic resonance which they feel themselves part of the story. For years, consumers find themselves were contributing directly on fashion designed via their consumption then continue through imaginative experimentation.

Disposal: Disposal can be referred as getting rid of something, i.e., the end of life stage of the clothing with the present owner, regardless of whether the clothing is

Table 1: Previous studies on Green fashion

Author(s) and year	Independent variables	Dependent variables	Results
Cervellon and Wernerfelt (2012)	Online communication	Green fashion	Positive relationship
Cervellon <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Knowledge of green fashion	Online communities	Positive relationship
Jung <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Personal values	Attitude towards EFFL Products	Positive relationship
Clarke and Holt (2015)	Fashion designer environmental campaign Critics of consumption	Consumer behavior	Positive relationship

Table 2: Previous studies on disposal

Author(s) and year	Independent variables	Dependent variables	Results
Shim (1995)	Recycling environmental attitude	Apparel disposal pattern	Positivelyrelationship
Bianchi and Birtwistle (2012)	Apparel disposal behavior	Clothing disposal	Positivelyrelationship
Lang	Personal attribute and behavior of disposal	Clothing disposal	Positivelyrelationship
Lee	Disposal behavior, motivation and emotional	Fashion disposition	Positivelyrelationship

discarded of as waste or delivered to recycling or reuse. Consumers' clothing disposal is important from an environmental point of view. They decide when and where the use of clothing is delivered and therefore determine the lifespan of clothing, the amount of waste that is generated as well as the potential for re-use and recycling (Laitala, 2014).

Consumers should be aware of the way they dispose especially clothes as it can damage our ecosystem. For example, improper disposal textile ends up in landfills each year which warrants notice since landfill space is quickly running out. Shim (1995) conducted an exploratory study of apparel disposal patterns. It found that in comparison to the general waste recycling behavior, environmental attitude had a stronger impact on whether or not consumers used environmentally friendly apparel disposal methods.

Bianchi and Birtwistle (2012), Morgan and Birtwistle (2009), Birtwistle and Moore (2007) found the reason for apparel dispose among the consumers caused by fashion trend sensitivity, frequent shopping for fashion and low priced goods. This situation commonly occurs in 'fast fashion' where people buy cheap items and throw them away after a short period of time and more about engagement with the product. The frequency of purchase and consume regularly will increase the rate of dispose, thus the amount generated from this behavior also increase. Regarding to the study by Lang *et al.* (2013), consumers who are sensitive to fashion trends also dispose of their unwanted clothing more frequently than those who are less sensitive to fashion trends especially for young and female consumers.

Besides, Lee investigate young consumers' fashion disposition behavior. For the study, participants mentioned fashion-ability, physical condition of an item and social responsibility as factors that prompted their fashion disposition. Participants experienced primarily positive emotions when disposing of unwanted apparel items.

Independent variable (relationship between values and pro environmental beliefs): It would seem fairly reasonable that there is a relation between general values and pro environmental behavior. Values may channel

actions (Bardi and Schwartz 2003; Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002; Rokeach, 1968) and for that reason values may possibly be seen as the foundation for pro-environmental behavior (Jackson, 2005; Stern, 2000). Consumers gain prestige by purchasing luxury goods, where this concept is referred to as "conspicuous consumption" (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004). Luxury goods have always been associated with wealth, exclusivity and power and have been identified with the satisfaction of nonessential want (Brun *et al.*, 2008; Laurent and Dubois, 1994).

Relationship between pro-environmental beliefs and norms: The environmentally responsible behavior of an individual may be a result of the strength of the individual's personal norms (Thøgersen and Olander, 2006; Harland *et al.*, 1999). It was found that individual might behave in a certain manner because of norms, even if the specific behavior counters the individual's values (Bardi and Schwartz, 2003). Therefore, pro-environmental clothing disposal behavior may also have the strongest relationship with personal norms. Park and Ha (2011) investigate the differences in underlying psychological aspects regarding pro environmental behaviors between green product purchasers and green product non purchasers. The result showed that green product purchasers exhibited significantly higher levels of cognitive attitude, affective attitude, social norm, personal norm and recycling intention. Also, cognitive attitude, social norm and personal norms predicted recycling attention.

Relationship between norms and green behavior: Elliott and Willmes (2013) investigated whether certain individual values and perceived social norms moderate relationships between environmental concern and select environmental attitudes. It found that perceiving pro-environmental behaviors as social norms was positively related to willingness to undertake personal conservation behavior. While Kim *et al.* (2012) explores whether eco-friendly consumer behavior in the apparel market is influenced by variations in social norms and by consumer's environmental concern. The results confirm the significant effects of the type of social norms (i.e.,



Fig. 1: Theoretical framework

injunctive versus descriptive norms) and the level of environmental concern on purchase intentions. Theoretical framework is shown in Fig. 1

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Pilot test: It was conducted among 30 respondents from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Terengganu's and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)'s staffs. Potential participants were invited via e-mail. The study started by mid of January 2016. Respondents selected randomly from the name list to avoid the business.

Online survey: Online survey will be conducted among 384 consumers in Malaysia. Convenience sampling will be used in this study due to the simplicity and convenience. It helps potential participants to join the discussion, whenever they are available.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ethical fashion is still new among Malaysian. The definition of that is too wide. This study focuses more on purchasing and how Malaysia people dispose their cloths. These play a critical role in conserving our environment as the way they purchase and dispose will impact to the earth. A proposed conceptual research approach by using an online survey as a medium of gathering the data is useful in mitigating the issue identified in this study. The respondents can come from many places with different values, belief and norms.

The first stage of this study; an email survey that was conducted by mid of January 2016 for 2 weeks (phase one). The gathered data will be analyzed and findings will be used to develop the survey questions in phase two. For phase two, online survey via social interaction board such as Facebook will be conducted for one and half months. Thus, this study aims to achieve the main objective by having theoretical and practical perspectives from respective participants and respondents.

CONCLUSION

The overall this study is conducted to investigate the relationship among consumer values (conspicuous),

pro-environmental beliefs, norms and ethical consumption behavior. Thus, with a better understanding of this relationship, the consumer will increase the level of awareness and behavior towards conservation of environment. This study will be able to fill a gap of knowledge particularly for Malaysian consumers and will extend knowledge about ethical fashion focusing purchasing and disposal in their daily life.

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