

Ethical Apparel Consumption: A Study on Muslim Consumers in Malaysia

Najdah Abd Aziz^{1*}, Rubiah Abu Bakar²

¹ Faculty Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Terengganu, Dungun, Terengganu

² Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS), University Teknologi MARA Cawangan Terengganu, Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu

*Corresponding Author: najda329@uitm.edu.my

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Abstract: *The ethical consumption behaviour of individuals has received much attention from several parties as this activity is frequently debated in relation to its effects on the environment, human welfare, climate change and the sustainability of the planet. A lot of issues in relation to unethical apparel behaviour have been raised in the mass media and it has become a topic of increasing concern due to reports of the negative impact on society and the environment (Rusinko, 2007). Indeed, the demand for products, especially clothing has increased dramatically. The clothing and textile industries have increased their production capacity and are competing with each other to fulfil consumer needs. Several studies show that apparel consumption is one of the main reasons for environmental degradation. Therefore, ethical consumption behaviour is encouraged among consumers in order to minimize the damage to the environment and achieve sustainability. Due to this issue, the study aims to analyse the effect of conspicuous values, pro-environmental belief, personal norms and ethical consumption behaviour focusing religiosity and ethics on Muslims consumers in Malaysia. This study applied the value-belief-norm (VBN) theory as the underlying theory. The sample for this study consisted of 219 Muslim consumers in Malaysia, using an online survey method. The collected data were analysed by using SPSS version 23. The results showed that conspicuous value has no relationship on pro-environmental belief and ethical consumption behaviour. This study makes a significant contribution to the field of ethical behaviour as it deepens our understanding on ethical consumption behaviour particularly on religiosity and ethics. From the theoretical perspective, it fills in the literature gap by developing a comprehensive concept of ethical consumption behaviour, identifies factors that influence ethical consumption behaviour and extends the VBN model by adding new variable which is ethical consumption behaviour focusing on religiosity and ethics.*

Keywords: Values, Beliefs, Norms, Ethical Consumption Behaviour, Malaysia

1. Introduction

The ethical consumption behavior (ECB) of individuals has received much attention from several parties as this activity is frequently debated in relation to its effects on the environment, human welfare, climate change and the sustainability of the planet. A lot of issues in relation to unethical apparel behavior have been raised in the mass media and it has become a topic of increasing concern due to reports of the negative impact on society and the environment (Rusinko, 2007).

Apparel can be said to be environmentally friendly (fashionable) when the environmental and social impacts of its entire product life cycle are taken into account. Unfortunately, as yet there are no industry standards for ethical, green or eco products in the apparel industries. Initially, global apparel consumption levels and patterns were driven mostly by the rapid growth in the global population and the increase purchasing power of middle-class consumers. The increase in the population rate and economic developments are driving higher consumption of apparel around the world and will further increase because billions of consumers, especially in China, India and other emerging countries, demand an increasing number of clothing. However, the over-production and over-consumption of clothing had recognized give impact on the environment such as landslide, air pollution, water pollution and son on. Therefore, this study is important to investigate the ethical consumption behavior among Muslim consumers in minimizing the environmental issues.

2. Literature Review

Definition and concepts of ethical consumption behavior

Table 1: Summary of Definitions of Ethical Consumption Behavior

Definition of ECB	Researcher(s) and Year
Concerns social as well as environmental issues.	James (2010)
Has political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social or other motivations.	Long and Murray (2013)
Refers to the environmental impacts of the purchase, usage of products as well as to post-use behaviours.	Onel (2014)

Religiosity and ethics as a dimension of ECB

Religiosity is defined by Tan and Vogel (2008) as the extent to which a people hold on to the beliefs, experiences, and also rituals of a religion. Meanwhile, Delener (1990) as cited in Farrag and Hassan (2015), states that religiosity is viewed as the beliefs in specific religious values and practiced by an individual.

A study by Ahmad et al. (2018) discusses the influence of religion on consumers' attitudes and behaviors. The result of their study shows that all these independent variables have a significant relationship with the purchasing decision. Thus, their study verifies that religion play an important role in determining the consumer purchase decision as they found that consumers who are religious, especially Muslims, follow the requirements of their religion in buying or consuming certain goods.

Meanwhile, a study by Muhammad (2018) seeks to determine the significance of relationship between religiosity, subjective norms and ethical consumption intentions towards ethical consumption behavior. The results show that the ethical consumption behavior of consumers is driven by their level of religiosity, subjective norms and ethical consumption intentions. Thus, religiosity can have an impact on consumers' ethical behavior and the proposed model is effective in analyzing these relationships.

Julina et al. (2017), in their study on the effect of religiosity, environmental attitudes and environmental knowledge on green purchase behavior in Pekanbaru, Indonesia, built a model to assimilate the spiritual aspect as this had not been studied by researchers before. From their

analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaires, they found that there is a significant relationship between religiosity, environmental attitudes and environmental knowledge, and green purchase behavior among consumers in Pekanbaru. Thus, from the above works, it can be said that religiosity is one of the important factors that contribute to green purchase behavior in consumers' daily life.

Table 2: Summary of Literature on Religiosity and Ethics

Religiosity and ethics				
Researcher(s) & Year	Independent variables	Dependent variables		Finding
Ahmad et al. (2018)	Religious affiliation, religious commitment, religious knowledge and religious orientations	Ethical behaviour	purchase	Consumer with high levels of religiosity tend to be ethical in their purchase behaviour
Muhammad (2018)	Religiosity, subjective norms and ethical consumption intentions	Ethical behaviour	consumption	Religiosity can give impact on consumer ethical consumption behaviour
Julina et al (2017)	Religiosity, environmental attitudes and environmental knowledge	Green behaviour	purchase	Religiosity be one of the factors that influence green purchase behaviour among consumers

Main theory of the study: Value-belief-norm (VBN) Theory

The foundation of what later became known as VBN theory principally lies in a combination of value theory (Schwartz, 1992) and norm activation theory (Schwartz, 1977), in which it is assumed that the relationship between values and actual behavior is affected not only by consumption but by other factors as well. Dietz and Stern (1994) extended this idea to develop VBN theory, which is the theory that underpins this current study. Value-belief-norm theory is applicable in the study of the behavior of consumers in relation to environmental concerns and issues (Stern et al., 1995). The theory is useful because it reveals ways of encouraging consumers to participate in sustainable practices. This is because it focuses on values, belief and personal norms, all of which can form an individual's actions to be ethical (Stern et al., 1999).

Relationship conspicuous value and ethical consumption behavior

Ajitha and Sivakumar (2017) examined the personal values of Indian women about luxury cosmetic usage. The result shows that hedonic value has a positive relationship with product usage behavior, whereas conspicuous value has a negative relationship with product usage behavior. Consumers may feel that luxury cosmetics expose their real beauty to the outside world perfectly, but socially, communicating this sign to others may not be much appreciated. This could be the reason why conspicuous value has a significant negative relationship with usage behavior.

Thorburn (2016) investigated how socio-economic status (conspicuous value) affects the purchase of luxury products. The researcher found that respondents who have experienced an upward shift in socio-economic status during their lifetime are more motivated to gain social acceptance. Thus, they tend to buy the luxury the product of interest to the studying question because it explicitly communicates their newfound status and has recognizable graphics. Therefore, the researcher concluded that consumers who have conspicuous value prefer to buy visible luxury products to show off their status in society instead of buying eco-friendly

products. Thus, conspicuous consumption has a negative relationship with ethical consumption behavior.

Yajin (2015) explored how consumers feel and behave when they have conspicuous value and use luxury products. Overall, the result shows that luxury consumption leads consumers to act in ways to benefit the self, which can result in either more selfish or more generous behavior depending on the situation. Consequently, their selfish behavior in luxury consumption makes them refuse to buy eco-friendly products and thus become irresponsible in terms of protecting the environment.

Table 3: Summary of Literature on Conspicuous Values and ECB

Conspicuous Values					
Researcher(s) & Year	Independent variables		Dependent variables		Finding
Ajitha and Sivakumar (2017)	Hedonic and conspicuous values		Consumption behaviour		Conspicuous value has negative relationship with consumption behaviour.
Thorburn (2016)	Consumer preferences and motivations	luxury and	Purchasing products	luxury	Consumers who achieve a higher status prefer to purchase luxurious products compared to eco-friendly products. Thus, there has no relationship between conspicuous values and ECB.
Yajin (2015)	Conspicuous experience		Using luxury products and luxury brands		Luxury goods affect how consumers feel and behave.

Relationship conspicuous value and pro-environmental belief

Hye et al. (2015) studied the green leather consumption behavior among consumers in China and South Korea using VBN theory. The researchers found that, conspicuous value has a negative relationship with an individual's PEB.

In addition, Kosteljik and Jan (2015) found that conspicuous is associated with the PEB of consumers. They found that the consumers' behavior depends on their expectations about the outcomes of their belief, which varies from person to person, and from situation to situation. For example, consumers were found to hold the belief that a BMW car model is a safe, functionally styled hybrid car with a relatively low level of gas consumption and luxury features, has more prestige, and provides experiential benefits to them, so then they develop a positive behavior towards buying that kind of car. Thus, these values promote their belief that then leads to certain behavior.

In the context of Albania, Memushi (2014) investigated the factors that might influence PEB among consumers, such as gender, age, education, values and social environment. He found that Albanian households consume luxury goods in order to maintain their social status, so this consumption is influenced by their belief, including participation in environmental activism. Thus, it could be said that conspicuous consumption of green products has a positive effect on promoting PEB and thus encourages individuals towards this type of behavior.

Table 4: Summary of Literature on Conspicuous Value and Pro-environmental belief

Researcher(s) & Year	Conspicuous Values		Finding
	Independent variables	Dependent variables	
Hye et al. (2015)	Conspicuous, utilitarian value and hedonic value	PEB	Utilitarian and hedonic values strongly affected PEB, while there was no significant impact of conspicuous value.
Kosteljik and Jan (2015)	Conspicuous, hedonic and utilitarian value	PEB	Conspicuous, hedonic and utilitarian value associated with PEB
Memushi (2014)	Gender, age, education, values and social environment	PEB	Conspicuous consumption can maintain social status; thus, this consumption associated with their belief.

Relationship pro-environmental belief (PEB) and personal norms

Liu et al. (2018) applied VBN theory to study the factors that influence public-sphere pro-environmental behavior among Mongolian college students and they found that individuals who have a moral obligation to protect the environment can be activated by their positive view of human–nature interrelationships and awareness of ecological crises. Thus, if the information is in line with one’s value orientations, pro-environmental norms and other specific pro-environmental beliefs are more likely to be generated.

Palupi and Sawitri (2018) examined the importance of pro-environmental behavior in adolescents (high school and university students). The results of some previous studies were also analysed. The result shows that human behavior (including pro-environmental behavior) is influenced by norms, beliefs, values and attitudes. Therefore, PEB has an impact on human norms in terms of protecting the environment.

Bilir and Ozbas (2017) studied how values, beliefs and norms influence high school students with regards to the conservation of biodiversity. The result shows that the beliefs of the students influence their personal norms towards the conservation of biodiversity. The study concluded that the students’ beliefs are associated with their norms and the general condition of the biophysical environment.

Table 5: Summary of Literature on Pro-environmental Belief and Personal Norms

Researcher(s) & Year	Pro-environmental Belief		Finding
	Independent variables	Dependent variables	
Liu et al. (2018)	PEB	Personal norms	Pro-environmental belief has significant relationship with people’s norms.
Palupi and Sawitri (2018)	PEB and values	Personal norms	Pro-environmental belief can shape the norms among adolescent.
Bilir and Ozbah (2017)	Belief	Personal norms	Beliefs of students shape their personal norms in conservation of biodiversity.

Relationship norms and environmental behavior

Bilir and Ozbas (2017) found the personal norms of students regarding the conservation of global and local biodiversity are high. In other words, personal norms are vital among high

school students in regard to the protection of biodiversity. Thus, the result shows that personal norms strongly influence the behavior of students in conserving biodiversity.

Ruepert et al. (2016) stated that personal norms strongly influence pro-environmental behavior at work. Their study investigated the influence of biospheric values, environmental self-identity and personal norms on environmental behavior among the employees in Europe. As expected, it was found that the employees feel morally obliged to act pro-environmentally at work and thus seem not to deny the importance of engaging in pro-environmental actions in the workplace.

Sadachar et al. (2016) studied normative, informative, and environmental apparel knowledge and the effect on green apparel consumption behavior at Midwestern University in the USA. The findings of the study are quite interesting because they show that normative values have a negative influence on the environmental behavior of the respondents. This suggests that the decision to purchase and consume products may not require approval from others.

Table 6: Summary of Literature on Personal Norms and ECB

Researcher(s) & Year	Personal Norms		Finding
	Independent variables	Dependent variables	
Bilir and Ozbas (2017)	Personal norms	Behaviour in conservation biodiversity	Personal norms strongly influence students' behaviour towards conservation of biodiversity.
Ruepert et al. (2016)	Personal norms	Pro-environmental behaviour	Personal norms have strong relationship with pro-environmental behaviour among employees at workplace.
Sadachar et al. (2016)	Normative, informative, and environmental apparel knowledge	Green apparel consumption behaviour	Normative values have a negative influence on general environmentally responsible behaviour.

Theoretical framework

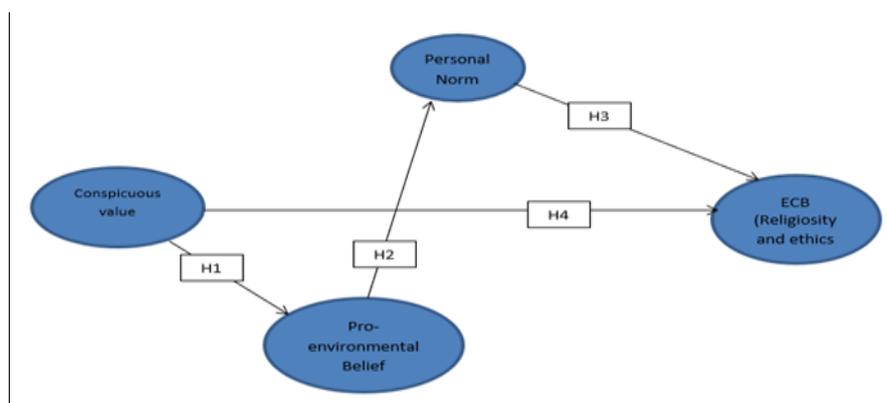


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

Hypothesis

- H1: Conspicuous value has a positive relationship with pro-environmental belief.
- H2: Pro-environmental belief has a positive relationship with personal norms
- H3: Personal norms have a positive relationship with ethical consumption behavior.
- H4: Conspicuous value has a positive relationship with ethical consumption behavior.

Methodology

Population, sampling technique and sample size

In this study, population is all Muslim consumers in Malaysia. Non-probability convenience sampling was used in this study due to simplicity and convenience. The sample size for this study is 219 and is thus adequate for further data analysis. Data was collected via online survey using a Google Form (www.googleform.com).

3. Discussion and Conclusion

Goodness of Measure: Reliability

Table 7: Reliability result

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No of items
ECB (religiosity and ethics)	0.930	7
Conspicuous	0.750	3
Pro-environmental belief	0.845	8
Personal norms	0.825	8

Table 7 shows the Cronbach's alpha for all variables are 0.750-0.930. These results indicate the questions developed by the researcher successfully measured the intended variables and meet the requirement.

Correlation between conspicuous, pro-environmental belief and personal norms with ECB (religiosity and ethics)

Table 8: Correlations

		ECB (religiosity and ethics)	conspicuous	PEB	Personal norms
ECB (religiosity and ethics)	Pearson Correlation	1	-.499**	.750**	.536**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.367	.000	.030
conspicuous	Pearson Correlation	-.499**	1	-.422**	.387**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.367		.172	.000
PEB	Pearson Correlation	.750**	-.422**	1	.580**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.172		.001
Personal norms	Pearson Correlation	.536**	.387**	.580**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.030	.000	.001	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

b. Listwise N=219

Table 8 shows that the relationship between dependent variable (religiosity and ethics) with independent variables (conspicuous, PEB, personal norms). The relationship between PEB and ECB (religiosity and ethics) shows the strong relationship ($r=0.750$), where personal norms had moderate relationship with the dependent variable ($r=0.536$). Surprisingly, conspicuous has no relationship with ECB (religiosity and ethics) and PEB which is -0.499 and -0.422 respectively and $P>0.05$.

Table 9: Results of Hypothesis Testing

No.	Path model	Beta	Std. deviation	T-statistics	P-value	Decision
H1	Conspicuous values -> Pro-environmental belief	-0.068	0.072	0.949	0.172	Not Supported
H2	Pro-environmental belief -> Personal norms	0.760	0.035	21.644	0.001	Supported
H3	Personal norms -> ECB-religiosity and ethics	0.187	0.086	2.175	0.030	Supported
H4	Conspicuous value -> ECB-religiosity and ethics	-0.005	0.015	0.34	0.367	Not Supported

In H1 it was hypothesized that conspicuous value would have a positive relationship with belief. However, the result of this study shows that conspicuous value has no relationship with pro-environmental belief. The finding of the current study suggests that education level is one of the contributors to conspicuous consumption. A lot of studies indicate that the higher the level of education that a person has, the more visibility they have in society (Wijnen, 2017). Therefore, the respondents who were conspicuous consumers were willing to spend more money on luxury goods, especially clothes, to display their professional and status and get recognition from society. The result of this study shows that there is a relationship between pro-environmental belief and personal norms. Thus, H2 is supported. the values propounded by a religion might shape and influence the norms of the people who follow that religion. In fact, it can be said that all the religions in this world encourage their followers to protect the environment. Ownership of the environment remains strictly in Allah's domain, with humans being held accountable for their treatment of divine property (Hope & Jones, 2014). Therefore, religions govern individuals' beliefs about the norms with regards to environmental issues by giving guidelines on how to be an ethical person.

Moreover, the result of this study indicates that personal norms have relationship with ethical consumption behaviour, thus H3 is supported. Social influence such as family lifestyle shapes a person's beliefs and norms regarding the conservation of the environment. Parents play an important role in shaping their children's attitude towards being a good person through their parenting style, values and behaviour, which all guide their children in all the actions they later take. In terms of clothes consumption, the respondents were influenced by their family to buy clothes with 'environmentally friendly' labels and felt morally obliged to buy only the necessary clothes. In Islam, in terms of fashion, there are many guidelines to be implemented as stated in Quran and Sunnah. For example, ".....O children of Adam, we have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness – that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember...." (Quran 7:26). Thus, their belief and norms about being an environmentally responsible person were shaped by their family culture. In H4 it was posited that conspicuous value would have a positive relationship with ethical consumption behaviour, the result shows conspicuous value has no relationship with ethical consumption behaviour. Status gains can derive not only from visibly consuming a status good, but also from being seen to purchase the product in a way that itself confers prestige. This support by Wang (2013), which stated that some consumers were triggered to seek conspicuous luxury possessions to show off their wealth or level of prestige to others, as well as the functionality of the product itself. Thus, people who spend more money on luxury products such as clothing are seen to be unethical if they cannot consume those products efficiently and are wasteful. With regards to this situation, there are many verses in the Quran that stress the concept of mindful consumption or 'zuhud'. The following several verses in the Quran highlight the concept of

reduced consumption: “.....And give the relative his right, and (also) the poor and the traveller, and do not spend wastefully. Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and ever has Satan been to his Lord ungrateful.....” (Quran 17:26-7).

Conclusion

Overall, the findings also showed that there has no relationship between conspicuous value and ethical behaviour focusing on religiosity and ethics. This may be due to the Islamic religion itself where it teaches all the followers practice simple life and avoid any waste. Islam also stress on reduced consumption whereby Muslims do not over expenses in every purchasing. In addition, pro-environmental belief influenced the personal norms of individuals with respect to their consumption behaviour. Thus, the findings of this study revealed that pro-environmental belief has an effect on an individual’s personal norms, and this leads to their ethical consumption behaviour particularly in religiosity and ethics.

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