

The impact of ethical fashion on Spanish consumers *

El impacto de la ética en la moda para los consumidores españoles

Hakan Karaosman^{1,2}, Gustavo Morales Alonso¹, Mercedes Grijalvo¹ and Alessandro Brun²

¹Department of Industrial Management, Business Administration and Statistics; School of Industrial Engineering; Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM); Spain.

²Department of Management, Economics, and Industrial Engineering, Politecnico di Milano (POLIMI), Milano, Italy.

hakan.karaosman@upm.es, gustavo.morales@upm.es, mercedes.grijalvo@upm.es, alessandro.brun@polimi.it

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between consumer behavior and ethical fashion by focusing on the fast-fashion retailing industry through Spanish consumers. Hence, it contributes to the ethical fashion and consumer behavior literature and provides noteworthy data for practitioners. The findings are supported by the quantitative analysis of surveys conducted with 462 Spanish consumers. The findings reveal that Spanish consumers have difficulties linking ethics to the fashion and apparel industry; furthermore, the ethical communication of fashion brands is not considered transparent. Lastly, it is concluded that ethical fashion has a positive impact on purchase behavior only when consumers have a high level of ethical concern.

Keywords: Ethical fashion, Consumer behavior, Spanish consumer, Quantitative research

Resumen: Se examina la relación entre el comportamiento del consumidor y la ética en la moda, contribuyendo a la literatura científica en el campo de la 'moda ética' y del comportamiento del consumidor, proporcionando interesantes datos para profesionales del mundo de la moda. Los resultados de 462 encuestas a consumidores revelan que éstos no vinculan el comportamiento ético y el mundo de la moda y consideran que la comunicación de la ética en dicho mundo no es transparente. Por último, se concluye que la 'moda ética' sólo impacta positivamente en la conducta de compra de los consumidores con una elevada preocupación ética.

Palabras Clave: Moda ética, Comportamiento del consumidor, Consumidor español, investigación cuantitativa

1. Introduction

Fashion is a process in which practical and dynamic dimensions exist (Aakko and Koskennurmi-sivonen, 2013). Fast fashion, which is of the most significant segments in the fashion industry, embodies rapid prototyping, fast cycles, small product batches and merchandise presented with already attached price tags (Tokatli, 2007). Fast fashion industry grows fast to meet rapidly changing consumer demands with an expansion from traditional to emerging markets. The main characteristics of fast fashion could be defined, as an extension of product range toward more accessible and affordable items. In this vein, the fast-fashion re-

tailoring industry encompasses quick response production and dynamic planning processes to reduce design/manufacturing/ purchasing, and distribution processes from months to weeks (Caro and Martínez de Albéniz, 2014). Furthermore, free trade agreements, removal of quotas, and flexibility in legislative frameworks enable fast-fashion retailers to take advantage of low-cost production through overseas manufacturers (Bruce and Daly, 2006; Koszewska, 2010; Laudal, 2010; P. de Brito et al., 2008).

In the fast fashion world, Spain emerges as a distinctive country as a consequence of a wide range of leading retailers such as Zara, Mango and Desigual. Cor-

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respondingly, Spanish clothing and retail industry had a total revenue of \$17.7bn in 2013 (MarketLine, 2014), and the industry exported products were worth almost 20 billion euros, representing an increase of 47 percent since 2008. Recently, sustainability has become a significant topic to consider in highly growing yet energy intensive industries. Sustainability aims at preserving the environment, improving social conditions while maintaining business stability.

As for fast fashion, sustainability must be further enhanced given that fast-fashion retailers are characterized by globally dispersed supply chains that bring environmental and ethical concerns (Arrigo, 2013; Caniato et al., 2012; Chan, 2009).

Until recently, sustainability and fashion were considered an oxymoron; yet, globalization and today's tough conditions require a fundamental union. Sustainability in fashion symbolizes the harmony amongst nature, humanity, more desirable labor conditions, and fashion trends to enhance sustainability (Aakko and Koskennurmi-sivonen, 2013). Even though ethical consumption is growing (Bray et al., 2010), few studies have examined the impact of ethical fashion on consumer outcomes. Prior research stressed that price, design and product attributes are mediating factors and consumers would not trade off their self interest characteristics for ethical dimensions (Maignan and Ferrell, 1997; Rizkallah, 2012; Shen et al., 2012). Nonetheless, some other scholars pointed out that ethical and environmental practices could have a positive impact on behavioral loyalty (Ailawadi et al., 2013; Bhattacharya et al., 2008; Öberseder et al., 2013).

Despite the growing interest in the topic, surprisingly few studies investigated the impact of ethical fashion on consumer behavior. The theoretical understanding of ethical issues of the industry has been explored; however, empirical evidence and demonstration is scarce. This study thus aims to better explain the match between theory and current practice by examining the influence of ethical fashion—through the dimensions of labor conditions and eco-design—on Spanish consumers' purchase behavior. The study is organized as follows. Next section provides a theoretical background of the topics under study. In the following section, research framework, hypotheses, and methodological approach are presented. Lastly, findings and then conclusions are described.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Fast-Fashion and Its Impact on Spain

Globalization is a process driven by economic forces that influence manufacturing, international trade, and the integration of financial markets (Buckley and Ghauri, 2004). As stressed, fast-fashion prototypes more rapidly, production is held continuously in large varieties, supply chains are globalized in a shortened delivery time, and price tags are already attached (Bruce and Daly, 2006; Joy et al., 2012). Nevertheless, major ethical issues emerge in a global scale.

In Europe, fast fashion chains grow faster due to quick response times from neighbor countries, and growing consumer demands. In particular, the fashion and apparel industry has a vital importance for Spanish economy. As previously stressed, fast-fashion retailers have a big influence on Spanish exports.

According to the Spanish Ministry for the Economy and Competitiveness (2013), exports reached the value of 234 billion euros with a growth of 47% between 2009 and 2013 and 76% between 2002 and 2013, and accounts for almost 35% of the country's overall GDP (Marca España, 2014).

Besides, Spanish consumers play an important role and consumption patterns significantly grow. Therefore, it is interesting to conceptualize how Spanish consumers respond to fast fashion through the perspective of sustainability and how Spanish consumers perceive the actions of Spanish brands. In other terms, when fast-fashion retailers are directly linked with ethical and environmental issues, it is critical to examine how Spanish consumers' behaviors are shaped and how they react (Sanchez and Santos, 2010) to bring significant managerial implications to foster and better communicate ethics in fashion supply chains.

2.3. The Concept of Ethical fashion

Since the late '80s, many of the fast fashion retailers have been linked to less favorable labor conditions. Unfortunately, social scandals, building collapses and

'un-fair' trade principles were also revealed. Consequently, consumers expose to further information and have become more aware of ethical and social issues and/or challenges surrounding the industry. Big corporations are now facing the requirement of embracing environmental and social consciousness (Fletcher, 2007; Sacaluga et al., 2011; Shen et al., 2012).

Ethical fashion appears as an endeavor in which sustainability and fashion meet. Ethical fashion could be defined as fashionable yet sustainable apparels that are produced under fair trade principles with sweat-shop-free labor conditions (Joergens, 2006). Ethical fashion could be divided into two main categories, (i) Socially Responsible Business and (ii) Environmentally Responsible Business. This study aims to further explain the match between theory and current practice through more generalizable conclusions. To this end, Spanish consumers are focused and purchasing behavior is examined through two distinctive dimensions of ethical fashion, namely labor conditions and eco-design to justify the impact of ethical fashion.

2.4. Ethics and Consumer Response

Monitoring consumers' perception is inevitably important since they affect attitude. Consumer attitude is likewise significant because of its influence on behaviors. In this sense, attitudes have been pointed out as determinants of the actual behavior (Krueger et al., 2000) and of the actual purchase decisions (Keh and Xie, 2009). However, according to social identity literature, perceptions of socially responsible activities and ethical practices might influence behavior not only through attitudes (what do consumers think ethical fashion tells about the brand?) but also through social identity of the activity itself (what do consumers think ethical fashion tells about itself and what does it constitute?) (Ailawadi et al., 2013). Conversely, research on consumers' responses to ethical practices is limited and it is still unclear whether or not attitudes toward ethical fashion could be translated into behavioral outcomes. Therefore, it is vital to see to what extent consumers' intentions are aligned with the actual behavior. In the marketing literature, there are authors who identified a gap between attitude and behavior (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001). This theory further suggests that having a socially responsible attitude does not always lead to purchase behavior. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how Spanish consumers who purchase from fast-fashion retailers respond to ethical fashion and how attitudes are translated into real purchase behavior in Spain where fast-fashion is extremely vital for the economy.

3. Research Outline

This study provides an original contribution with respect to the link between attitudes and behaviors of Spanish consumers with a very specific focus on fast fashion retailers. Furthermore, a distinctive feature of this research grounds in its methodology, which combines both qualitative and quantitative techniques to enrich and make results more reliable. Firstly, an exploratory study attempting to state the main issues of Spanish fast-fashion consumers' responses was conducted. A qualitative method comprising focus groups was conducted in Madrid, Spain to obtain information about Spanish consumers' attitudes towards ethical fashion, and its influence on purchase behavior. Secondly, focus group findings and what was detected as gaps in existing literature were utilized to develop hypotheses.

Next, a quantitative analysis took place in which surveys were designed to test the hypotheses and verify the focus groups' initial findings.

3.1. Research Objectives

Earlier studies conducted to translate consumers' attitudes to actual purchase behavior provide inconclusive results. Industry-specific studies are also scarce, and more importantly fast fashion industry, as an important industry due to intensity of social scandals, has not been widely studied despite its interesting twist. Demographic factors have also been neglected so far (Bray et al., 2010).

Considering these aforementioned facts, the main research question is stated as follows.

'How do Spanish consumers respond to ethical fashion?'

3.2. First Approach: Qualitative Study out of Focus Group Discussions

3.2.1. Sample and Data Collection for Qualitative Study

Due to the subject's complexity and the need for further identification, first step was conducted through qualitative research methodology. To this end, focus groups were conducted to further explore the consumer insights in terms of ethical fashion and the reflection on the purchase behavior. The chosen number of participants in each group discussion was six and a total of

three focus groups were conducted in Madrid, Spain during February 2014. Three sessions enabled the research team to achieve saturation. To maintain homo-

geneity and assure maximum participation, individuals were chosen based on demographic areas including age, marital status, occupation, gender, and education.

Table 1: Focus Group Participants' Characteristics

Group No	No of Participants	Age	Education	Gender
Spain 1	6	25-30	PhD.	4 female, 2 male
Spain 2	6	20-25	University Degree	3 female, 3 male
Spain 3	6	25-30	Master's Degree	4 female, 2 male

Group No	Annual Income*	CSR Knowledge	Purchase Frequency	Fashion Segment
Spain 1	€ 30,000 - € 35,000	Basic	Not often	Fast-fashion
Spain 2	€ 35,000 and more	High	Often	Fast-fashion
Spain 3	€ 30,000 - € 35,000	Basic	Not often	Fast-fashion

*Minimum wage in Spain: €752.85 per month in 12 payments, €645.30 per month in 14 payments (Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social, 2013)

3.2.2. Data Analyses

Focus group discussions were analysed and interpreted to determine to what extent the data achieved saturation. More specifically, Constant Comparison Analysis was applied to generate valid contextual implications (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Constant comparison analysis was conducted as multiple focus groups were used in this research. The purpose of using constant comparison analysis was to assess saturation in and across groups. One focus group's data was analysed at a time. Hence multiple focus groups' analyses enabled to serve as a substitution for theoretical sampling in order to assess the relevance of the themes. Three major stages were conducted. Firstly, open coding was applied where the data was sorted into small units by assigning codes. Subsequently, axial coding was employed where initial codes were grouped into categories. Lastly, selective coding was conducted where themes were developed to channel the content of focus group data. In total, 110 codes were assigned, 12 categories were created and then four themes emerged.

3.2.3. First Findings from Spanish Consumers towards Ethical Fashion

Following the analysis, themes emerged could be listed in four categories:

(i) **Level of concern and awareness:** While participants showed concern about the wellbeing of local communities, a lack of interest in the manufacturing conditions of fast-fashion retailers in distant countries was encountered.

(ii) **Consumers' response to ethics:** Spanish participants stressed that CSR could only be considered not part of the marketing strategies of the company when it is integrated into the firm's business model.

(iii) **Ethical fashion impact on purchase decision;** Participants stated that their intention was to avoid purchasing from brands with bad social records. However, purchase decision was governed by self-interest, mainly price, design, and product durability. The gap identified in earlier research (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Castaldo et al., 2008; Porter and Kramer, 2006) between intentions and behaviors has also been observed.

(iv) **Communication of ethical fashion;** Transparency in communication and disclosure were not sufficient in the opinion of focus group participants.

Subsequently, hypotheses were further developed based on current problems as well as unidentified issues in the literature and results from the first focus group discussions.

3.3. Research Hypotheses

While talking about consumers' response to ethical fashion, it is equally important to shed light into cultural values. Culture is considered relevant in marketing literature as it influences and changes consumer behavior and purchase decisions directly (Abreu et al., 2012). Spain can be regarded as a country where the collectivist dimension prevails (Hofstede, 2010). In collectivist societies people have a shared group feeling, which could bring some interesting insights regarding consumer behavior. While the participants of focus group discussions showed concern about the wellbeing of local communities, a lack of interest in the manufacturing conditions of fast-fashion retailers in distant countries has been encountered. This thus leads us to our first research hypothesis:

H1a: Spanish consumers show a higher concern for local communities' labor conditions than for those occurring in distant countries.

Prior research suggests that consumers are only concerned when products or apparels are dangerous or unhealthy for their health and/or skin (Joergens, 2006). Subsequently, focus group findings validated this finding. Consumers were found to pursue a natural inclination to care about materials they expose to. It is believed that these could be extrapolated to the fast-fashion industry via material content of apparels. Hence:

H1b: Spanish consumers are concerned for the material content of apparels they wear

Several researchers previously stated that transparency has been an important indicator to (i) enhance knowledge, and (ii) communicate socially responsible activities to consumers (Dolnicar and Pomeroy, 2007; Pookulangara and Shephard, 2013). Spanish focus group discussions concluded that transparency in communication of environmental as well as ethical practices were neither sufficient nor transparent. Thus, the following hypotheses were generated:

H2a: Spanish consumers' perception of labor conditions is not positive

H2b: Spanish consumers' perception of environmental communication is not positive

Previous studies suggest that young consumers disconnect sustainability from fashion. Even though sustainability is supported as an idea, real purchase behavior is not applied through ethics (Joy et al., 2012). Focus group findings, correspondingly, have brought

very similar insights. Therefore, the following hypothesis of this study was stated:

H3: For Spanish consumers self-interest is the main purchase criteria

An interesting finding from Dickson (2001) suggests that social campaigns of fashion brands do not effectively inspire consumers to consider ethical issues whilst on purchasing. However, for some consumer groups what they come across in terms of communication could bring a positive influence. At the same time, the increasing market share of fair trade in some countries (Cailleba and Casteran, 2010) reveals that there are some consumer segments who are willing to pay extra for sustainable as well as ethically made products. It is thus convenient to segment consumers based on their level of concern to better understand the motivations and reasons for ethical attitudes, behaviors and purchases.

Hence, as detailed later, in this research the sample is divided in *Segment 1: Spaniards with a high level of concern*, and *Segment 2: Spaniards with a low level of concern*. The following hypotheses have been then developed.

H4a: Spanish consumers – who have a high level of ethical concern – are positively influenced by ethical practices and show a more positive attitude towards brands with ethical behaviors.

H4b: Spanish consumers – who have a high level of ethical concern – are positively influenced by the companies involved in eco-design and show a more positive attitude towards these brands

Consumers' level of concern and awareness of ethical fashion along with other attributes such as price and design, could affect purchase behavior directly or indirectly through attitudes. Attitudes may mediate the impact of concern on behavior. Nonetheless, the relationship between attitude and behavior does not have to be linear. Besides, focus group findings pointed out that a contradiction was detected between attitudes and behaviors. The following hypothesis was thus created.

H5: Spanish consumers who have a high level of concern have a positive influence on purchase behavior when their attitudes are positive

Dickson (2000) was one of the pioneers that examined consumers' concerns and knowledge of ethical fashion. Shen and Wang (2012) used a framework based on Dickson's model by encompassing environmentally responsible businesses. Ailawadi and Neslin (2013)

developed their conceptual model and presented price, product quality, and promotions as key attributes that could affect consumer behavior. However, there is a need in examining attitude and its impact on purchase behavior prior to discussing the real purchase decision. Therefore, this study provides an original contribution by situating attitude as a mediator and incorporating self-interest to examine real purchase behavior out of not only consumer related but also non-consumer related characteristics. Within this study, two constructs; (i) ethical and (ii) eco-design awareness were created to show (i) how attitude was influenced by level of concern, (ii) how purchase behavior (measured as willingness to purchase) was mediated by an attitude, and (iii) to what extent consumers were willing to trade off ethics for their self-interest.

3.4. Quantitative Study: Surveys

3.4.1. Sample

The sample used in this study comprised Spanish consumers of fast-fashion retailers. Given the fact that this study is performed with the real consumers from Spain where the most influential fast-fashion retailers were born- the findings are expected to bring generalizable conclusions. Spanish consumers play an important role in the fast fashion universe. Inditex Empire, its contender Mango, the massive department store El Corte Inglés, and apparel chain Cortefiel not only dominate the Spanish retailing industry, but also create a profound and global impact. In this vein, the final sample of this study was composed of 489 valid responses through surveys. In order to have a heterogeneous sample of age, gender and purchasing power, respondents were taken from three different groups, namely (i) engineering students from the Mechanical Engineering School at UPM (285 responses, 58% of sample), (ii) professors, together with other workers, technical professionals from the Mechanical Engineering School at UPM, and consumers who had just made their purchases at fast-fashion retailers that were interviewed in the street (204 responses, 42% of the sample). The age average in the sample was 25.26 years with a standard deviation of 9.22, the youngest respondent being 18 and the oldest, 42. As regards gender, the distribution was 57.2% for men and 41.8% for women, with 0.6% of respondents not giving information in this respect. After responses with missing data or from other nationalities had been discarded, the final sample consisted of 462 respondents. Table 2 shows the number of respondents who participated in the surveys.

Table 2: Demographics of respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	76	51.7
<i>Female</i>	70	47.6
Age		
<i>Below 20</i>	31	21.1
20-24	43	29.3
25-29	11	7.5
30-34	20	13.6
35-39	19	26.5
40- Above	21	14.3
Social Class		
<i>Low</i>	4	2.7
<i>Medium-Low</i>	54	36.7
<i>Medium-High</i>	85	57.8
<i>High</i>	3	2.0
Shopping		
Frequency	28	19.0
<i>Once a month</i>	12	8.2
<i>Twice a month</i>	21	14.3
<i>During the sales</i>	7	4.8
<i>Once a year</i>	19	12.9
<i>Twice a year</i>	59	40.1
<i>Only when needed</i>		

The objective of the survey was introduced briefly without providing any further indications, but making it clear that the research was being conducted for academic purposes. The data were collected during May 2014 in a frame of four weeks, a short enough period to reduce any risk of time-variant influences. During this time and the previous months no relevant news or scandals regarding the unethical behavior of fast-fashion retailers that could bias the public opinion took place.

3.4.2. Variables Measured

The questionnaire consisted of two main sections. The first section gathered standard demographic and psychographic information. Subsequently, the second section was divided into eight sub-sections with an attempt to measure respondents' attitudes and purchase behaviors. Ethical concern, which is the independent variable considered in this study, was assessed to examine the level of concern of consumers towards labor conditions in the fast-fashion industry both in Spain and abroad. Ethical awareness, with regard to the knowledge of fast-fashion retailers' ethical practices, is our first dependent variable. The following sub-sections of the survey addressed the level of concern and awareness towards eco-design identified by consumer worries and familiarity with the material content of the apparel that he/she buys. The impact of self-interest in the purchase decision was measured as the average of two items referring to whether affordable prices had been determinant in the purchase behavior in the past and how it was likely to have an affect in the future. The next two constructs referred to attitudes towards the brand, both due to ethical and environmental dimensions, directed to past attitudes towards brands with bad working conditions or environmental scandals. Respondents were asked to rate the degree of their agreement. A five point Likert-scale (1= total disagreement, 5= total agreement) was employed.

3.4.3. Data Analyses

Firstly, the results obtained for each of our constructs were analyzed. Secondly, in order to examine how existing differences in consumers' ethical concerns affect their attitudes and behaviors towards the fast-fashion retailers, the sample was divided into two sub-segments. This is a common procedure in studies that aim to assess differences in opposite scores of the same variable (Baron et al., 2008; González et al., 2006; Zamora et al., 2004). The rationale behind this procedure is the intention to assess differences in opposite scores of ethical concern, shedding light on how the variables under study are affected. The scope was to create two groups each with 15% of our original sample. However, with the aim of maintaining a similar dis-

tribution with regards to gender as in the original sample, the final groups comprised 13% and 18% of the sample, the mean age being 27.27 and with 51.7% of men and 47.6% of women. These figures speak of a sub-sample, which is demographically representative of the global sample. The first sub-segment included 63 respondents that scored 5 in the ethical concern construct. Hence, this group was labeled as "high ethical concern". Contrarily, 84 respondents formed the "low ethical concern" group, in which this construct scored 2.5 or lower for all those consumers. In order to test differences in our dependent variables between these two groups, Student's t-tests were carried out, comparing the means of the mentioned variables between both groups. The table below depicts the characteristics of above-mentioned consumer segments.

3.4.4. Results of the quantitative study

When the total sample (462 respondents) was considered, the mean of ethical concern ranks 3.33 (on a 5-point scale, as previously mentioned), its standard deviation being 1.89. This value was the highest obtained of all of the constructs. Regarding the rest of the variables measured, the following highest result was for environmental concern (3.30). Contrarily, the two lowest values obtained correspond to the knowledge-related items, that is, ethical awareness (1.60) and environmental awareness (1.80). Two constructs ranked in the central part of the scale, self-interest (2.73) and ethical purchase behavior (2.47). Lastly, attitudes ranked in the lower quarter of the scale, their mean values being 2.21 and 1.89 for attitudes towards ethical dimensions and towards environmental dimensions, respectively.

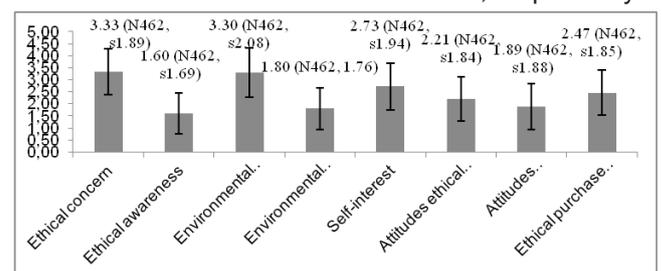


Figure 1: Research Variables for the sample

The construct of ethical concern was formed by items regarding the concern for labor conditions in Spain and in far distant countries. The mean result was 3.33, but the partial results of the individual items showed that concern for local labor conditions ranked at 3.57, while for distant countries, it was 3.10. The results obtained allowed accepting the H1a. In this study, environmental concern has been identified with interest for eco-design. For this reason, one of the items explicitly evaluated the concern for the material content of apparels bought by the respondents. The result obtained for

environmental concern (3.30), which was well above the central point of the scale, calls for accepting H1b. These results showed that Spanish consumers possess both ethical and environmental concerns. Contrarily, they do not have positive perceptions with regard to these issues; furthermore, they do not consider fast-fashion retailers' communications transparent. Hypotheses H2a and H2b could be therefore accepted. Our results pointed self-interest on ethical purchase behavior is in the middle of the scale; no positive or negative connotations towards ethical behaviors could be inferred. That is, neither self-interest overrides ethical purchasing nor the opposite seemed to be happening. For this reason, our data for the whole sample could not support H3. In order to shed light on this issue, we have conducted the aforementioned analysis in which the sample was divided into two groups, one corresponding to high ethical concern and the other to low ethical concern. The results from the t-test of the Spanish consumers are summarized in Table 4. As may be seen, differences were found for ethical aware-

ness ($t=-2.30$, $p\leq.05$), environmental concern ($t=-4.06$, $p\leq.001$), attitudes towards ethical dimensions ($t=-4.63$, $p\leq.001$), attitudes towards environmental dimensions ($t=-5.04$, $p\leq.001$) and ethical purchase behavior ($t=-5.46$, $p\leq.001$). Contrarily, no differences were found either for environmental awareness or self-interest. That is, while attitudes ranked low for the global sample, we have found statistical support for demonstrating that Spanish consumers with a higher level of ethical concerns are more prone to having favorable attitudes towards ethical behaviors of the companies and their involvement in eco-design. Thus, our hypotheses H4a and H4b were supported. This is a far-reaching result, as it represents evidence of the existence of a segment of consumers that could be targeted by companies developing ethical and environmentally friendly actions. Last, a higher tendency to perform ethical purchases has been found in the respondents with a high ethical concern, when compared to the group of low ethical concern. Therefore, H5 was accepted.

Table 3: t-test of the constructs analyzed in this study with regard to level of concerns of Spaniards

	High level of ethical concern		Low level of ethical concern		df	t	Sig.
	N	Mean (1-5)	N	Mean (1-5)			
Ethical awareness	63	1.73	84	0.69	147	-2.30*	.022
Environmental concern	63	3.88	84	0.69	147	-4.06***	.000
Environmental awareness	63	1.53	84	0.69	147	-1.38	.167
Self-interest	63	2.61	84	0.69	147	-1.46	.146
Attitudes based on ethical dimensions	63	2.96	84	0.69	147	-4.63***	.000
Attitudes based on eco-design	63	2.76	84	0.69	147	-5.04***	.000
Ethical purchase behavior	63	3.42	84	0.69	147	-5.46***	.000

*** $p\leq.001$; ** $p\leq.01$; * $p\leq.05$

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that Spanish consumers with a high level of concern about ethical issues would associate their positive attitudes with their actual purchase behavior. However, consumers with a low level of concern did not seem to pursue the notion of positive influence of ethical fashion on purchase be-

havior. The construct of ethical concern was shaped by the items regarding the concern for labor conditions in Spain and in far distant countries. Participants of both focus groups and surveys addressed the concern about the wellbeing of their local communities when a lack of interest in the manufacturing conditions of fast-fashion retailers in distant countries was encountered. When it comes to fast-fashion retailers' ethical communica-

tion, a consistency within and across respondents was assured. The results of both qualitative and quantitative analyses showed that Spanish consumers do not have positive perception of labor conditions and ethical fashion. Level of awareness has been identified with interest for eco-design. In accordance with the result obtained for environmental concern (3.30). Spanish consumers are concerned for the material content of the apparels they wear. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that a concern for material content was seen highly linked with level of concern since a significant difference was detected across respondents.

With regard to communication and perception of eco-design, Spanish consumers do not have sufficient knowledge with regard to these issues. Furthermore, they do not consider fast-fashion retailers' communications transparent or sincere. Hence, it was seen that fast-fashion retailers are highly expected to improve their communication and disclosure of ethical behaviors. The influence of self-interest on Spaniards' purchase behavior delivered contradictory results. While focus group discussions stated that purchase decision was mainly governed by self-interest, primarily price, design, and product durability, quantitative research could not verify this initial finding. The statistical support of this study demonstrated that Spanish consumers with a higher level of ethical and ecological awareness to be more prone to having favorable attitudes towards fashion brands involved in ethical behaviors and eco-design. This may represent the known effect of factors impeding ethical behaviors, as pointed out by Joergens (2006) and Bray (2010). A higher motivation to perform ethical purchases has been found in the respondents with a high level of ethical concern when compared to the group of low ethical concern. This could bring valuable insights to both scholars and marketers. Fast-fashion retailers should take more reasonable and responsible actions to further educate and cultivate consumers' behavior in order to persuade them to support ethical fashion through purchasing.

5. Conclusions

In sum, Spanish consumers were seen to be concerned for their local communities more than they were concerned for others' social conditions in distant countries. This suggests that they feel more threatened or disturbed when an incident affects their closer circles. With regard to material content of the apparels, consumers with a high level of concern were seen to be more concerned and associated with seeking more information about the social and environmental records. Nonetheless, for the consumers with a low level of concern, material content was not identified as a dis-

tinctive indicator. Ethical fashion could be concluded to have a positive impact on attitudes that lead to purchase behavior only when consumers have a high level of ethical concern. On the contrary, when the level of ethical concern is low, neither attitude nor purchase behavior is directly or indirectly influenced by ethical fashion. Once transparency is assured, the segment of consumers with a high ethical concern would actually be ready to conduct the behavior, and not to stay in the intentions phase. In this study, ethical fashion was investigated through Spanish consumers' perspectives to better comprehend the match between existing theory and current practice. To formalize the dynamics identified in the literature, a conceptual framework was proposed to examine how consumers conceive ethical issues within the industry, and more precisely, how their purchase behavior is influenced by ethical practices of the fast-fashion retailers. The findings of this study suggest that the level of ethical concern could affect consumer's attitudes and behaviors.

6. Managerial Implications

It may be accurate to state that ethical practices or conscious collections of fast-fashion retailers may not be the most influential factor in purchase decision, yet depending on the level of concern and awareness, purchase decision could be enhanced through positive attitudes. It is thus important to (i) define clear targets and deliver understandable messages while developing communication strategies, and (ii) to educate and cultivate consumers through real stories and transparent actions. The findings of both the qualitative and quantitative study revealed that Spanish consumers had difficulties linking ethics to the fast-fashion retailing industry, and the transparency of fashion brands.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Given that the results for one country cannot take us to the saturation point, which is Spain within this study, further research is required to achieve more generalizable and comparable conclusions. To achieve saturation of consumer behavior towards ethical fashion, other countries could be studied and future research could deliver more comprehensive results by conducting cross-cultural settings. Global results could be verified through country comparisons to enhance international communication as well as marketing strategies of global fast-fashion retailers. Regarding the quantitative analyses, enlargement of the sample would be desirable, in order to improve representativeness.

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