The Impact of Ethical Fashion on Consumer Purchase Intention of the Undergraduates:
With Special Reference to Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The basic human need of clothing has now evolved into the concept of fashion, and it keeps developing further into significant niches such as ethical fashion. The growing concerns on ethical fashion have exhibited a vast impact on consumer purchase intentions, especially of young consumers. This research was conducted with the main objective to assess the impact of ethical fashion on consumer purchase intention of undergraduates of the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. It has been observed that fashion consumers prefer or reject certain products depending on the ethical considerations, beliefs and attitudes they hold on regarding that specific brand or product, which paved the path to constructing this research study. The research coverage areas include three aspects of ethical fashion, namely cruelty-free, fair trade and eco-friendly and their individual

and collective impact on consumer purchase intention. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire that was administrated online to the sample of undergraduates. The findings suggested that there is an overall positive impact of ethical fashion on consumer purchase intention which is exhibited through their willingness to pay a premium and choosing of ethical brands and products over others now and in future. Further statistical analysis is done through tests of correlation and regression and those provided insight into individual variable relationship and impact with the purchase intention of the undergraduates. Based on the results of the study, it can be stated that both businesses and consumers should pay greater attention to ethical fashion, as it has a significant effect on the direction that the fashion industry would take in the future.

Keywords

Ethical fashion, consumer purchase intention, cruelty-free, fair trade

1. Introduction

Fashion has been a major topic of discussion in research studies and has been approached through many different perspectives. With the evolution of fashion into concepts such as "ethical fashion", which changed the existing ideologies of fashion, so did the research approaches as well. As summarized in (Pollari, 2016), ethical fashion issues that were commonly and frequently identified through past research studies are mainly of three types. Issues of fair trade, labour exploitation and child labour have been the most researched area regarding ethical fashion. Next, related environmental issues of ethical fashion have been studied and this has been studied together with fair trade issues to work out the values of both consumers and suppliers. Recently, the focus of ethical fashion related research studies have shifted to a new spectrum; cruelty-free (Carrigan et al., 2004; Pollari, 2016). Those research studies aim to bring out the animal cruelty in the fashion industry and the consumer demand for cruelty-free products.

The research studies that studied the relationship with regards to consumer

purchase behaviour have contributed to building a thorough understanding of that perspective. For example, in Shen et al., (2012), it has been claimed that consumers show their support by purchasing from a business that they perceive as environmentally responsible and believed to be using fair labour. Further, fashion related research studies have been able to prove that ensuring animal rights and use of cruelty-free materials in fashion products is a highly motivating factor for consumers to purchase those products (Sheehan and Lee, 2014)

This research study concentrated on a three-way approach to understanding the effect of ethical conduct in supply chains on the consumers' purchase intentions. Those three dimensions are namely; cruelty-free, fair trade and eco-friendly. Consumer purchase intentions have been studied on ethical fashion by many past researchers but, in the Sri Lankan context, those types of studies are very few in numbers. According to past studies, it is more productive to observe consumer purchase intentions through younger generations because they become future consumers (Ma et al., 2012).

Further, each aspect's span was defined separately as follows. Cruelty-free is not using animal materials as inputs in products and avoiding any kind of animal cruelty while confirming animal welfare. Fairtrade is not using sweatshop labour and child labour for production processes while avoiding price masking on products. Eco-friendly is using environmentally friendly material inputs and the extent to which the features of the product align with the respondent's personal eco-friendly practices.

In this paper, first, a brief introduction to the study is given, which is then followed by a literature review. Thereafter, the methodology aspect of the study is discussed and the discussion moves on to the results of the study. Finally, the conclusion is presented.

2. Literature Review

Since this study aims to contribute to explain the consumer purchase intention on ethical fashion through the two main driving factors of intention; beliefs and attitudes, the

theoretical adaptation follows Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). According to that theory, consumer purchase behaviour can be derived by identifying consumer purchase intentions. The TPB has been the basic foundation of many previous research studies that were aimed at determining the relationship between consumer purchase behaviour and ethical fashion (Shen et al., 2012; Favier, 2013; Oh and Yoon, 2014a; Pollari, 2016; Hegner, Fenko and Teravest, 2017) and therefore it essentially sets up the fundamental framework for this study.

Fashion, when taken as a concept has multiple meanings and therefore it is difficult to identify a single unambiguous definition. According to Aspers and Godart, (2013), fashion has two implications; either a change or a dress. A change designates that fashion, as a concept it continuously evolving where the old concepts and creations are being replaced by new ones. On the other hand, a dress indicates that the term "fashion" is used in place of clothing. Accordingly, fashion is a concept closely related with human's day to day life that

keeps evolving and changing since its origin and it comprises of sub-concepts such as clothing, trends, personal statements and styles (Chan and Wong, 2012; Favier, 2013; Pollari, 2016).

The growth in the fashion industry have made fashion evolve into an "ethical" aspect, because of the increasing number of the ethical issues that began to rise along with the globalization of the industry (Pollari, 2016). In the present context, ethical issues can be observed in each and every stage of a value chain and include a multiplicity of concerns related to the environment, people, animals and society that are being committed by manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers both knowingly and unknowingly (Shaw et al., 2006). Drawing on the ethical and fashion consumption literature, there are some common variables that are discussed in relation to ethical fashion, for example, Joergens, (2006) has defined ethical fashion as clothing that is manufactured with using fair paid labour in factories where there are measures taken to minimize the

adverse effect of the process on the environment. Furthermore, ethical fashion is elaborated as "fashion with a conscious" as it concerns worker conditions and natural environment. Accordingly, from the view of the industry, ethical fashion focuses on two major factors; manufacturing in eco-friendly manners and using non-sweatshop labour.

Environmental friendly clothing options are a part of ethical fashion and those are free of chemicals and materials that are harmful to the environment (Stanforth et al., 2010). It also includes clothing made of sustainable materials such as recycled plastics, hemp or bamboo. Fair-trade or the concerned fashion on human side aims to achieve better working conditions, wages and improved rights to all the humans involved in the fashion supply chain (Carey and Cervellon, 2014).

In the field of fashion, the common ideas associated provides that the fashion product has not contributed to causing any kind of distress or harm to any animal in its process of manufacturing (Potts, White and Hons, 2007; Sheehan and Lee, 2014).

Additionally, Reimers, Magnuson and Chao, (2016) have provided that cruelty-free includes its opposite positive action; ensuring animal welfare by means of CSR where both consumers and industry contribute to ensuring that animal rights are protected, animals are given better chances at life and animals that have been affected for the sake of fashion are well taken care of.

The fashion industry's main social concerns comprise of ''forced labour, low wages, excessive hours of work, discrimination, health and safety hazards, psychological and physical abuse, lack of awareness of workers' rights, and lack of worker representation for negotiations with management''(Kozar and Hiller Connell, 2013). Ethical fashion identifies environmental harm and unfair conditions for the ones involved in the production (humans and animals); as the two major concerns that need immediate attention in today's world.

Ethical consumer behaviour, which is led by the intention can present in various terms, for example as boycotting unethical products or

brands or as positive purchasing which means favouring products or brands manufactured and marketed ethically, based on the key assumption that taking on ethical purchase intention is the conviction that an individual consumer can and have the ability make a substantial divergence (Pollari, 2016). Basically, consumption in this circumstance is backed by an ethical-moral responsibility to purchase ethically, even when the consumer is not gaining any special personal advantage by doing so, other than the feeling of moral satisfaction (Shaw and Shiu, 2003). A similar idea was presented by Sheehan and Lee (2014), as ethical consumers make their buying decisions by making their acknowledged ethical commitment and their delicate values about what is

right or wrong as the foundation since ethical issues time and again are an imperative part of their self-identity.

3. Methodology

Based on thorough literature review the following dimensions were recognized as the most important aspects of ethical fashion to be taken into consideration. Ethical Fashion is the independent variable with three dimensions; cruelty- free, Fairtrade and eco-friendly. These three factors were considered as the independent variables. The dependent variable of the research was the consumer purchase intention of undergraduates of Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Accordingly, the developed conceptual framework is as follows.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Independent Variables (IV)   Dependent Variable (DV)
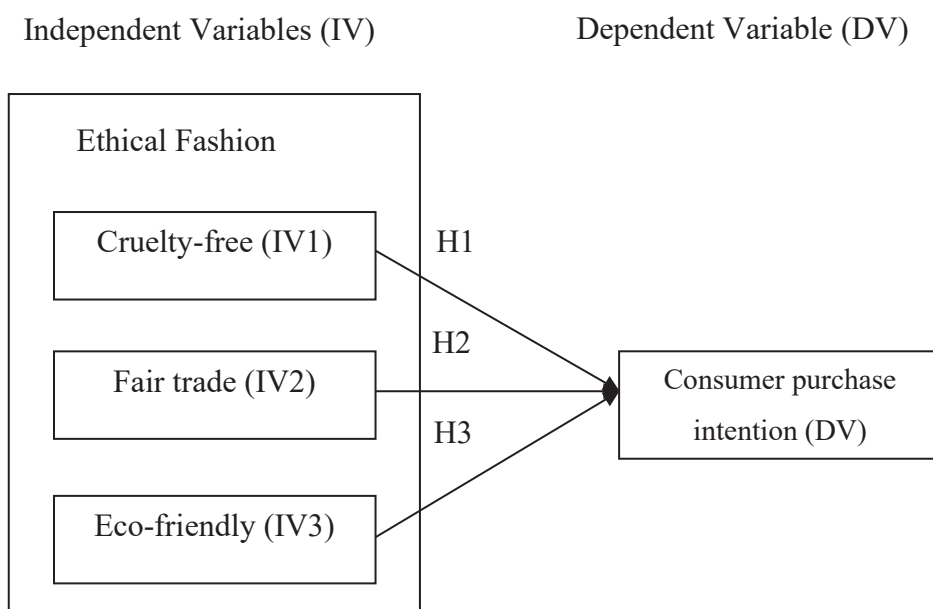
Source: Constructed by Authors

The followings were the tested hypotheses of the study in order to find out the relationship between ethical fashion and consumer purchase behaviour.

H1: There is an impact of a fashion product being cruelty-free on consumer purchase intention

H2: There is an impact of a fashion product being fair-traded on consumer purchase intention

H3: There is an impact of a fashion product being eco-friendly and consumer purchase intention

The population selected for this study is the undergraduates of the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce (FMSC) of University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ) which is 4889 in number. This population is targeted because According to Joergens, (2006) "young consumers will be the next generation of ethical consumers. Mirza, (2004) and on the other hand, this consumer group shows more interest in fashion than older consumers, they are a group who could really make a difference by

forcing retailers and brands to take action."

The sample unit of analysis is the student of FMSC, USJ. Random sampling method for the quantitative analysis of the study was used in order to ensure enough representation of the overall population. Based on the literature, Sekaran, (2012) sample size guide, the sample size was taken to be 357 individual undergraduates from the population.

The empirical analysis involved the following three steps: questionnaire design, pilot testing and the sampling and data collection. The instrument used to gather data for this research study was a self-administrated structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three main parts and five sections within those, namely; Part One - Section A: Background Information, Part Two – Ethical fashion- Section B: Cruelty-free, Section C: Fairtrade, Section D: Eco-friendly, Part Three – Consumer purchase intention and Section E: Consumer purchase intention

Respondents were asked to rate the degree of their agreement. A five-point Likert-scale was used, in which "1" represented "strongly disagree" and "5" represented "strongly agree." After constructing the questionnaire, 35 participants were involved in a pilot test to guard against obtaining invalid or irrelevant data. A total of 35 sets of data were collected from the completed questionnaires and analyzed, and the results were highly desirable. The pilot test data were analyzed using reliability tests (Cronbach's alpha), correlation analysis and a regression test. All of the internal reliability estimate results were larger than 0.7. Therefore, the pilot test had high internal reliability and consistency. The process and results of the pilot testing confirmed the reliability of the research instrument.

Data collection was done through the self-administrated structured questionnaire, which was a Google form made online and the link for the form was distributed online to the sample. After 357 responses were collected, the "accepting responses" option on the form was closed. The

following table depicts the numbers on data collection.

Table 1. Data collection

Descriptions	Number
Sample size	357
Responses received	357
Invalid responses	47
Usable survey	310
Percentage response rate	85%

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data generated by SPSS version 23.0

4. Results and Discussion

The process of data analysis included numerous steps from data screening to regression analysis. Except for the background information, all other variables were tested through the following procedures.

The screening of outliers, normality and multivariate assumptions techniques was done initially. This study uses multiple regression analysis methods to evaluate linearity. Multicollinearity examines through tolerance value and the variance inflation factor (VIF- the inverse of the tolerance value) using multiple regression procedure. The tolerance value does not exceed the common cutoff points .1 and VIF values are less than 5. Hence, multicollinearity was not a problem.

This study considers six demographic factors and given below is a detailed description of the respondents' profile of the study.

Table 2 Respondents profile

Variable	Category	Range	Frequency	Percentage
BI1	Gender	1. female	173	55.8
		2. Male	137	44.2
BI2	Age	1. 19-21	61	19.7
		2. 22-24	245	79
		3.25-27	4	1.3
BI3	Academic year	1. first-year	81	26.1
		2. second-year	79	25.52
		3. third-year	84	27.1
		4. fourth year	66	21.3
BI4	How do you get money to do fashion purchases?	1. self-earned	98	31.6
		2. from parents/caretakers	204	65.8
		3. other	8	2.6
BI5	How much do you spend on fashion purchases within a year? (LKR)	1. <5000	17	5.5
		2.5000-10000	165	53.2
		3.>10001	128	41.3
BI6	How often do you make fashion purchases within a year?	1. < 5 times	84	27.1
		2. 5-10 times	163	52.6
		3. >10 times	63	20.3

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data generated by SPSS version 23.0

Three main areas were focused on when obtaining descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent variables of the study. To measure the central tendency, mean and median values were considered. Dispersion of the data set was measured by maximum, minimum, range, variance and standard deviation values. Nature of the distribution was assessed through measures of skewness and kurtosis. Further, interquartile values were also considered.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics

Variable/ Dimension		CF		FT		EF		CI	
		Statistic	Std. error	Statistic	Std. error	Statistic	Std. error	Statistic	Std. error
Mean		4.4054	0.02465	4.1430	0.02661	4.2124	0.02342	4.2319	0.02231
95% confidence interval for mean	Lower bound	4.3569		4.0907		4.1663		4.1880	
	Upper bound	4.4539		4.1954		4.2585		4.2758	
5% trimmed mean		4.4516		4.1697		4.2413		4.2507	
Median		4.5000		4.3333		4.3333		4.3333	
Variance		0.188		0.220		0.170		0.154	
Std. deviation		0.43408		0.46851		0.41238		0.39274	
Minimum		2.17		2.17		3.00		3.22	
Maximum		5.00		5.00		5.00		5.00	
Range		2.83		2.83		2.00		1.78	
Interquartile range		0.38		0.67		0.50		0.56	
Skewness		-1.949		-1.052		-0.847		-0.676	
Kurtosis		4.721		1.387		0.445		-0.199	

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data generated by SPSS version 23.0

Since the independent variable ethical fashion and dependent variable consumer purchase intention showed a strong positive relationship, a regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of the independent variable on the

dependent variable. The following section elaborates its results.

Table:4 Regression Model summary

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig. F Change	
1	.672[a]	.451	.446	.29239	.451	83.840	3	306	.000	1.687

a. Predictors: (Constant), Eco-friendly , Fair trade, Cruelty-free

b. Dependent Variable: Consumer Purchase Intention

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data generated by SPSS version 23.0

According to the table 4, the value of R square is 0.451 meaning that 45.1% of the variation of the dependent variable (consumer purchase intention) can be explained by the three independent variables (cruelty-free, fair trade and eco-friendly).

Further, the Durbin – Watson test value is 1.687 which is closer to 2, thus indicating that there is no autocorrelation.

Table 5 ANOVA

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	21.502	3	7.167	83.840	.000[a]
	Residual	26.160	306	.085		

| | Total | 47.662 | 309 | | | | | | |

The F value and p-value (sig.) shown in the above table 5, provides further ground to prove the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The p-value is less than 0.001 and the F value is greater than the p-value. Thus, consumer purchase intention (dependent variable) depends on the sum of the three independent variables (cruelty-free, fair trade and eco-friendly); ethical fashion.

Table 6 Coefficients

Coefficients[a]										
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics		
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF	
1 (Constant)	1.273	.194		6.548	.000	.890	1.655			
Cruelty-Free	.354	.050	.392	7.091	.000	.256	.453	.588	1.700	
Fair trade	-.034	.044	-.041	-.766	.445	-.121	.053	.640	1.562	
Eco friendly	.365	.055	.384	6.695	.000	.258	.473	.546	1.831	

Based on the data provided in table 6, the regression equation can be developed as,

Consumer purchase intention = 1.273 + 0.354 Cruelty-free - 0.034 Fairtrade + 0.365 Eco-friendly

The p-value for beliefs and attitudes on fair trade fashion is 0.445, hence implying that beliefs and attitudes on fair trade fashion are not a significant predictor of consumer purchase intention of undergraduates. The p-values for the other two independent variables are less than 0.05, indicating that those are significant predictors of consumer purchase intention.

Thus, for every unit increase in beliefs and attitudes about cruelty-free fashion, consumer purchase intention of undergraduates will go up by 0.354, provided that the other two variables; beliefs and attitudes on fair trade fashion and eco-friendly fashion remain unchanged. Similarly, for every unit increase in beliefs and attitudes about eco-friendly fashion, consumer purchase intention of undergraduates will go up by 0.365, provided that the other two variables; beliefs and attitudes on fair trade fashion and cruelty-free fashion remain unchanged. On the contrary, for every unit increase in beliefs and attitudes about fair trade fashion, consumer purchase intention will drop by 0.034, provided that the other two variables; beliefs and attitudes on cruelty-free fashion and eco-friendly fashion of undergraduates remain unchanged. But this impact is not significant as the p-value is higher than 0.05.

The 95% confidence interval for cruelty-free and eco-friendly variables are (0.256-0.453) and (0.258-0.473) respectively. The value of 0 does not fall within those intervals, again indicating that those are significant predictors. But, the 95% confidence interval for fair trade is (-0.121-0.053), within which the value 0 falls. It again confirms that fair trade variable is not a significant predictor of consumer purchase intention of the undergraduates.

5. Conclusion

The first research objective was to understand the impact of cruelty-free fashion on consumer intention. There was a positive association between the

independent variable CF and dependent variable CI. It implies that when beliefs and attitudes on cruelty fashion increase, so do the consumer purchase intention of undergraduates. The correlation value for CF was 0.604 which is greater than 0.3. The significance of the p-value was less than 0.001. Thus, it can be said that the two variables covary in the same direction, indicating a statistically significant positive relationship between cruelty-free fashion and consumer purchase intention. The results of the regression analysis provided a beta value of 0.354 with a significance value (p-value) of 0.000, implying that the impact of CF on CI is significant and for every unit increase in beliefs and attitudes about cruelty-free fashion, consumer purchase intention of undergraduates will go up by 0.354, provided that the other two variables; beliefs and attitudes on fair trade fashion and eco-friendly fashion remain unchanged.

Above mentioned findings provide evidence to say that undergraduates, as consumers are concerned about a cruelty-free factor of fashion items and the positive beliefs and attitudes they have on cruelty-free fashion, have led to exhibit that concern through their purchase intentions as the willingness to pay a premium, choosing cruelty-free brands and fashion over other fashion options now and in future. Hence, the objective is achieved through the acceptance of the hypothesis;

H1: There is an impact of a fashion product being cruelty-free on consumer purchase intention.
The same impact was found through the studies of Joergens, (2006); Sheehan and Lee, (2014) and Pollari, (2016)

The second objective of this study was to find out the impact of fair trade fashion on consumer intention. The impact of the independent variable FT on dependent variable CI is positive. It indicates that when the beliefs and attitudes on fair trade fashion increase, consumer purchase intention of undergraduates increases. The correlation value for FT was 0.375 which is greater than 0.3. The significance of the p-value was less than 0.001. Thus, it can be said that the

two variables covary in the same direction, indicating a statistically significant positive relationship between fair trade and consumer purchase intention. The results of the regression analysis provided a beta value of -0.034 with a significance value (p-value) of 0.455, implying that the impact of FT on CI is not significant. This implies that even though the beliefs and attitudes on fair trade fashion exist among undergraduates, the degree to which that beliefs and attitudes impact on their consumer purchase intention is insignificant. One of the reasons that might be behind this phenomenon is that in Sri Lankan culture, the perspective on the apparel industry and the treatment of workers in the industry are often viewed in a negative manner despite the real situation. Therefore, the majority of people have negative beliefs and attitudes on the fair-trade aspect of fashion. Hence, the objective is achieved through the rejection of the hypothesis;

 H1: There is an impact of a fashion product being fair-traded on consumer purchase intention.

The same impact was found through the studies of Pelsmacker, Janssens and Mielants, (2005) and Shaw *et al.*, (2006).

The third objective of this study was to discover the impact of eco-friendly fashion on consumer purchase intention. There is a positive impact of the independent variable EF on the dependent variable CI. It implies that when beliefs and attitudes on eco-friendly fashion increase, so do the consumer purchase intention of undergraduates. The correlation value for EF was 0.599. The significance of the p-value was less than 0.001. Thus it can be said that the two variables covary in the same direction, indicating a statistically significant positive relationship between eco-friendly fashion and consumer purchase intention. The results of the regression analysis provided a beta value of 0.356 with a significance value (p-value) of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, implying that the impact of EF on CI is significant and for every unit increase in beliefs and attitudes about cruelty-free fashion, consumer purchase intention of undergraduates

will go up by 0.356, provided that the other two variables; beliefs and attitudes on fair trade fashion and cruelty fashion remain unchanged. Above mentioned findings provide evidence to say that undergraduates, as consumers are concerned about an eco-friendly factor of fashion items and the positive beliefs and attitudes they have on eco-friendly fashion, have led to exhibit that concern through their purchase intentions as the willingness to pay a premium, choosing cruelty-free brands and fashion over other fashion options now and in future. Hence, the objective is achieved through the acceptance of the hypothesis;

H1: There is an impact of a fashion product being eco-friendly on consumer purchase intention.

The same impact was found through the studies of Wang, (2010), Kozar and Hiller Connell, (2013) and Gwozdz, Nielsen and Müller, (2017)

6. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The study population of this study was limited to the undergraduates of the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, the University of Sri Jayewardenepura., which limits the overall applicability of the findings to other consumer populations. Therefore, the study population should be widened to include a variety of consumer groups. Furthermore, this study used only a structured questionnaire to collect the data. More reliable, diverse and valid data can be collected through other methods such as interviews, observations etc. Moreover, only three concepts of ethical fashion were evaluated in this study. But more variables can be added and their impacts can be studied in the future

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