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Sustainable Apparel Consumption: Personal Norms, CSR Expectations, and Hedonic vs. Utilitarian Shopping Value

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Abstract: The sustainable consumption trend is gaining popularity among Gen Z. Guided by the environmental awareness construct, Norm Activation Model, corporate social responsibility paradigm, and shopping value perspective, this study aims to assess how environmental awareness is connected to consumer evaluations of their personal consumption behavior and corporate social responsibility to help explain their sustainable apparel purchase intention, in conjunction with consumer shopping motivation. An online survey was conducted with a group of Gen Z consumers (N = 192). The results from testing the conceptual model indicated that environmental awareness was positively linked to personal norms and CSR expectations, both of which were similarly related to green purchase intentions. While hedonic and utilitarian shopping value was positively associated with CSR expectations, they were both negative predictors of green purchase intentions. This study is the first to integrate environmental ethics, personal ethics, expectations of corporate ethics, and hedonic vs. utilitarian consumption value to better understand the attitude–behavior gap in sustainable apparel purchase decision-making.

Keywords: sustainable apparel consumption; corporate social responsibility; environmental awareness; personal norms; norm activation model; hedonic vs. utilitarian value



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1. Introduction

The negative environmental footprint of the apparel industry has garnered more media scrutiny of late, owing to the popularity of fast fashion. Fast fashion is a business model that rapidly produces and distributes trendy affordable apparel, which contributes to both a wasteful and a negative impact on the environment [1]. According to a United Nations study [2], the apparel industry outputted approximately 10% of global carbon dioxide and 20% of global water waste. Market research suggested that 67% of U.S. consumers reportedly considered environmental sustainability when making apparel purchase decisions [3]. As the apparel industry meets an essential consumption need in society and its harmful environmental outcomes are glaring, the empirical literature based on theory-driven scholarly research remains limited [4].

The concept of sustainable consumption broadly refers to consuming goods and services that are produced through processes that minimize the waste of natural resources, the use of toxic materials, and the production of environmental pollutants [5]. This consumption belief has also turned into a movement that is gaining strength in society, especially among the Generation Z [6,7]. Gen Z refers to those who were born between 1997 and 2012 [8]. This generation is also known as the “TikTok” generation, who often aligns their consumption choices with their personal, social, and environmental values [6]. According to a recent study of U.S. consumers, 54% of Gen Z indicated a willingness to pay a 10% premium for sustainable products, outpacing both Millennials (50%; born between 1981 and 1996) and Generation X (34%; born between 1965 and 1980) [9].

Against this backdrop, a sustainable fashion trend has been on the rise, as the demand for environmentally friendly clothes or the reduction of clothing waste has increased

among consumers [10,11]. In particular, many young consumers who became aware of the environmental impact of their apparel consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic have tried to make their purchase behavior more ethical; they also expect the apparel industry to practice social responsibility to help reduce the environmental damage it has produced [3]. As the corporate social responsibility perspective describes an organization's actions and policies that meet stakeholders' expectations of environmental, ethical, philanthropic, and economic responsibilities [12,13], extant research has yet to examine such expectations in a sustainable apparel consumption context.

From a social psychological perspective, the Norm Activation Model proposed by Schwartz [14] describes the psychological process of shaping one's altruistic behaviors toward the natural environment. This model has been widely applied to study different pro-environmental activities, but not green apparel purchase behavior. Likewise, as utilitarian and hedonic shopping value is a key theoretical construct for explaining the purchase decision-making process [15], existing research has not investigated how consumers' shopping value is related to sustainable apparel purchase intention. Specifically, the utilitarian value can involve choosing products at an affordable price to meet functionality-oriented shopping needs; the hedonic value can reflect seeking products that gratify emotion-oriented shopping needs.

The current study aims to fill these literature gaps by exploring the cognitive and affective factors that may influence sustainable apparel consumption with an innovative conceptual approach. Specifically, it will examine a theoretical framework adapted from the Norm Activation Model, corporate social responsibility perspective, and shopping value construct. This framework links awareness of environmental consequences, personal behavioral norms, attributions of corporate social responsibility, and hedonic vs. utilitarian value to sustainable apparel purchase intention. This study contributes to the literature by being the first to consider the theoretical link between awareness of apparel product sustainability and personal ethical consumption behavior. It also provides an initial theoretical exploration into how these two cognitive factors are connected to the consumer expectation of sustainable corporate behavior in conjunction with shopping value and green apparel purchase intention.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Environmental Awareness and Personal Norms

The concept of environmental awareness, or individual concerns for and knowledge of their impact on the environment, is often considered an initial step for behavioral changes in a way that could contribute to protecting the environment [16,17]. Past research has tested environmental awareness as one of the key premises of individual adoption of pro-environmental behaviors [17,18]. Specifically, the relationship between individual awareness of environmental issues and their moral obligation to act in a way that could protect the environment has been established by a large number of past studies [19,20].

According to the Norm Activation Model (NAM), the activation of personal norms, which embodies the feeling of a "moral obligation to perform or refrain from specific actions [21] (p. 191)", is the key driver of prosocial intentions and behavior [22–25]. For example, Eriksson et al. [26] examined the factors that could lead to reduced private car use and the acceptance of public transportation use for travel. Their findings indicated that awareness of the problems caused by air pollution from private car use is positively related to personal norms for reducing car use and the willingness to consider using public transportation.

Additional research also confirmed that personal norms mediated problem awareness and the willingness to reduce personal car use [20]. Esfandiar et al. [19] explored the factors that encourage individuals' binning behaviors in national parks to solve the litter management issue. These results suggested a strong relationship between awareness of environmental consequences and personal behavior norms, which was again the strongest determinant of binning behavior.

The existing literature has not examined how environmental awareness may be associated with perceived personal norms in the context of sustainable apparel consumption decision-making. By extending the relevant theoretical link validated in the relevant studies discussed above, the current study expects to find a positive relationship between an individual's awareness of the apparel industry's harmful environmental impacts and moral obligation to evaluate the sustainability of fashion products.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Environmental awareness will be positively related to personal norms.*

2.2. Personal Norms and Purchase Intentions

Clothing purchases fulfill one of the three basic human consumption needs, which are food, housing, and raiment [27]. As consumers have become more environmentally aware in recent years [28], they have also increased their adoption of more sustainable lifestyles [29]. The Millennials and Gen Z have a stronger interest in sustainability than their counterparts in prior generations; they have become the primary consumers of apparel products that are made with environmentally friendly materials, such as recycled fabrics [30]. Even so, the best way to achieve sustainability in apparel consumption is to reduce the purchase of new products [31,32]. Making consumers aware of how to choose apparel products that are less harmful to the environment is a more achievable sustainability goal.

As aforementioned, the NAM [14] has been actively applied by previous research to examine individuals' engagement in environmentally friendly behaviors, such as recycling [33] and decision-making related to environmental protection [34]. Savari et al. [25] empirically demonstrated that one's moral obligation (or NAM) to combat the dehydration of farms had a significant positive relationship with farmers' water conservation behavior. Kim and Seock [35] tested the NAM and found that bio-altruistic and egoistic values had a positive relationship with personal norms, which were positively and directly associated with purchase behavior. Onwezen et al.'s [24] work integrated the NAM and the Theory of Planned Behavior; their findings also suggested that personal norms had a direct effect on behavioral intentions.

Based on the thesis of the personal norms construct [36] and its theoretical relevance to the green apparel context, this study defines personal norms as how consumers evaluate sustainability out of their moral obligation when shopping for clothing. As established by the previous literature, this study anticipates finding a positive relationship between an individual's perceived moral obligation via personal norms to act with prosocial intentions [14]. To validate this assumption, a hypothesis is postulated below.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Personal norms will be positively related to sustainable purchase intentions.*

2.3. Personal Norms, Environmental Awareness, and CSR Expectations

According to the framework of the NAM, an awareness of consequences and ascription of responsibility can also be important drivers for prosocial behavior [37]. Per the NAM, the concept of "awareness of consequences" refers to "whether someone is aware of the negative consequences for others or for other things one values when not acting prosocially", while the "ascription of responsibility" construct refers to "feelings of responsibility for the negative consequences of not acting prosocially" [37] (p. 426). Extending the original conceptual scope of the NAM, the current study conceptualizes the former as consumer awareness of environmental consequences created by the apparel industry and the latter as their ascription of corporate responsibility associated with those consequences.

This conceptualization is an innovative approach to examine consumer demand for corporate social responsibility. In response to increased consumer awareness, corporations have tried to distinguish themselves from competitors [38] by engaging in CSR activities. The CSR paradigm, as defined above [15,16], emphasizes that corporations have societal obligations that they need to fulfill to advance the welfare of society, aside from advancing

their own company interest [39]. In the current study context, CSR will refer to apparel industry/companies' sustainability practices, including producing green apparel products in a sustainable approach to reduce their environmental impact and at an affordable price, among others.

Research has found that consumers who hold high self-transcendent values and connect themselves to social issues more than others showed higher expectations for the ethical–philanthropic dimension of CSR [40]. While expectations can be defined as consumer needs and wants expressed based on what they think companies should do (Parasuraman et al., 1988), the ethical–philanthropic dimension of CSR refers to the corporate activity specifically related to ethical or moral standards [40]. In essence, consumers' own ecological awareness of and ethical environmental behavioral standard can contribute to their expectation and acceptance of CSR [41].

While it is evident that CSR activities are designed to appeal to consumers' call for sustainability [42], research that explored how personal environmental awareness and environmentally ethical behavior may be linked to their expectations for CSR activities is lacking [43]. To explore these potential theoretical links, the current study assumes that for those consumers who have adopted an ethical norm for green clothing consumption, they will also expect corporations to adopt ethical practices to reduce their environmental harm (e.g., reducing the emission of chemical pollutants). It is also anticipated that consumers' environmental awareness will be positively related to their expectations for the industry to engage in CSR activities to practice environmental sustainability (e.g., reducing the waste of natural resources). These two theoretical propositions will be tested in the hypotheses below.

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Personal norms will be positively related to CSR expectations.*

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Environmental awareness will be positively related to CSR expectations.*

2.4. CSR Expectations and Consumption Intentions

Prior work has suggested that expectations that consumers hold toward a corporation could affect how they think about its moral obligation in relation to its social responsibility on important environmental issues. For instance, Podnar and Golob [44] revealed that customer expectations of the ethical–philanthropic dimension of CSR were positively associated with their support for companies' socially responsible behavior. Öztay and Birinc [45] demonstrated that consumers' CSR perceptions about a company had a significant positive relationship with sustainable consumption behavior; such perceptions also included the sub-dimensions of CSR expectations of legal, voluntary, and employee responsibility.

Additional research has also shown that a company's voluntary CSR actions can improve its brand image and consumer trust, which can lead to increased consumer loyalty [46]. Similarly, Lee and Lin [47] found that a brand's CSR image was related to perceptions of brand innovativeness, consumer-brand identification, and attitude toward the brand. Kong et al.'s [48] study further indicated that brand attitude mediated the relationship between perceived sustainability of an apparel product and purchase intention. These authors also revealed that consumer trust in a brand increased their expectations of the brand to be ethical and transparent.

Moreover, as CSR activities can promote a company's image and positive consumer attitude [47], they can also significantly influence the subsequent buying intentions. For instance, consumer knowledge of CSR was found to influence their assessment of companies, products, and purchase intentions [49]. Testing the role of CSR in the context of purchase intention toward environmentally friendly sneakers, Huang et al. [50] reported that CSR positively predicted brand image; brand image was a significant predictor of consumer attitude, which predicted purchase intention.

Elucidating from the established conceptual link between consumer expectations of sustainable CSR and their response to green product purchase decision-making, it is

logical to assume that consumers' CSR expectations of the apparel industry (e.g., sourcing sustainable materials and adopting an environmentally responsible production process) will be related to their sustainable apparel purchase intention. To verify this theoretical assumption, a hypothesis is proposed below.

Hypothesis (H5). *CSR expectations will be positively related to sustainable purchase intentions.*

2.5. Shopping Value, CSR Expectations, and Consumption Intentions

The marketing literature has established that individuals are motivated by both hedonic value (an experiential motivation) and utilitarian value (an instrumental motivation) when they seek product information for purchase decision-making [51]. According to Hirschman and Holbrook [21], hedonic shopping value, or the affective experience of shopping behavior, can reflect emotion-oriented factors such as pleasure, feeling, aesthetics, emotions, and enjoyment. By comparison, according to Voss et al. [52], the utilitarian shopping value, or the cognitive dimension of shopping behavior, is associated with functionality or practical-orientated factors.

As for the shopping value associated apparel products, prior research has examined the motivating factors and barriers that can influence consumer engagement in sustainable fashion consumption behaviors [32]. For example, both fashion styles and high prices of sustainable apparel, alongside unfamiliarity with sustainable brands, could contribute to the so-called attitude–behavior gap [48,53]. Other research also reported that the fashionability [54,55] and price of the product were found to influence consumers' sustainable purchase decision-making [54,56]. These findings thus suggest that both fashion style, which is a hedonic value, and price, which is a utilitarian value, are important factors influencing sustainable apparel purchase decision-making.

2.5.1. Hedonic Value

Fashion consumption is first and foremost about consumers accepting the style that it offers [57]. This hedonic shopping value has been supported by past research, which demonstrates that consumers will not purchase green fashion, unless it meets their aesthetic needs, functional objectives, and financial criteria [58]. Criticism has also been levied against the apparel industry, owing to its neglect to create sustainable products that appeal to consumer desire for enjoying fashion trends and innovative styles [59]. CSR practice notwithstanding, as apparel purchasing meets one of the basic human consumption needs [27], it is natural for consumers to expect satisfaction from their fashion shopping experience.

Among environmentally aware consumers, the greenwashing practice [60] is a factor that could violate their CSR expectations for companies that market “less than green” fashion products under the “green” banner for profit. In particular, the authenticity of the apparel industry's claims of sourcing sustainable raw materials could also raise concerns, when it fails to disclose reliable or validated source data [61,62]. When the greenwashing practice is further compounded by fashion companies' failure to be transparent with their environmental practices [63], this could further discredit their CSR practices and violate consumers' CSR expectations.

As fashionability [57–59] or style factor is considered a hedonic value above, it is assumed that those environmentally aware and hedonic value-seeking consumers may also have higher CSR expectations of reducing the industry's negative environmental impacts. As no prior work has examined hedonic value in the sustainable CSR context, a research question (instead of a hypothesis) is posed below to explore how the hedonic style factor may be linked to consumers' CSR expectations.

Research Question (RQ1). Will the style factor be positively related to CSR expectations?

Preliminary research on the relationship between hedonic value and the actual consumption of sustainable products has shown contradictory results in terms of valence [64,65]. For example, Kumar and Yadav [64] found that hedonic motivation and green purchase

intention were positively associated with each other. These authors believed that the increasing popularity of green apparel, along with its endorsement by celebrities, makes green apparel more aspirational for consumers, offering greater enjoyment for consumers as well [64].

Findings from Razzaq et al. [65] suggested otherwise, as they revealed that consumers who put a great emphasis on hedonic shopping value were reluctant to engage in sustainable fashion consumption. Their rationale stemmed from the conventional beliefs of hedonism being linked with negative emotional aspects such as instant gratification, pleasure, joy, and wasteful consumption [66]. These results were in line with McNeill and Moore's [67] findings from a qualitative study, describing how those who regarded "newness" in fashion as promoting self-identity demonstrated little prospect as consumers of sustainable fashion.

Based on the mixed findings reported in the empirical literature above, a research question (instead of hypothesis) is proposed to further understand whether the hedonic value in fashion style will be related to sustainable consumption intentions below.

Research Question (RQ2). Will the style factor be significantly related to sustainable consumption intention?

2.5.2. Utilitarian Value

Price is a key attribute of utilitarian shopping value because, for the majority of consumers, price is the most pivotal factor that affects consumer decision-making [68]. Utilitarian value is considered a quintessential factor of purchase behavior [69], as traditional economic theories regard humans as rational actors who manage risks by maximizing the expected utility of behavioral outcomes [70]. As elaborated earlier in the empirical evidence, clothing price alongside fashion style are two essential cognitive and affective factors that can influence consumer evaluation of sustainable apparel products and purchase intentions [71].

Previous research has established that more environmentally aware consumers may also expect companies to practice social responsibility by producing more environmentally sustainable products [41]. For example, D'Souza et al. [72] empirically demonstrated that consumers formed a negative perception towards green products when they perceived the company that produced them to be more concerned about profitability than reducing pollution and implementing regulatory protection. This could be particularly true for those consumers who pay a premium price to purchase a green product, with the expectation that the product has been produced through an environmentally sustainable practice.

Similarly, Sana [73] also revealed that consumers were more attracted to green products when they considered the price of the product as fair and when the company was seen to be actively engaged in CSR activities. Additional research pointed out that luxury fashion brands were found to have a stronger positive relationship with eco-friendly product attributes than low- or high-fashion brands. In other words, price appears to be linked to consumers' CSR expectations toward a brand. Other researchers reported that the sustainability image associated with non-luxury and luxury fashion brands could derive different responses, with consumers viewing a good match between non-luxury fashion brands and sustainability attributes but a mismatch for luxury fashion brands [48].

As the initial empirical literature has evidenced an inconsistent direction of the conceptual link between the utilitarian shopping value via the price factor and consumer expectations of CSR, a research question (instead of a hypothesis) is proposed to further explore this theoretical connection below.

Research Question (RQ3). Will the price factor be significantly related to CSR expectations?

Consumers' utilitarian shopping value can focus on lowering the monetary cost—along with reducing the environmental cost—associated with acquiring apparel products. For example, Kumar and Yadav [64] found a positive relationship between utilitarian motivation and green purchase intention, while demonstrating the concepts related to

sustainable fashion—such as slow fashion and collaborative consumption—as part of the multi-dimensional utilitarian aspects. By definition, slow fashion emphasizes fashion products’ durability and endurance [74], while collaborative consumption implies sharing, exchanging, and renting of products and services [75]. According to Binninger et al. [76] (p. 978), utilitarian motives are at “the heart of collaborative consumption” which can lend to a more sustainable consumption model.

As price can be a key factor for consumers’ purchase decision-making of green fashion products [56], prior research on the effect of price on green product consumption has produced mixed findings. For example, Bray et al.’s [77] focus group study indicated that more participants cared about financial values over ethical values, as they reported avoiding purchasing ethical products at the supermarket after realizing the inflated weekly shopping cost. Alternatively, De Medeiros et al. [78] reported that consumers were willing to pay a 10% premium for green products. Chekima et al. [79] also did not find the premium price as the main barrier to green product consumption, as they failed to evidence a significant moderating effect of price on the relationship between purchase motivational factors and green consumption intentions.

As luxury and non-luxury apparel products are priced very differently, consumer acceptance of price points may also differ widely. Considering the inconsistent empirical findings associated with the relationship between the utilitarian price factor and purchase decision-making, a research question (instead of a hypothesis) is tested below to further explore the conceptual link in question here.

Research Question (RQ4). Will the price factor be significantly related to sustainable consumption intention?

2.6. Proposed Conceptual Model

To present the interrelations between all the theoretical constructs tested in the proposed research hypotheses and questions, a conceptual model is proposed in Figure 1 below. Specifically, this model proposes that consumer awareness of the environmental harm contributed by the apparel industry (H1) will be associated with their personal ethical norms on apparel consumption. Both personal norms (H3) and environmental awareness (H4) will also be connected to consumer expectations of apparel companies living up to their corporate social responsibility (CSR) on environmental sustainability. Personal norms and CSR expectations are also expected to be linked to sustainable purchase intentions. In addition, consumers’ hedonic shopping value via the style factor and utilitarian shopping value via the price factor are anticipated to be affiliated with their CSR expectations as well as their sustainable purchase intentions.

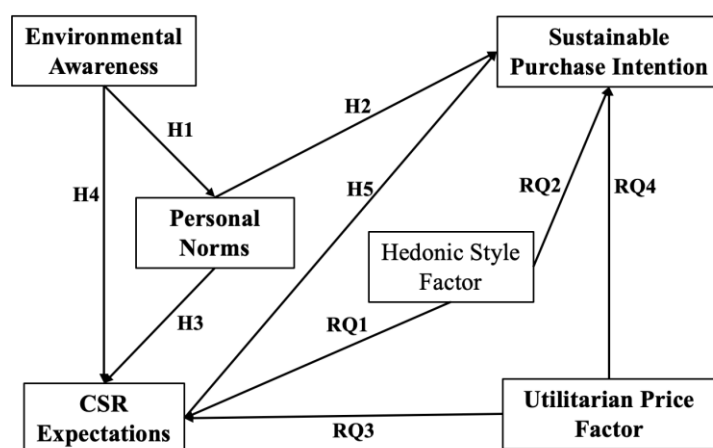


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model.

3. Materials and Methods

An online survey was conducted with a college student population at a northeastern university in the U.S., after receiving the IRB approval in December 2021. Students enrolled in a multi-section general education course with a cross-section of academic majors across the university comprised the sampling unit for the study. Specifically, students were invited to participate in the study and offered course credit for their time/effort, through a study announcement made by the course coordinator. Interested students were instructed to first review the informed consent description posted by the coordinating instructor on the course webpage, before making a participation decision. After confirming participation consent, student participants were allowed to log in to the study webpage to respond to the survey during a two-week period. After completing data collection, data cleaning was conducted and 8 cases with incomplete answers and response errors were removed.

The final study sample yielded 192 valid cases. In terms of the sample's characteristics, study participants consisted of 40.6% males, 58.9% females, and 0.5% other gender. The breakdown of participants' ages in percentage and years was as follows: 15.6% at 18, 46.9% at 19, 20.3% at 20, 15.1% at 21, 1.04% at 22, and 1.04% at 23; average participant age was 19.42 (SD = 1.04). The racial/ethnic composition of the sample indicated the following: 63.5% White, 6.3% Black or African American, 9.4% Hispanic or Latino, 16.7% Asian, 3.2% mixed race, and 1% others.

3.1. Procedure and Definitions

Study participants, after logging on to the survey webpage, were first presented with a definition of sustainable fashion and a description of the different source materials for manufacturing more environmentally sustainable clothing products. The conceptual and operational definitions for each variable tested in this study are provided below. An exploratory factor analysis was first conducted to confirm the conceptual dimensions for all variables. All variables were then subject to a confirmatory factor analysis to ascertain measurement validity, followed by a Cronbach's alpha test to establish measurement reliability. All variables were measured on a Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Disagree nor Agree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree).

Personal norms illustrate how consumers evaluate environmental sustainability when clothes shopping, based on three items adapted from Tran et al. [80]. Sample items included "When shopping for clothes, I pay attention to if the material can be recycled" and "When shopping for clothes, I pay attention to if the material can be harmful to the environment" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85).

Environmental awareness refers to consumer awareness of the fashion industry's ethical challenges associated with the environmental harm it has created. This variable was measured by four original items. Sample items included "I'm aware that the fashion industry causes water pollution in the environment" and "I'm aware that the fashion industry contributes to chemical pollution in the environment" ($\alpha = 0.93$).

CSR expectations describes consumer attribution of corporate responsibility and expectations of how fashion companies should act in an environmentally responsible manner. This construct was assessed by five items adopted from the work of Diddi and Niehm [18], including "I would like to see that fashion brand make clothes using fewer resources, e.g., power, water, materials" and "I would like to see that fashion brands create initiatives to help people recycle their old clothes" ($\alpha = 0.93$).

Hedonic value, reflected by the style factor of apparel shopping, was gauged by four items adapted from Arnold and Reynolds' [81] study. Example items were "When shopping for clothes, I pay attention to the product design" and "When shopping for clothes, I shop for the products which make me look stylish." One item was removed to improve the reliability of the composite variable ($\alpha = 0.80$).

Utilitarian value, represented by the price factor of apparel shopping, contained three items adapted from Arnold and Reynolds [81]. Sample items included "When shopping

for clothes, I pay attention to whether the price is reasonable” and “When shopping for clothes, I pay attention to whether the products have a discounted price” ($\alpha = 0.87$).

Sustainable purchase intention measures how consumers intend to make sustainable clothes shopping decisions, based on five items adapted from Chi [82]. Sample items included “I would be more likely to buy clothes from companies that I know are committed to making sustainable apparel sustainability” and “I would be willing to pay more for the same clothing item, if it is made in a sustainable way” ($\alpha = 0.83$).

3.2. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed to present the mean and standard deviation for each variable. Zero-order correlations were calculated to demonstrate the interrelations between all variables. A structural equation model analysis (using AMOS 29) was performed via a measurement model and a path model to test all the hypotheses and research questions shown in the proposed conceptual model.

4. Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients for all variables. The variable with the highest mean value was personal norms ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.88$), while the lowest mean score was attributed to the utilitarian value price factor ($M = 1.80$, $SD = 0.71$). All variables tested in a research hypothesis or question demonstrated statistically significant associations at $p \leq 0.01$ level, except for the correlations between purchase intention and the two shopping value indicators, and between personal norms and CSR expectations.

Table 1. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Purchase Intention	--					
2. Environmental Awareness	0.29 **					
3. Personal Norms	0.29 **	0.31 **				
4. CSR Expectations	0.55 **	0.30 **	0.07			
5. Hedonic Value (Style)	0.22 **	0.11	0.16 *	0.25 **		
6. Utilitarian Value (Price)	0.10	0.19 **	0.10	0.17 *	0.26 **	--
<i>M</i>	2.47	2.40	3.23	1.86	2.15	1.80
<i>SD</i>	0.68	0.91	0.88	0.73	0.62	0.71

** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed), * $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed).

To test the research hypotheses and questions, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed to examine the validity of the measurement model. The modeling results provided an acceptable fit: $\chi^2 = 331.83$, $p < 0.001$; CMIN/DF = 1.73; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.94; IFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.062. Following that, a path analysis was also conducted to verify the interrelations between the components of the proposed conceptual model. The path analysis results also generated a good model fit: $\chi^2 = 4.20$, $p = 0.225$; CMIN/DF = 1.40; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.97; IFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.046. Figure 2 reports the path analysis results below.

H1 proposes that environmental awareness will be positively related to personal norms. This hypothesis was supported by the path analysis results ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$). (H2) and (H3) assert that personal norms will have a positive relationship with sustainable purchase intentions and CSR expectations, in that order. (H2) was confirmed through its significant path leading from personal norms to purchase intentions ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$). By contrast, (H3) was not validated owing to a non-significant path from personal norms to purchase intentions.

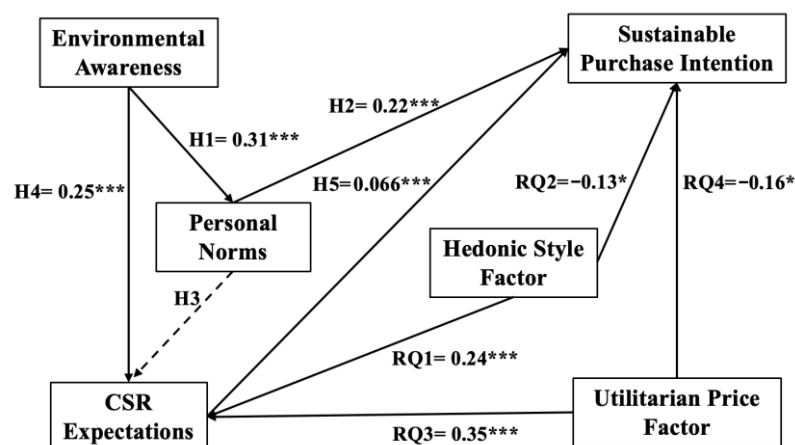


Figure 2. Path Analysis Results for Testing the Proposed Conceptual Model. Note: *** = $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed); * = $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed).

As for H4, the path analysis results did confirm its proposition, which predicts that environmental awareness will be positively associated with CSR expectations ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.001$). H5 proposes that CSR expectations will positively predict sustainable purchase intentions. The path analysis results showed a robust path coefficient ($\beta = 0.66$, $p < 0.001$) to also validate this hypothesis.

Turning to RQ1 and RQ2, which separately inquire whether the style factor (i.e., hedonic value) will be significantly linked to CSR expectations and sustainable purchase intentions, respectively. The findings demonstrated a positive and significant path from the style factor to CSR expectations ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$) and a negative and significant path from the style factor to purchase intention ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.033$).

RQ3 and RQ4 individually query whether the price factor (i.e., utilitarian value) will be significantly related to CSR expectations and sustainable fashion purchase intentions, in that order. The results similarly showed a positive and significant link from the price factor to CSR expectations ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$) and a negative and significant link from the price factor to purchase intention ($\beta = -0.16$, $p = 0.016$).

5. Discussion

This study is the first to test a conceptual model that examines how consumer appraisal of environmental ethics, personal behavior, and corporate practices—in conjunction with their consumption value—may be related to sustainable apparel purchase intention. Specifically, the proposed conceptual model integrated the theoretical constructs drawn from the personal norms model, attribution of corporate social responsibility, and hedonic vs. utilitarian value. The findings contribute to the literature by demonstrating how personal environmental awareness about harmful apparel industry practices can help buttress consumer expectations of corporate social responsibility and their personal sustainability purchase decision-making. The results also establish that consumers' hedonic and utilitarian shopping value may have a different indirect and direct effect on sustainable purchase intentions.

By testing the personal norms construct [14], the results showed that practicing environmentally ethical behavior when making shopping decisions (e.g., considering clothing recyclability and source material) was significantly related to sustainable purchase intentions (H2) but not CSR expectations (H3). These results indicate that consumers do not see a significant connection between their own ethical conduct and the industry's CSR behavior. The results also suggest a consistent association between prosustainability personal behavioral norms and sustainable apparel purchase intentions. These findings are the first to confirm personal norms activation as an antecedent to pro-environmental behaviors [34,83] in the context of sustainable apparel consumption. Moreover, they also affirm the results from recent industry studies which suggested increased adoption of more sustainable

lifestyles during the COVID-19 pandemic, owing to heightened consumer awareness of their personal impact on the natural environment [28,29].

Consistent with what was hypothesized, consumer awareness of the apparel industry's ethical challenges in environmental pollution was linked to their personal ethical apparel behavior (H1). This result confirms those reported in industry studies that evidence Gen Z's tendency to observe their own ethical consumption norm, owing to their environmental awareness [5,8]. Consumers' environmental awareness was likewise found to be positively associated with their expectation of the industry to become more environmentally sustainable and socially responsible (H4). This finding is also congruent with the results of an industry survey, which described consumer expectations of corporate adoption of sustainable practices, including reducing carbon emission and increasing the production of sustainable products [29]. Again, the current study is the first to have empirically validated the attribution of apparel industry practices as a factor in relation to consumer expectations of corporate social responsibility.

As positive conceptual links were found from hedonic and utilitarian value to CSR expectations, these results imply that consumers' clothing style and pricing preferences may spur CSR expectations on the apparel industry to produce stylish and affordable sustainable products (RQ1 and RQ2, respectively). In a similar vein, CSR expectations, as speculated, were positively associated with sustainable purchase intentions (H5). The combination of these results thus confirms those reported in relevant past industry studies. For example, a large consumer survey [84] suggested that at least 87% of respondents considered natural habitat protection, greenhouse-gas emissions, and animal conservation as important sustainability features for making purchase decisions.

Interestingly, the style and price factors were both negatively related to sustainable purchase intentions (RQ3 and RQ4, in that order). It is likely that consumers believe that their style and pricing preferences may be seen as not yet attainable sustainable purchase options, as green clothing products from trustworthy brands are very costly and popular affordable brands are known for greenwashing [85]. In essence, lack of consumer confidence in the authenticity of green product claims [86]—in conjunction with their low perception of internal (e.g., ability to judge product claims) and external (e.g., monetary resources) behavioral control over green consumption—might have undermined their sustainable purchase intention [87] to reflect the attitude–behavior gap.

From a theoretical perspective, the current study has adapted and expanded the Norm Activation Model to the context of sustainable apparel consumption [37]. In particular, the conceptual model validated a direct effect of consumer awareness of harmful industry practices on personal behavioral norms concerning environmental protection, as well as a direct effect from their personal norms on their intention for making sustainable purchase decisions. The model also presented both a direct effect of awareness of environmental ethical consequences—and a direct effect of expectations/attributions of corporate social responsibility—on consumers' sustainable apparel purchase intention.

From a practical perspective, consumer dissatisfaction with the apparel industry's harm to the natural environment appears to be associated with their expectations that the industry needs to live up to its social responsibility. Patagonia, a leader in marketing green clothing products, has abandoned using the term “sustainable fashion” to avoid misleading the consumer about the true meaning of sustainability [88]. Brands such as H&M and Decathlon were pressured to renounce their false claims and donate funds to sustainability causes [89,90]. Although not directly related, the two class action lawsuits associated with consumer complaints against fast-fashion brand H&M's greenwashing practice [84,91] serve as a good reminder of the importance of observing business ethics and practicing corporate social responsibility. As the low-fashion industry remains the major player in producing affordable green fashion for the masses, it is incumbent on the apparel industry itself to innovate its material sourcing and manufacturing processes to produce sustainable products that will meet future consumer demand.

This study has several limitations. First, owing to its exploratory nature, additional research will be needed to validate the study's measurement scheme and its conceptual model. Second, even though a brief description of the definition and the production materials of sustainable apparel were provided, the notion of "sustainability" could still be an abstract one (not unlike the concept of "organic" food). Third, participant responses could be influenced by social desirability, owing to partaking in the study and learning about the environmental sustainability subject. Lastly, even though college students are representative of the Gen Z population and a primary target for the green clothing market, a more diverse Gen Z sample selected from the general population would be more ideal.

6. Conclusions

The sustainable fashion consumption trend contrasts sharply with the fast-fashion trend, which enables consumers to purchase and dispose of low-cost clothes at a high frequency [92]. Popular fashion brands such as Zara and H&M offer 12–24 collections per year to refresh their inventory weekly [93,94]. Unsurprisingly, according to the United Nations, 85% of the textiles produced in the world end up in landfill each year [95]. It is clear that the apparel industry needs to take responsibility for these negative environmental outcomes, as it has heavily polluted the ecosystems through its release of carbon emissions and microfibers, exacerbated by pesticide and chemical use [96,97].

If we assume that clothing choices reflect consumers' hedonic and utilitarian shopping value, then assessing such value as a self-expression device to communicate their emotions and identity would better explain their sustainable apparel purchase decision-making process. Future research could endeavor to theorize how self-expression needs, personal identity, and eco-identity in relation to hedonic and utilitarian shopping value may influence consumers' sustainable apparel preference and purchase behavior.

As awareness of the environmental harm created by apparel consumption at the individual consumer level is the basis for developing personal norms that will guide ethical consumption behavior, it is equally important to consider how to spread ethical personal consumption norms to help shape similarly collective consumption norms at the societal level. Future work could consider developing the theoretical link between personal norms and social norms, as well as their interaction, to foster a collectivistic cultural value on sustainable apparel consumption across society.

To accomplish the objective of normalizing ethical apparel consumption in society, consumers will also need to demand industry accountability through consumer activism, which can include expressing their CSR expectations through interaction with companies and brands across all different offline and online communication channels. Additional research could consider examining how consumers respond to potential corporate communication strategies that address the rising sustainable apparel consumption trend, by theorizing the relationship between the CSR practices of promoting green fashion and their halo effect [98] on consumer trust and purchase behavior.

Fashion represents an important aspect of our culture and lifestyle in society. Its creativity and variety also meet the consumer needs for hedonic and utilitarian consumption. Among younger consumers, an eco-friendly circular apparel consumption movement [99], including the practice of recycling and renting clothes [100], is gaining popularity. Above and beyond the consideration of corporate social responsibility, the apparel industry should seize this emerging consumer culture to stake out their green identity by innovating their product lines and business model.

The extant literature still lacks theory-driven empirical research addressing consumer motivations and decision-making processes that can help explain the attitude–behavior gap in sustainable fashion consumption. This leaves a fertile ground for researchers to explore the theoretical paradigms, including those examined and proposed in the current study, that could best explain how and why consumers may choose to purchase more ecologically gentle apparel.

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