



Factors Affecting Sri Lankan Consumers' Purchase Intention Towards Sweatshop – Free Global Footwear Brands: A Study Using a Modified Theory of Planned Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

The fundamental human need for clothes and footwear has now given way to the idea of fashion, which is constantly expanding into important areas like ethical fashion. Growing ethical fashion concerns have had a significant influence on customers' buying intentions. The purpose of this study is to determine what influences Sri Lankan customers' decision to buy global footwear companies that do not employ sweatshop labour and assess the impact of each factor. A modified theory of planned behaviour is used to assess the link between attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, self-identity, and ethical obligation in relation to the intention to buy international sweatshop-free footwear brands. A quantitative approach was used, and a standardized questionnaire was administered online among 150 consumers, to collect data. The findings of this study highlighted positive influence from attitudes, subjective norms, ethical obligation and self-identity towards purchase intention whereas attitude was recognized as the most influential determinant towards the purchase intention of sweatshop-free global footwear brands. Thus, the study's authors suggest global marketers to adopt a more instructive marketing strategies based on the local value system to promote ethically made global footwear brands by targeting educated and medium – high income earning consumers in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Consumer Purchase Intention, Ethics, Global Footwear Brands, Modified Theory of Planned Behavior, Sweat-Shop Free Production*



1. INTRODUCTION

Multinational Enterprises offer products in many regions of the world and conduct business operations externally to the country of origin. According to Nigam (2014), Multinational Enterprises outsource production activities to developing countries due to low labour cost in order to achieve economies of scale. Although outsourcing the manufacturing facility has a number of apparent benefits for the parent company, one of the negative consequences of outsourcing is creation of sweatshops in developing nations (Nigam, 2014). Sweatshops encompass “forced labour, low pay, long hours of labour, discrimination, health and security risks, mental and physical abuse, lack of consciousness of workers' rights, and lack of worker representation for negotiations with management” (Kozar & Connell, 2013).

In the consumer products sector, particularly in the footwear industry due to physically performed work and its labour-intensive nature, outsourcing has become increasingly common (Gupta et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2012; Nigam, 2014). The rapid development of the apparel and footwear industry in the recent past has raised concerns regarding an ethical form of fashion (Pollari, 2016). As described by Joergens (2006), ethical fashion refers to apparel and footwear produced in factories utilizing labour that is fairly compensated. Some authors have looked at ethical issues from a broader perspective considering a wide range of issues pertaining to people, animals, the environment, and society that are being engaged in, both knowingly and unknowingly, by producers, distributors, retailers, and consumers (Shaw et al., 2006). Moreover, the definition of ethical fashion is “fashion with a conscience” in terms of environmental and labour issues (Joergens, 2006). Accordingly, there are two main goals in the fashion industry with regards to ethical fashion: production using eco-friendly practices and utilizing labour from non-sweatshops (Thilakarathne & Ranasinghe, 2020). Ethical Fashion provides sustainable solutions to prevent environmental damage and unjust working conditions for those engaged in the production processes. This study focuses on sweatshop free aspect of ethical fashion as it has become more significant social and ethical concern in the footwear industry (Kozar & Connell, 2013).

As pointed out by Shen et al., (2012), consumer interest was swiftly stimulated by the discovery of multiple sweatshop scandals, which eventually resulted in the development of



ethical fashion. Thus, it is important to identify what factors affect consumer purchase intention towards sweatshop-free footwear and its impact on the consumers' purchase decisions.

Many researchers in the past have examined consumer purchase intention on ethical fashion and sweatshop-free products, but similar studies are minimal in the Sri Lankan setting (Ranasinghe et al., 2020). The younger generation of specific communities was the main focus of earlier research, which limited the general applicability of the outcomes to other age groups (Abey Siriwardhana et al., 2019; Ranasinghe et al., 2020). Thus, these scholars recommended that the study population to be expanded in order to cover a range of consumer groups.

Further, it has been revealed that, Sri Lankan consumers prefer to consume foreign footwear over local footwear brands (Fernando et al., 2005). By addressing this gap, authors of this study investigate whether Sri Lankan consumers who possess purchasing power and ethical consciousness consider sweatshop-free practices followed by global footwear brands when making their purchase decisions and what factors affect their purchase intention towards sweatshop-free international footwear brands, and its impact.

In the recent times, consumers' awareness and preference for ethical products has risen demanding organizations to produce such products adopting a socially accountable management strategies and grow the business in a sustainable manner (Oh & Yoon, 2014). Yadav and Pathak (2017), emphasize that identifying the determinants that influence consumers' decisions to buy ethical goods will be helpful to businesses and marketers since such findings will help them in producing and marketing ethical products to the intended target market. Therefore, this study will assess the purchase intention of local consumers towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands adopting the modified theory of planned behaviour. Accordingly, this study intends to promote awareness and behaviour of consumers towards ethical purchase and consumption and thereby promote a responsible society.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Sweatshops in Global Fashion Industry

A “sweatshop”, as defined by the United States General Accounting Office, is a “firm that repeatedly breaks more than one federal or state labour law including those governing minimum wage and overtime, child labour, industrial work, workplace safety and health, workers' remuneration, and industry regulations” (Nigam, 2014). Gupta and Hodges (2012) and Jones and Williams (2012), point out that because of the labour-intensive nature as well as physically performed work, labour maltreatments are notably widespread in the fashion industry. Additionally, Bachman (2000), claims that other sweatshop issues such as usage of child labour is more prevalent in industries such as apparel and footwear industry. Pollari (2016), claimed that although child labour is banned or restricted in many communities, it is yet a common practice around the world and sweatshops remain to exist, mainly in third-world countries. Nigam (2014), revealed that most of the young women aged 17 to 24 working for footwear manufacturers like Nike, Adidas, Puma, Asics, and FILA, frequently encounter long work hours for low pay in unpleasant environments. Multinational Enterprises, including Nike, have been charged by the Interfaith Centre on Corporate Responsibility for serious worker exploitation (Nigam, 2014). The tragic building collapse in Bangladesh's capital city of Dhaka, which left hundreds of unfortunate labourers dead and others injured, has finally shed some much-needed light on the questionable community of sweatshop labour. Australian Fashion Council issued a warning to consumers not to purchase inexpensive goods created in sweatshops, such as clothing and shoes, in developing nations like Bangladesh (Nigam, 2014). Nike was charged for using child labour, having inexcusable living and working conditions, verbal and physical abuse, demanding overtime, and emitting poisonous gases that were harmful to both human and environmental well-being at its factories (Fritz, 2018; Nigam, 2014). However, until there was a widespread boycott movement against Nike, one of the most popular footwear brands in the world, Nike's management refuted all allegations and refused to accept responsibility for their negligence. Nike has thereafter established sustainable operations and policies in response to public criticism to ensure that employees are treated decently (Fritz, 2018). After the discovery of these multiple sweatshop scandals,



consumer intention and interest to purchase sweatshop-free products was swiftly ignited (Shen et al., 2012).

2.2. Consumer Purchase Intention towards Sweatshop-Free Global Footwear Brands.

A person's intention, according to Hagger et al., (2002), "describes their immediate behavioural tendency towards performing a given behaviour and it reflects what drives them towards that behaviour". According to Armstrong and Kotler (2012), a consumer's purchase intention is formed before they actually decide to make a purchase, and it is possible for many circumstances to have an impact on their decision to make it an ethical purchase. Research from several nations suggests that category of consumers whose decisions are influenced by ethical considerations is present and growing (Pollari, 2016; Shen et al., 2012; Shaw et al., 2000; Yadav et al., 2016). Although Stringer et al. (2022), note that employee health and well-being is a less important and irrelevant topic of concern among fashion consumers and the reasons and claims of worker-welfare breaches are less likely to affect consumer buying intentions, Weiner (2017), notes that consumers may purchase ethically sourced and produced fashion items as a psychological need to express their individual values. Numerous academics have used the theory of planned behaviour to investigate how consumer buying intent relates to moral purchasing behaviour.

In this study, the consumers' intention to buy ethical, sweatshop-free footwear products is examined. A person's readiness, or the condition of being ready for something, will be used to gauge their intention to buy ethical goods by probing them on their enthusiasm, willingness, and effort to carry out the necessary behaviour (Yadav & Pathak, 2017). Furthermore, according to Nam et al. (2017), customers who have higher levels of ethical awareness are more inclined to buy ethical goods. Therefore, how consumers view and behave towards ethical practices such as using sweatshop-free labour followed by enterprises can be examined through the theory of planned behaviour which was originally developed by Ajzen in 1991.



2.3. Modified Theory of Planned Behaviour

How consumers perceive and respond with regards to ethical practices followed by enterprises using sweatshop-free labour can be explained through the “theory of planned behaviour” which was originally developed by Ajzen in 1991. According to the theory of planned behaviour, people behave in accordance with their “attitudes”, “subjective norms”, and “perceived behavioural control”. Further, consumer purchase behaviour can be predicted by detecting customer buying intent. The theory of reasoned action, the initial formulation of the theory of planned behaviour developed by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1980, connects attitudes, subjective norms, behavioural intents, and conduct in a predetermined causal order. It is a psychological theory of attitude- behaviour correlations. Ajzen (2005), claims that the theory of planned behaviour reveals that people behave logically in response to psychological elements including their beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. This theory suggests that individuals’ intentions are shaped by their attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control which determines their behaviour (Ajzen, 2002). Despite the theory of planned behaviour model's efficacy in a variety of behavioural scenarios, its capacity to anticipate and explain certain situations was restricted (Ajzen, 2005). Many scholars have expanded and deepened the model as a result of this. For instance, Shaw and Shiu (2003), observed that in the context of ethical consumption, decision-making methods are frequently influenced by sense of responsibility and moral concerns and thus modified the theory of planned behaviour model by incorporating indicators of “ethical obligation” and “self-identity”. Ethical consumers’ decision-making methods are frequently determined by ethical obligations and to what extent consumers perceive themselves as ethical. Henceforth, it is important to broaden the model to include these constructs (Shaw et al., 2006). Therefore, in this study with the inclusion of self-identity and ethical obligation, the modified theory of planned behaviour is used as the theoretical framework to enhance the study’s relevance. Hence, the following section will discuss the variables in the modified theory of planned behaviour.



2.4. Attitude

According to Ajzen (2002), attitude is the tendency to appraise an individual, an organization, an occurrence, or an item favourably or adversely. According to Chen and Hung (2014), attitude is a psychological feeling that underlies one's perception. If the attitude is good, behavioural intentions will shift towards having a positive influence, and it is a quantifiable part of behaviour that is tied to an object. Francis et al. (2004) provides a method for assessing a person's attitude by asking if they have a favourable or unfavourable opinion on ethical products. The prior research supports the necessity of including attitude as a fundamental part of a model to explain the factors that influence consumers' decisions to buy ethical goods (Paul et al., 2016; Wang & Wang, 2016). Therefore, according to the above-mentioned literature, it can be stated that Attitude will have a favourable impact on purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear products.

2.5. Subjective Norm

Subjective norms refer to a person's opinions about whether close friends and family would approve of the activity (Ajzen, 2005). It involves how someone feels about whether peers and significant others participate in the conduct of an activity. Significant others are those who have strong opinions about how a person should act in a certain situation (Nigam, 2014). This is also called normative beliefs that are formed as a result of societal pressure (Ajzen, 2002). This is the notion that significant others believe they should do something that determines people's intentions to carry out a certain activity. Customers could think that buying footwear made without sweatshop labour will be preferred by their peers, family, and relatives.

2.6. Perceived Behavioural Control

Ajzen (2002), described that the degree to which people have the resources and confidence to solve possible obstacles is known as perceived behavioural control. Perceived behavioural control is a crucial element that may affect people's intentions, and this factor cannot be easily changed if consumers have a great level of persistence to put up the work necessary to achieve



their objective. A high level of perceived control, "may reinforce a person's intention to engage in a behaviour and boost effort and endurance" (Ajzen 2002). Perceived behavioural control can be evaluated using a person's self-efficacy and perceptions about the behaviour's controllability (Francis et al., 2004).

2.7. Ethical Obligation

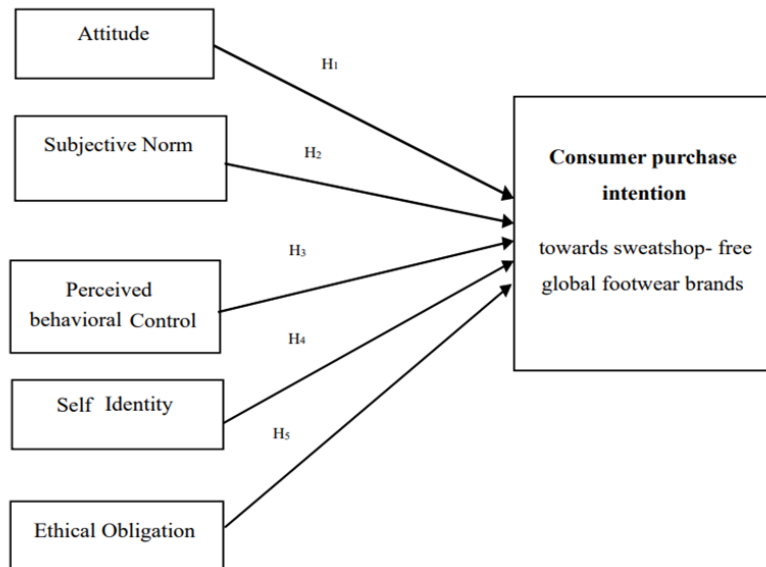
According to Shaw and Shiu (2003), ethical obligation is the perception of what is morally right and wrong when engaging in a certain behaviour or the sense of moral responsibility to engage in a particular behaviour. Personal moral standards may be divided into two categories: benefits to the self and harms to others. Beneficial self-enhancing sensations of "doing what you believe is the right thing", which elicit feelings of pride or self-satisfaction, lead to positive repercussions for the self (Arvola et al., 2008). According to Schwartz (1977), when people transgress according to their own personal moral standards, it has negative effects on the self and causes feelings of guilt or duty.

2.8. Self-Identity

Self-identity is defined as an individual's concern related to various ethical issues that affect how ethical they perceive themselves to be (Dowd & Burke, 2013). According to Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al. (2006), if a certain concern arises which is important to an individual's self-identity, it is more likely to affect that individual's intention. Modified theory of planned behaviour model shows the influence of self-identity on intention increases with the strength of the sense of identification (Shaw & Shiu, 2000).

2.9. Conceptualization

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



Note. This figure represents the conceptual framework that was built to identify the relationship between the variables in concern. From “The contribution of ethical obligation and self-identity to the theory of planned behaviour: An exploration of ethical consumers,” by D. Shaw, E. Shiu and I. Clarke 2000, *Journal of Marketing Management*. 16:8, 879-894, DOI: [10.1362/026725700784683672](https://doi.org/10.1362/026725700784683672).

2.10. Hypotheses Development

A favourable attitude has a positive influence on behavioural intentions and previous literature states that this element particularly has a favourable impact on purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear (Chen & Hung 2014; Paul et al., 2016; Wang & Wang, 2016). Hence the hypothesis can be derived as follows.

H1: Attitude towards sweatshop-free products positively influences purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands.

Further, customers could think that buying ethically sourced products will be preferred by their peers, family, and relatives (Nigam, 2014). Accordingly, the hypothesis can be built as follows.

H2: Social norm on sweatshop-free products has a positive influence on the purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands.

Moreover, it is claimed that, if a consumer perceives that they have the ability to control their own behaviour to a higher extent, then that individual is highly likely to purchase a product (Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., 2006; Chen & Hung, 2016). Thus, the hypothesis can be derived as;

H3: Perceived behavioural control positively influences purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands.

Ethically conscious consumers' sense of concern about various ethical issues also influences the purchase of ethically sourced products (Dowd & Burke, 2013). According to Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., (2006), a person's behaviour will change in accordance with a problem as it becomes more important to that person's sense of self. Thus, the hypothesis is derived as follows.

H4: Self-identity positively influences purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands.

Past research claims that ethical or moral obligations generate negative effects on the self and causes feelings of guilt if consumers avoid buying ethically made products (Shaw & Shiu, 2003). Therefore, the 5th hypothesis has been developed in the following manner.

H5: Ethical obligation positively influences purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands.



3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, authors followed a positivist philosophy. An explanatory research design was adopted with the support of deductive approach which makes it possible to test a hypothesis. Since this study places more emphasis on making discussion and analysis based on the data that can be measured and collected, a quantitative method was followed (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2009). A self-administered questionnaire was utilized and circulated using online platforms to the target respondents to obtain the data. This study has a cross-sectional time horizon, and the methodological approach for gathering data was mono-method quantitative methodology. Subsequently, a multivariate data analysis technique was utilized to analyze the data, and multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the correlations between the variables using the SPSS (version 22) software program.

The questionnaire in this study was created to elicit the respondents' thoughts on ethically produced goods, ethical behaviour, and ethical consumption. The questionnaire primarily considers the respondents' opinions about sweatshop-free global footwear products. In order to assess the assertions of each variable, the study uses a five-point Likert scale as an interval scale. Questionnaire was used to examine the research questions involving the influence of attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, ethical obligation and self-identity on the Sri Lankan consumers' purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands. Four questions were utilized to measure each variable. Questions were adopted from previous literature of similar studies. Questions related to purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands reflect the indicators as such “readiness – an individual's conscious plan to /make an attempt to perform a specific behaviour”. Attitude related questions are based on indicators such as “experimental component i.e. how it feels to perform the behaviour” and “Overall evaluation – scales which includes adjective pairs of both types, good—bad scale” whereas the questions utilized to measure subjective norms reflect the indicators of “level of perceived social pressure from others”. To measure the influence of perceived behavioural control, indicators such as “self-efficacy” and “controllability” were used whereas for ethical obligation indicators such as “negative anticipated consequences and positive anticipated consequences” were used. Finally, to



measure the impact of self-identity indicators as such “social types, and personality type” were used (Anders et al., 2017; Beldad & Hegner, 2018; Nigam, 2014; Shaw et al., 2006).

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

Data was collected from Sri Lankan consumers who have higher educational levels and earn a stable or relatively higher income level since past studies show that customers who possess higher educational levels have higher ethical awareness and are inclined to purchase ethically produced goods and since ethical products are more expensive, customers should pay a premium price to buy them (Beldad & Hegner, 2018; Nam et al., 2017; Taylor & Boasson, 2014). The sample was selected using non-probability, convenience sampling method. The questionnaire was prepared and circulated via social media platforms, emails and distributed to the targeted respondents in postgraduate courses whilst informing the objective of the study. 150 survey responses were considered in the study after removing missing data and imputation.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The data obtained from the questionnaires were analysed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, frequency analysis, and Pearson correlation analysis were used to examine the data, which was subsequently displayed as tables and descriptions.

4.1. Demographic Analysis

Table 1: Respondents Profile

Detail	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	46	30.7
	Female	104	69.3
Age	20-30 years	85	56.7
	31-40 years	31	20.7
	41-50 years	28	18.7
	Above 50 years	6	4
Education level	Graduate	82	54.7
	Postgraduate	29	19.3



	Other professional qualifications	39	26
Profession	Senior Official/ Manager/ Executive	32	21.3
	Professional	41	27.3
	Technician/ Associate Professional	13	8.7
	Self Employed	16	10.7
	Other	48	32
Income	Below Rs. 50,000	65	43.3
	Rs. 50,000-100,000	41	27.3
	Rs. 100,000-150,000	28	18.7
	Above Rs. 150,000	16	10.7
Residential Province	Western	57	38.0
	Central	47	31.3
	Southern	23	15.3
	Northwestern	14	9.3
	Sabaragamuwa	5	3.3
	Uva	2	1.3
	Eastern	1	0.7
	North Central	1	0.7
	North	0	0

Source: Survey data

As shown in Table 1, when considering the data sample, 69.3% of the respondents are female and the remaining 30.7% are males. Majority of the respondents are in the 20-30 age category which is 56.7% and 20.7% of respondents are between 31 to 40 years. Respondents in the 41-50 years of age count for 18.7% and 4% of the respondents are above the 50-year age category. Majority of the respondents are graduates, which counts for 54.7% whereas 19.3% are postgraduates and remaining holds other professional educational qualifications. When considering professions, majority are professionals, which amounts to 27.3%. 21.3% of the respondents hold executive/managerial positions whereas self-employed and technicians/associate professionals account to 10.7% and 8.7% respectively. The remaining belongs to “other” category. 43.3% of the respondents’ income levels are below Rs. 50,000 whereas 27.3% of respondents are between Rs. 50,000-100,000. 18.7% of the respondents’ income levels lie in the category of Rs. 100,000-150,000. Approximately one-tenth of the respondents have an income level exceeding Rs. 150,000. The majority, which counts for 38% of the respondents are from the western province. The second highest is the central province which is 31%. 15.3% and 9.3% are from the southern province and north-western province respectively. The remaining number of respondents are from other provinces.

4.2. Multivariate Assumptions

Study's authors have tested the following assumptions: normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity since a linear model is utilized (Alexopoulos, 2010).

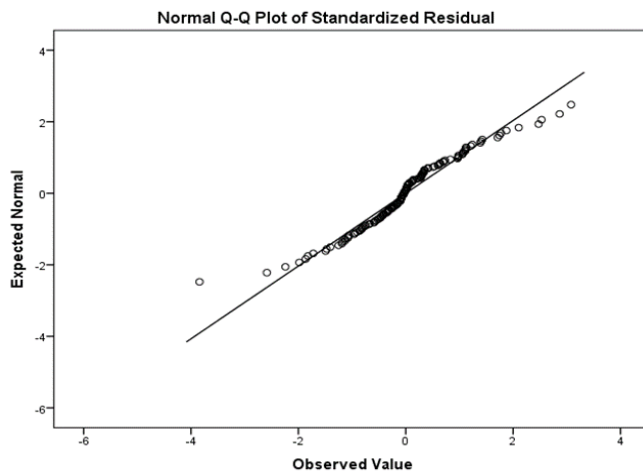
Table 2: Frequencies of Statistics

	<i>Purchase Intention</i>	<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Subjective norms</i>	<i>Perceived behavioural control</i>	<i>Ethical obligation</i>	<i>Self-identity</i>
Skewness	-0.516	-0.619	-0.221	-0.122	-0.438	-0.754
Kurtosis	-0.736	-0.447	-0.601	-0.999	-0.500	-0.268
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.394	0.394	0.394	0.394	0.394	0.394

Source: Survey data

According to the skewness test, if the figures are between -1 to +1 then the data set is approximately normally distributed (Kline, 2011). According to table 2, the factors related to skewness in the data set are within the above-mentioned standard range. Hence, it can be said that the data is approximately normally distributed. Moreover, it is said that if the absolute value of Kurtosis is less than 3 times the standard error of Kurtosis, the data set is normally distributed. With relevance to the survey data analysis, three times of standard error is 1.182. All the absolute kurtosis values are less than 1.182. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the data set is normally distributed (Kline, 2011).

Figure 2: Normal Q-Q Plot



Source: Survey data

In the normal Q-Q plot (Figure 2) which was derived from the study, majority of the residuals are distributed closer to the linear line. Thus, the residuals are normally distributed closer to the mean. Therefore, the results are more valid.

And the scatter plot generated through the study is randomly distributed without having a systematic pattern and it does not depict a funnel shape behaviour. As a result, the linear model remains linear, and homoscedasticity is met, hence satisfying the linearity and normality assumptions.

Multicollinearity testing is done to remove the interdependency between independent variables prior to executing the multiple regression analysis (Field, 2009). The data was processed using a multicollinearity test because there are five independent variables before the recommended hypothesis' suggested regression analysis. In order to rule out multicollinearity, the tolerance value should be more than 0.1 whereas Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) score in the multicollinearity test should be less than 10. The tolerance values for attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, ethical obligation and self-identity are 0.261, 0.376, 0.325, 0.226 and 0.298 respectively whereas the VIF values are 3.827, 2.659, 3.075, 4.425 and 3.351. This reveals that there is no issue regarding multicollinearity.

4.3. Reliability and Multiple Regression

A reliability test or internal consistency test was done to test whether all the items follow the same direction. This was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Field, 2009). All the variables possess Cronbach's alpha values more than 0.8. Therefore, the reliability of the scales used to measure the constructs are high.

Table 3: Regression Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F - Value	Significance
0.890 ^a	0.791	0.784	109.164	0.000 ^b

Source: Survey data



According to table 3, the coefficient of determination (R square) is 0.791. This says that 79.1% of the consumer's purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands has been explained by the regression model. As the value is more than 60% the model is nicely fitted. According to the adjusted R square, 78.4% of the consumer's purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands has been explained by the model. As there is less deviation between the R square and the adjusted R square, there is a goodness of fit in the model. The multiple correlation (R) is 0.89. This says that all the independent variables are strongly and jointly correlated with consumer's purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands. Probability of F-test statistics is 0.000. This indicates a significant result. Therefore, it can be concluded that the model is jointly significant, and all the independent variables jointly influence the purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands.

4.4. Correlation Analysis

To measure the strength of the linear relationships between each of the dependent and independent variables and to ensure the validity of the constructs of the study, correlation analysis was done using SPSS. According to the correlation values depicted in table 4, probability of the relationship between attitude and purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands is 0.000 ($p < 0.001$). This is highly significant. The coefficient of correlation is 0.834. This illustrates that there is a highly significant positive relationship between attitude and consumers' purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands. Further, there is a highly significant positive relationship between subjective norms and purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands as the p -value and correlation coefficient are 0.000 ($p < 0.001$) and 0.759 respectively. Perceived behavioural control and consumers' purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands are also highly significantly correlated as the p -value and correlation coefficient are 0.000 ($p < 0.001$) and 0.766 respectively. The p -value and the coefficient of correlation relevant to ethical obligation are 0.000 ($p < 0.001$) and 0.814 respectively, which demonstrate a highly significant relationship between ethical obligation and the dependent variable. The final independent variable, self-identity is also highly significantly correlated with the purchase

intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands as the p -value is 0.000 ($p < 0.001$) and the coefficient is 0.844. The correlation values are depicted in table 4.

Table 4: Correlation

Independent Variable	Purchase Intention	
	Pearson Correlation	Significance
Attitude	0.834**	0.000
Subjective Norms	0.759**	0.000
Perceived behavioural Control	0.766**	0.000
Ethical Obligation	0.814**	0.000
Self-Identity	0.774**	0.000

Source: Survey data

4.5. Hypothesis Testing and Findings

As the hypothesis is concerned with assessing the impact of each independent variable on the dependent variable, standardized coefficient figures are used to test the hypothesis and whether the hypothesis can be accepted or rejected is decided accordingly. Similar studies adopted 95% of the necessary level of confidence and as a result, 0.05 level of significance ($p < 0.05$) is used in this study (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis

	Hypothesis	Beta	Significance	Decision
H ₁	Attitude towards sweatshop-free products positively influences purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands.	0.328	0.000	Accepted
H ₂	Subjective norms on sweatshop-free products have a positive influence on the purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands	0.194	0.002	Accepted
H ₃	Perceived behavioural control positively influences purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands.	0.123	0.067	Rejected
H ₄	Self-identity positively influences purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands	0.185	0.022	Accepted
H ₅	Moral obligation positively influences purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands.	0.163	0.021	Accepted

Source: Survey data

As shown by Table 5, the p -value of attitude is 0.000. This value is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). This is highly significant. The individual beta value is 0.328. Therefore, the attitude has a highly significant positive effect on purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands.

The p -value of subjective norms is 0.002 ($p < 0.05$) and the individual beta value is 0.194. Therefore, the subjective norms have a highly significant positive effect on the dependent variable. Accordingly, hypothesis 2 can be accepted. The p -value related to perceived behavioural control is 0.067. Thus, it is insignificant. This refers to the fact that perceived behavioural control does not have a significant individual effect on the dependent variable. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is rejected.

Ethical obligation has a significant positive impact on the dependent variable as the p -value and individual beta values are, 0.022 and 0.185. Accordingly, hypothesis 4 is accepted.

The p -value of self-identity is 0.021 ($p < 0.05$) which is significant, and the individual beta value is 0.163. Self-identity has a significant positive impact on purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands. Therefore, hypothesis 5 can be accepted.

According to the standard coefficient of beta, the most influencing factor for purchase intention is the attitude of the consumers as it has the highest beta value. The second factor is subjective norms, and the third factor is ethical obligation. The fourth variable and the least influencing factor are self-identity and perceived behavioural control respectively.

5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.1. Discussion

Findings of this study show that attitude has a highly significant positive effect on purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands. These results support those of Anders et al., (2017); Hsu et al., (2017); Jin et al., (2012) and Paul et al. (2016), who came to the same conclusion that attitude is one of the key elements that strongly influence purchase intention for ethical products. This indicates that the respondents' attitudes towards ethical products are generally favourable.



According to the current study's findings, subjective norms also have a positive influence on the purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands. However, Shaw et al. (2006), point out that in the European context, subjective norms are less relevant in predicting buying intention because in that setting considering others' perspectives is a distant concept. However, a similar study done in the Indian context by Nigam (2014), showed contrasting results where subjective norms had a positive relationship and an impact on consumer buying intention towards sweatshop-free products. Therefore, by considering the above-mentioned facts, it can be concluded that contextual and cross-cultural differences related to high context and low context cultures may significantly affect the impact of subjective norms on the purchase intention towards sweatshop free footwear products.

Importantly, this study's findings reveal that perceived behavioural control does not have a significant individual effect on purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands which was proved through the rejection of hypothesis 3. A British study done by Yamoah et al. (2016), with regards to fairtrade purchase intention in retail industry also had similar results even though United Kingdom and Sri Lanka is culturally distant. However, these results of the perceived behavioural control variable, are contrasting with the research conducted by Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al. (2006), and Chen and Hung (2016), Anders et al. (2017), claim that due to the growing approachability and handiness of ethical goods anticipated challenges and complications may not be as strongly viewed as constraints to ethical consumption. According to Yamoah et al. (2016) and Maio and Olson (1998), ethical consumers are driven by their own interests and values and these values might have an impact on the desire to make a purchase irrespective of perceived behavioural control. Nevertheless, in the Sri Lankan context, a study conducted among undergraduate students with regards to ethical fashion found that attitudes and subjective norms had a substantial impact on buying intention, however perceived behavioural control was not identified as a significant influential factor (Wijerathne & Manel, 2023). Social cohesion and communal norms are frequently emphasized in Sri Lanka's collectivist culture, which is an indication of high-context societies. Personal behavioural constraints may not have as much of an effect on behavioural intentions in these societies when compared to the effect of subjective norms and social pressure. In Sri Lanka, where Buddhism is highly prevalent, empathy, non-harm, and preservation of the



environment are valued. Consumer behaviour is influenced by these ideals, which are profoundly embedded in the communal mind. According to studies, even in the face of real-world constraints, buyers who have strong moral senses are more likely to choose ethically manufactured products. Although there are a number of limitations such as limited product accessibility, increased prices, the interaction of moral principles, collectivist culture, identity dynamics, knowledge empowerment, and community involvement helps to explain the strong ethical intents seen among Sri Lankan consumers (Samarasinghe & Ashan, 2014; Thoradeniya et al., 2015). Although the hypothesis H_3 is disproved, it does not necessarily imply that this variable advocate influencing consumers' intentions to buy ethical goods. Since there is a linear relationship between perceived behavioural control and buying intention, this variable may have a marginal influence on the intention to buy. Therefore, its independent impact on ethical products should not be disregarded.

On the other hand, Ethical obligation has a significant positive impact on the purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands where, hypothesis 4 was accepted. The results are consistent with studies by Dowd and Burke (2013), and Leeuw et al. (2014), which came to the same conclusion that adding a moral responsibility component improves the reliability of purchase intention for ethically manufactured products.

Furthermore, self-identity also has positive impact on the purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands which is consistent with those of Anders et al. (2017), Dowd and Burke (2013) and Sparks and Shepherd (1992), who claim that self-identity is a main factor influencing a consumer's decision to buy an ethical product. The importance of ethical consumption concerns people's sense of self as ethical consumers (Shaw et al., 2003) hence it can be concluded that, such consumption habits are closely linked to a person's view of self. However, it requires conscious thought and effort from the customer's side to avoid products made in sweatshops and purchase ethically manufactured products.

Moreover, both additional variables namely ethical obligation and self-identity in the modified theory of planned behaviour have significant positive impacts on the Sri Lankan consumers' purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands which highlights the effectiveness of utilizing this model to the study.



5.2. Theoretical Contributions

This research primarily added to the body of literature by adding additional elements of ethical obligation and self-identity to the basic TPB model whilst investigating Sri Lankan consumer purchase intention towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands. Chen and Hung (2016), claim that consumer conduct is then seen as the major reason for the scarce resources that are not accessible, which leads to unjust conditions for those who are involved in manufacturing. Hence to lessen the harm brought on by consumption, it is essential to understand what factors impact a consumer's decision to buy ethical items. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis suggest that self-identity, subjective norms, ethical obligation, and attitude all significantly influenced consumers' propensity to buy ethical items, with attitude having the greatest impact. However, perceived behavioural control does not create a significant impact on influencing consumers' desire to buy ethical products. Moreover, a wider consumer population with ethical consciousness and an income was considered in terms of different age groups, gender, income levels, residential provinces and educational levels. Additionally, the theory of planned behaviour model's change was effective since it improved the model's predictive power, as evidenced by its high R square value of 0.791.

5.3. Managerial Implications

The most significant influence on purchasing intention for ethical items was attitude, hence it is recommended that a person's general appraisal towards ethical products to be enhanced so that they will intend to make ethical product purchases. It can be suggested for global marketers to adopt a more instructive marketing strategy for ethically made footwear brands by targeting educated and medium to high income earners in the Sri Lankan market as it was found that higher the income and education level, consumers are more inclined to purchase sweatshop-free footwear brands. Thus, increasing a person's awareness of societal concerns may result in a more optimistic mindset towards ethical goods, which may also boost the probability that people will choose products based on their moral characteristics (Nigam, 2014).



Moreover, based on this study's findings, when it comes to Sri Lanka, global marketers of footwear brands can consider subjective norms to be incorporated in their marketing strategy. Consumers in high context nations like Sri Lanka are driven by community welfare and social responsibility. Hence marketing campaigns can be designed to educate the positive social effects of buying sweat-free footwear produced using ethical labour standards and how it helps to develop local economies. Authentic value-based storytelling can be an effective technique since high-context cultures embrace indirect communication. Brands can demonstrate stories about the local values, artistry, traditions, and the cultural history woven into the footwear, and use evidence from society to promote moral purchasing rather than directly promoting ethical credentials. This approach promotes a stronger emotional bond by enabling customers to discern the brand's ethical position (Effandy & Xiao, 2025; Ali et al., 2025).

The study's conclusions can assist global marketers to incorporate ethical production and marketing practices in their businesses and thereby enhance their market share by increasing the accessibility and availability of ethical products. As a result, consumers will start to believe that ethical behaviour or consumption is a convenient and the most moral way of living.

5.4. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The researcher was able to gather only 150 responses to the questionnaire due to time restrictions and resource limitations. As a result, there is a possibility of the sample size having an impact on the findings. Therefore, it is recommended to increase the sample size in similar studies in the future.

Additionally, study's outcomes may vary due to the influence of correlation between independent variables. This study only considered a modified version of the theory of planned behaviour and there can be other factors and theories which can influence the consumer purchase intention towards ethical products. Hence it is suggested to use other theories and investigate other factors which affect consumer purchase intention towards sweatshop-free brands. It would be interesting to replicate the results over different types of products and



contexts to broaden the conceptual framework by integrating more factors associated with ethical consumer purchasing intention. Moreover, other ethical product categories like organic products, fair trade products, and green products also can be utilized in future research. Since customer income level and education seem to have a significant impact, they can be considered as moderating variables in future studies. Finally, there are several drawbacks related to the convenience sampling method which includes selection bias as participants are selected based on accessibility, which could result in a sample that is not representative of the general population. This may cause some groups to be overrepresented or underrepresented, which would distort the data and restrict the generalizability of the study's findings (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Hence to overcome the above-mentioned biases and enhance generalizability it is recommended to utilize other sampling methods such as stratified or random sampling methods in future research.

5.5. Conclusion

More attention has been devoted to social challenges in recent years, while a greater understanding and importance of consuming ethical products has proved to influence customer purchasing intention (Pollari, 2016). Consequently, the goal of this study is to identify the factors that influence Sri Lankan consumers' purchasing intentions towards sweatshop-free global footwear brands. The outcomes of this study give empirical evidence for the notion that the components of attitude, self-identity, moral obligation and subjective norms influence consumers' purchasing intentions towards global footwear products made using sweat-free labour. The outcomes of the multiple linear regression analysis rejected the hypothesis on perceived behavioural control, which was a unique finding of this study compared to previous similar research studies. In addition, it was found that subjective norms have a substantial influence towards the purchase intention of sweatshop-free products which contradicts the findings done in the Western context but agrees with the research done in South Asian context. It is worth noting that the attitude component was shown to have the greatest effect on purchase intention. This is in accordance with previous literature in which attitude was identified as the primary factor influencing purchasing intention towards ethical items. The findings also suggest that the initial theory of planned behaviour model was



improved since the study's updated theory of planned behaviour model clarified 79% of the dependent variable. This research provides insights on Sri Lankan customers' views regarding global footwear brands produced in an ethical environment. This information would be critical for production and marketing related decisions of global footwear manufacturers in order to improve their market share and brand image.

6. REFERENCES

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