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Framework for Ethical Decision Making:

How Various Types of Unethical Clothing Production Have Different Impacts on People

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate how various types of unethical clothing manufacturing impacts peoples' shopping attitude in different ways. The study also focused on if there was an effect on how people decided what they find more important and if there was a change in their decision making after being informed. Using an online survey, Kennesaw State University college students, faculty, staff, and community members (n=78) were conducted randomly. As a result, Fair trade ($p=0.032$), Sweatshop or Child labor ($p=0.007$), and Sustainable Material ($p=0.020$) had statistically significant differences after being informed. However, participants did have an increase in their ranking of their ethical priorities of clothing shopping habits ($p>0.05$). There were also significant differences on how different people relate and put importance of different ethical clothing concerns into their lives such as: Fair trade and gender ($p=0.031$), Healthy Work Environment and Employment ($p=0.045$), Sustainable Materials and Ethnicity ($p=0.021$), Sustainable Materials and Employment ($p=0.047$), Non-Toxic Dyes and Chemicals and Ethnicity ($p=0.019$), Locally Sourced Materials and Age ($p=0.005$), Locally Sourced Materials and Being Students or not ($p=0.005$), Animal Products and Gender ($p=0.034$), Animal Testing and Gender ($p=0.001$), and Animal Testing and Ethnicity ($p=0.034$). The results show that participants' ethical priorities of clothing shopping behaviors were relatively favorable linked with being informed. Further research with larger sample groups and more detailed training program is needed.

Framework for Ethical Decision Making: How Various Types of Unethical Clothing Production Have Different Impacts on People

Unethical clothing production includes not using fair trade, sweatshop and child labor, unhealthy work environment, not using sustainable materials, not doing waste minimization, using toxic dyes & chemicals, no energy efficiency, not handmade, not using locally sourced materials, using animal products and animal testing, and the list goes so on. Researchers have found several situational factors that prevent ethical behaviors and ethical consumption (Hughner et al., 2007; Aertsens et al., 2009; Bray et al., 2010). The main idea of this study was to find out how people have differences about the unethical consuming problem, what really caused them to consume unethically made products, or are they really informed enough of the ethical problems.

We should be considering the fact that not all people are knowledgeable about the ethical issues. Will their responses and actions change when they are more informed about the causes of unethical production? Therefore, this study focused on how people understand the ethical clothing consumption and how they act towards their understandings. Ethical models of consumer behavior suggest that the purchase intentions of these people are driven by values, norms and ethics and tend to be more socially aware (e.g. Shaw and Shui 2002 Vermeir and Verbeke 2008). In this case, will people change their decisions when they learn about the effects of the unethical products because of their values, norms, and ethics?

There is a need to understand the differences of consumer intentions, their personal values that help them build ethical product preferences (Jägel et al., 2012). Everyone have different concerns, and they put different importance on issues. When people do shopping for clothes, they will have different priorities as they relate it to themselves. “A better understanding of ethical consumption demands a deeper analysis of consumers’ ethical decision making and their ethically conscious behaviors” (Atif et al., 2013). How you give

your decisions when you are purchasing clothing is important. Thinking of who made the t-shirt, where was it made, and was it ethically made are the questions people should be considering to ask themselves before consuming the product. Ethical consumption has been considered as a result of positive ethical attitudes and intentions of consumers (Cornish, L. S., 2013). People might have different ethical attitudes towards different concerns. Therefore knowing what you care about the most is very essential in your decision-making to see whether or not you think it is ethically made.

Literature Review

Relatively concerns was taken into consideration in a research by Carrington, M., Neville, B., & Whitwell, G. (2010), where the research aimed to find the gap between the ethical purchase intentions and actual buying behavior of ethically minded consumers. The past study focused on implementation intentions, Actual Behavior Control (ABC), and Situational Context (SC). Both current and past studies intended to find an answer to how people behave and act towards their understanding of ethical consumption. Carrington et al. (2010) focused on the behaviors of already ethically minded consumer, whereas the current study approached to find an answer to strengthen those unethical consumption behaviors. Another study, similar to Carrington et al., has also stated their aim is to find the gap between attitude and intention where they examined why consumers do not shop ethically instead of why they do (Bray, J., Johns, N. & Kilburn, 2011).

A study about the motivations behind the purchase of ethical products by Cornish (2013) mentions how “ethical consumption cannot happen unless the motivations behind such consumption are better understood”. Research aimed to investigate different motivations behind the consumption of ethical products to use the information for encouraging more ethical consumption. Another research made by Ajzen and Madden (1986) was made about the theory of planned behavior. Their aim was to find the reasoned action, which they called

“theory of reasoned action”. They looked at the attitude-behavior relation and they said: “Antecedent of any behavior is intention: the stronger the intention, the more likelihood of the behavior to occur” (Ajzen and Madden, 1986).

Our study focused only on clothing consumptions’ ethics. The purpose was to try to find the cause behind the behaviors towards unethical clothing consuming. I also looked at the point where there are some motivations and categories that either prevents or helps people to purchase more ethically. In addition, the study aimed to find whether there are statistically significant differences on different categorized participants’ (gender, age, ethnicity, employment status, student) choice of importance for the unethical concerns when the explanations were given.

For a change, people need to realize how their consumption affects the world and what those unethical productions really mean. Therefore the current study focused on what unethical concerns actually mean because one of the hypothesis was that people might not be informed enough about the unethical consumption and its’ consequences, that is why they will have a change in their value of importance after having more knowledge about the ethical issues. This study did not only consider the people who already have some ethical knowledge, considering that not all people can be knowledgeable about every aspect of unethical consumption and production. That is why, this research, differently than other similar studies, have additionally looked at the differences between before being informed answers and after being informed answers.

Method

Participants

Seventy-eight people were enrolled in the survey and minimum of sixty-eight participants answered every question. Participants were randomly selected from Kennesaw State University students, faculty, staff, and community members. The age range of the

participants who completed the survey was from 18 to 74 years old, 78.21% of them were aging between 18-34. 62.34% of the participants were female, and 37.66% of them were male. 72% of the participants were students and 64% of the participants stated themselves as “White/Caucasian”, the remaining 36% were almost equally identified as “Hispanic/Latino”, “Black/African American”, “Asian”, and “other”. Also, 78% of the participants were either full-time employed, part-time employed, or self-employed (Table 1). The survey was completed from the participants voluntarily.

Materials

This cross-sectional study was made between April 2016-June 2016, with 78 people in a university in Atlanta, USA. A 20-questioned non-tracking online survey, including demographics, was distributed to Kennesaw State university students, faculty, staff and community members. The survey was distributed through various online outlets such as social media and Kennesaw State University mail system. The consent form was provided in the beginning of the survey. The survey was sent to the people randomly while the distribution of Kennesaw State University students and faculty was considered. The study used SPSS 20.0 version of the program to analyze the results.

Procedure

Participants started the online survey with a consent form, which informed them about the research. The survey should have taken about 25 minutes to complete. Since the survey was only to be conducted to gain perception of what people find more important in purchasing clothing, it did not cause any known physical or emotional discomfort. For the safety of the participants, identifiable information was not collected and none of the raw data was shared.

Participants were asked to answer some demographic questions, multiple-choice questions and ranking questions. They were asked if they prefer online or in-person shopping.

Also, they were asked to rank some ethical priorities (fair trade, no sweatshops or child labor, healthy work environments, sustainable materials, waste minimization, non-toxic dyes & chemicals, energy efficiency, handmade, locally sourced materials, no animal products, and no unethical animal testing for experiments) in order of importance to themselves from “1=the most important” to “11=the least important”. After they answered those questions, they were provided with the explanations of the choices that they have ranked in the previous question. They were asked to choose an answer with a Likert Scale from “very important” to “do not care at all” (very important, important, neutral, not important, and do not care at all). After being informed and learning the meanings of some of the concerns in ethical clothing shopping, the participants were asked to rank the same questions on ethical priorities again, in the end. The survey was designed in this way to consider if there were going to be any changes in their answers after having more knowledge about the consequences of unethical consumption and production.

Statistical Analysis

With SPSS 20.0, two tests were used to analyze this study: Chi-Square test and Paired-Samples T-Test. When comparing Independent variables and ethical priorities, Chi-Square test, when comparing the importance ranking and ethical priorities, Paired-Samples T-Test was used. *P*-values that were less than 0.05 were accepted as statistically significant. When analyzing the *p*-value while doing the Chi-Square test, the Likert scale was grouped. Important was grouped by combining “very important” and “important”, not important was grouped by combining “neutral”, “not important”, and “I do not care”.

Results

The results were designed to show if gender, ethnicity, being students or not, and whether being employed or not makes a difference in participants' answers. In general, participants' age range was mostly “18-34 (78.2%)”, ethnicity was “White/Caucasian

(64.1%)”, “Students (71.8%)”, and “Employed full-time, part-time or self (79.5%)”(Table 1). “Sweatshop and child labor” (88.8%), and “Healthy Work Environment” (85.9%) was chosen as “very important” and “important”, whereas handmade was the least importance that the participants put (34.8%). Also, 71.8% of the participants preferred in-person shopping (Table 2).

As a result, there have been statistically significant relations between the independent variables (gender, age, ethnicity, student or not student, employment, online or in-person shopping) and the ethical priorities. The study found that “fair trade” and “gender” had statistically significant relation. Females (79.5%), comparing to males (55.6%) found fair trade significantly more important ($p=0.031$). The statistically significant relation between “healthy work environment” and “employment” showed that people who are “part-time workers” (92%) and “unemployed” (100%), compared to “full-time workers” (75%), significantly find more importance on healthy work environment ($p=0.045$). “Sustainable materials” and “ethnicity” had a significant relation between each other. “Asian” (100%), “White” (80.4%), “African” (28.6%) are significantly concerned about sustainable materials ($p=0.006$). The significant relation between “sustainable materials” and “employment” showed that the “part-time workers” (80%) and “unemployed” (92.9%), compared to “full-time workers” (56.2%) find significantly more importance on “sustainable materials” ($p=0.021$). “Minimize waste” and “ethnicity” showed a significant relation by, “Asian” (83.3%), “White” (80.4%), and “African” (28.6%) being concerned about waste minimization ($p=0.047$). The significant relation between “non-toxic dyes and chemicals” and “ethnicity” presented that “Asian” (83.3%), “White” (89.1%), “African” (71.4%), and “Others” (33.3%) were significantly concerned about the use of non-toxic dyes and chemicals in clothing production ($p=0.019$). “Locally sourced materials” and “age” showed statistically significance in their relation. The ages between “18-25” (25%) and “45 and above” (68.8%)

were more concerned about it ($p=0.005$). At the same time, I found a significant relation between “locally sourced materials” and “student or not”, which showed that “students” (35.5%), compared to “nonstudents” (45.5%) were significantly concerned more ($p=0.005$). The use of “animal products” and “gender” had statistically significant relation. Compared to “males” (14.8%), “females” (51.1%) were significantly more concerned about using animal products in factories ($p=0.002$). The statistically significant relation between “animal testing” and “gender” showed that compared to “males” (37.0%), “females” (75.6%) were significantly more concerned about the use of animal testing ($p=0.001$). “Animal testing” and “ethnicity” also had statistically significant relationship. While “White” (73.9%), “African” (42.9%), and “Asian” (50%) were more concerned, “Others” (16.7%) were significantly less concerned about the use of animal testing ($p=0.034$) (Table 3).

In conclusion, the study found significant differences between some of the demographics and the ethical priorities. Also, there was an increase in all of the ethical priority choices after being informed, however, only Fair trade ($p=0.032$), Sweatshop and child labor ($p=0.007$), and Sustainable materials ($p=0.020$) had statistically significant differences in pre- and post-test (Table 4).

Discussion

The analysis of the study aimed to show that people value different issues differently and there would be changes in peoples’ answers after they were being informed. The results showed that the participants did have an increase in their ranking on the importance of their ethical priorities of clothing shopping habits after being informed. However, only Fair trade ($p=0.032$), Sweatshop or Child labor ($p=0.007$), and Sustainable Material ($p=0.020$) had statistically significant differences (Table 4.). At the same time, the study showed significant differences between how different people relate and put importance on the different ethical clothing concerns. There might be some situations where it prevents people to do ethical

shopping and the study was designed to find if those issues have significant impact on consumptions. One of the empirical evidence suggests that while increasing numbers of consumers are motivated by the values of being an ethical consumer, a change in consumption behavior is much less apparent (Auger and Devinney, 2007; Belk et al., 2005; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Follows and Jobber, 2000; Shaw et al., 2007). Also, one recent study, found that while 30% of consumers stated that they would purchase ethically, only 3% actually do (Futerra, 2005, p. 92). The results showed that the participants have an intend to do ethical shopping as this research showed and prior did, however everyone had different factors that effected their decisions.

Looking at the general results, the study showed that “sweatshop and child labor” was the most to be chosen as a “very important” issue when they were informed about it (60.6%). At the same time, the most percentage on the “I do not care” choice was on the use of “animal products” (12.5%)(Table 2). There was no significant relation between the ethical priorities and online or in-person shopping (Table 3). The most significant relation value was found on “using animal testing” and “gender” ($p=0.001$)(Table 3). From this result, it can concluded that there is a difference on male and female priorities on the use of animal testing on clothing manufacturing. Furthermore, the most significant difference on before being informed and after being informed ranking results is “sweatshop and child labor” ($p=0.007$), meaning that the biggest increase on finding more importance on the ethical issue was on “sweatshop and child labor” (Table 4).

Limitations of the study

As a limitation of this study, it can be determined that the explanations of the ethical clothing shopping priorities might not be explanatory and informative enough. The size of the participants was too small to generalize gender, age, ethnicity, employment status, and students at Kennesaw State University.

Conclusion and Future Study

It is concluded that there are many different reasons why different people have different choices. Participants had different factors that effected their decisions. Also, with being informed, people did make different decisions. This study demonstrated that explanations were effective in participants' opinion and perception of ethical priorities on purchase intentions. The explanations of the ethical issues were taught to the participants in a very limited time. Even then, I found significant differences on their responses, which show that there is a hope to create differences by educating people in more common societal settings. Educating is very important because as far as there is a demand for unethically produced clothes, it is hard for the change to occur. Jägel et al. (2012) mentions that the study's results show that having more consumers is related to the ethical clothing consumption.

In order to examine the difference between informed people's decisions and uninformed people's decisions, it is necessary to see if the participants were able to understand the importance of ethical consumption in clothing fully and relate it to themselves, and it is necessary to not limit the findings with only online survey. The future study can focus more about the definitions and explanations of the concerns differently; such as finding a way to effect people better. Also, the potential study can recruit from different universities and from different jobs, so that the results can be generalized better.

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Tables

Table 1: Characteristics of the Participants

CHARACTERISTICS		n	%
Gender	Male	29	37.7
	Female	48	62.3
Age group (years)	18-24	34	43.6
	25-34	27	34.6
	35-44	9	11.5
	≥45	8	10.2
Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	50	64.1
	Hispanic/Latino	7	8.9
	Black/African American	8	10.3
	Asian	7	8.9
	Other	6	7.7
Being student or not	Student	56	71.8
	Not student	22	28.2
Employment Status	Employed full-time (30+ h/week)	36	46.2
	Employed part-time	25	32.1
	Unemployed	16	20.5
	Self-employed	1	1.3

Table 2: Importance of the Ethical Priorities While Given Definitions of Each

Ethical Priorities	Very important (%)	Important (%)	Neutral (%)	Not important (%)	I don't care (%)
Fair trade	23.9	46.5	22.5	2.8	4.2
Sweatshop	60.6	28.2	7.0	2.8	1.4
Healthy Work Environment	35.2	50.7	11.3	0.0	2.8
Sustainable materials	28.2	43.7	22.5	2.8	2.8
Waste Minimization	34.7	40.3	22.2	0.0	2.8
Non-toxic dyes and chemicals	56.9	25.0	15.3	1.4	1.4
Energy efficiency	12.5	45.8	33.3	5.6	2.8
Handmade	5.6	29.2	29.2	27.8	8.3
Locally Sourced Materials	15.3	30.1	31.9	12.5	9.7
Using Animal Products	22.2	15.3	30.6	19.4	12.5
Using Animal Testing	37.5	23.6	29.2	6.9	2.8

Table 3: P value of ethical priorities regarding gender, age, ethnicity, education status, employment status, and online shopping attitude

Ethical Priorities	Gender <i>p</i>	Age <i>p</i>	Ethnicity <i>p</i>	Student <i>p</i>	Employment <i>p</i>	Online Shopping <i>p</i>
Fair trade	0.031*	0.880	0.474	0.429	0.693	0.070

Sweatshop	0.355	0.568	0.918	0.174	0.147	0.599
Healthy Work Environment	0.307	0.562	0.609	0.332	0.045*	0.579
Sustainable materials	0.481	0.433	0.006*	0.179	0.021*	0.103
Waste Minimization	0.244	0.823	0.047*	0.225	0.058	0.611
Non-toxic dyes and chemicals	0.341	0.275	0.019*	0.566	0.382	0.483
Energy efficiency	0.268	0.276	0.117	0.345	0.957	0.266
Handmade	0.472	0.342	0.265	0.550	0.903	0.375
Locally Sourced Materials	0.335	0.005*	0.520	0.005*	0.085	0.571
Using Animal Products	0.002*	0.801	0.470	0.424	0.622	0.296
Using Animal Testing	0.001*	0.401	0.034*	0.365	0.716	0.072

*P values that are significant ($p < 0.05$).

*Important was grouped by combining “very important” and “important”. Not important was grouped by combining “neutral”, “not important”, and “I do not care”.

ETHICAL PRIORITIES	Importance Ranking												p
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Fair trade	Pre	7.9	10.5	9.2	7.9	6.6	14.5	6.6	13.2	13.2	5.3	5.3	0.032*
	Post	8.8	11.8	13.2	5.9	16.2	11.8	4.4	13.2	8.8	1.5	4.4	
Sweatshop and Child Labor	Pre	34.2	13.2	14.5	14.5	6.6	2.6	2.6	1.3	2.6	1.3	6.6	0.007*
	Post	32.4	23.5	17.6	10.3	1.5	2.9	4.4	2.9	-	1.5	2.9	
Healthy Work Environment	Pre	1.3	13.2	18.4	18.4	14.5	9.2	10.5	5.3	6.6	2.6	-	0.260
	Post	-	16.2	19.1	22.1	11.8	13.2	7.4	1.5	5.9		2.9	
Sustainable Materials	Pre	6.6	7.9	14.5	9.2	11.8	14.5	10.5	11.8	11.8	-	1.3	0.020*
	Post	4.4	4.4	7.4	10.3	16.2	16.2	13.2	13.2	7.4	7.4	-	
Waste Minimization	Pre	2.6	5.3	6.6	9.2	15.8	14.5	17.1	11.8	9.2	7.9	-	0.436
	Post	1.5	4.4	11.8	14.7	14.7	16.2	16.2	5.9	7.4	7.4	-	
Non-toxic Dyes and Chemicals	Pre	14.5	11.8	9.2	15.8	11.8	13.2	13.2	5.3	3.9	1.3	-	0.110
	Post	19.1	5.9	5.9	14.7	14.7	17.6	5.9	7.4	8.8	-	-	
Energy Efficiency	Pre	-	6.6	2.6	3.9	9.2	11.8	19.7	17.1	9.2	13.2	6.6	0.109
	Post	-	2.9	2.9	4.4	7.4	8.8	19.1	20.6	16.2	4.4	13.2	
Handmade	Pre	9.2	2.6	2.6	2.6	9.2	3.9	6.6	9.2	6.6	14.5	32.9	0.130
	Post	7.4	1.5	5.9	-	5.9	2.9	5.9	13.2	8.8	17.6	30.9	
Locally Sourced Materials	Pre	3.9	2.6	5.3	3.9	5.3	1.3	7.9	14.5	19.7	19.7	15.8	0.823
	Post	2.9	4.4	2.9	7.4	2.9	2.9	14.7	10.3	26.5	17.6	7.4	

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Using Animal Products	Pre	7.9	14.5	9.2	3.9	7.9	1.3	2.6	5.3	10.5	19.7	17.1	0.305
	Post	10.3	11.8	5.9	2.9	4.4	2.9	4.4	4.4	5.9	29.4	17.6	
Using Animal Testing	Pre	11.8	11.8	7.9	10.5	1.3	13.2	2.6	5.3	6.6	14.5	14.5	0.900
	Post	13.2	13.2	7.4	7.4	4.4	4.4	4.4	7.4	4.4	10.3	23.5	

**P* values that are significant ($p < 0.05$).

**76 participants responded the pre-question, 68 participants responded post-question.

***1 being the most important, 11 being the least important.

****Paired-Samples T-test was used.