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# Ethically Minded Consumer Behavior, Brands' Commitment to Sustainable Development and Brand Equity in the Apparel Market of Pakistan

**Short Title:** Ethically Minded Consumer Behavior.....

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose-**The current research paper elaborated effect of ethically-minded consumer behavior on the brand pledge to sustainable development and consumer perception and how it further impact “brand equity-loyalty-word of mouth statement.

**Designing/Methodology/Approach** - To evaluate proposed hypotheses, a quantitative study method with a close-ended questionnaire was structured to collect the responses with the convincing non-probability sampling method. About six hundred questionnaires were distributed among the various people and 217 valid responses were received back. To measure the participants' response, 5- Point Liker Scale was employed. Smart PLS was used to analyses the collected data

**Findings** - The findings of the study recommend and allow an increasing series of suggestions for the brand holders to adopt sustainable development practices and it will raise the attention of the ethically minded consumers.

**Research Limitations/Implications** - The research was conducted in the cities of Punjab Pakistan. Where the level of education and earnings are high. This study should also be conducted in other cities of Pakistan. The researchers have conducted this study for the apparel industry it should also be conducted on the other industries. At the final note for the further study in line with this study mediated relationship between variables used in this proposed model should be done. The new variable can also be introduced like brand image, satisfaction, perceived quality. This study has several implications for managers and academia. As a result of exposure and information, consumer behavior has changed in Pakistan and requires that organizations and brands must take necessary steps for owing sustainable development goals. This pledge to sustainable development is completely supposed by the consumer to boost brand equity, Loyalty, and constructive word of mouth.

**Originality/Value** - To the best of Author's Knowledge no study has been conducted to measure the impact of consumer behavior on Brands commitment to sustainable development in the Apparel Market of Pakistan

**Key Words:** Consumer behavior, Brands, Sustainability, Sustainable development, Brand equity, Ethically-minded consumer behavior

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## 1. Introduction:

Sustainable development got acceptance and grabbed the attention of the entire globe during the last two decades (Voola, 2022). The United Nations has established Sustainable Development goals in 2015 and it visualized to accomplish by 2030 (Navarro, 2022). The consumer has more awareness about the concept of sustainability and their buying behavior has influenced the brand companies (Sigurdsson, 2022). The Organizations have realized this change and they have developed their strategies to attack the consumer who is conscious about sustainable development (Fiscina, 2022). Sustainable development and its three pillars concept are becoming an important consideration for all kinds of businesses in developing and developed countries (Jian, 2022). There are three pillars of sustainability which are economic, environmental, and social (Marti, L., & Puertas, R. 2022). Due to the popularity of this concept, customers, government agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders are putting more pressure on the companies and brands to comply with the requirements of Sustainability (Wu,2022). The focus of this study is that currently, consumers are considering how their buying and consumption behavior can play a role in sustainable development.

Consumers are re-evaluating their consumption patterns concerning their moral point of view. Ethical Consumers are those who buy products that are not environmentally or socially harm full (Tan, T. M., Makkonen, H., Kaur, P., & Salo, J. 2022). This

study focused to explain ethically-minded consumer behavior (EMCB). As EMCB's emphasis is on ecological and social sustainability rudiments to brands' requirement to verify their pledge to sustainable development in terms of consumer perception (BCSD). Available researches have abundant focused-on SDGs ethically-minded consumer behavior and brand commitment to sustainable development. However, no research has been found to study the relation between ethically-minded consumer behavior (EMCB) and brand commitment to sustainable development. It is also required to study how brand commitment to sustainable development is seeming by the consumer.

### **Significance of the Study:**

The study was conducted for the apparel market of Pakistan. Pakistan is among the five top raw cotton-producing countries and large textile industry. Though the government has advanced strategies for sustainable development yet, it is still lacking in sustainability practices. This study will help and motivate the apparel brands owner how the Sustainable development commitment can increase their brand equity, loyalty, and good reputation among the consumers who are more ethical in their buying behavior. It will also contribute the academic literature available in the field of sustainable development and consumer's behavior for better understanding of the business and sustainability.

### **Research Objectives:**

The study had two research objectives;

- i- To understand the relationship between ethically-minded consumer behavior and the perceived value of brand commitment to sustainable development.
- ii- To study the impact of ethically-minded consumer behavior on a brand committed to sustainable development and its added effect along with supposed value and its consequences on the chain "Brand equity-loyalty-word of mouth communication"

## **2: Literature Review**

### **2. 1: Ethically Minded Consumer Behavior**

Ethically minded consumer behavior is based on codes, moral values, standards, and principles to determine what is wrong or right. Ethical consumption is defined as that considers health, environment, and society. Ethical purchasing means consideration of environmental, social, and economical factors during the purchasing process. Ethically minded consumers feel a responsibility towards social, economic, environmental, and humanity compliance. They participate actively in the efforts for sustainable development (Sánchez-González, I., Gil-Saura, I., & Ruiz-Molina, M. E. 2020). The demand for ethical products has increased in different countries. A study has revealed that usually the consumers in their actual practices do not act ethically and they are inclined by their morals and situations. Consumers are more aware of the environmental issues and their expectations in this regard are influencing their decision making. Pro-environmental consumers are contributing a lot to the

sustainable development of the world and have an impact on companies to convert to a sustainable business model. Companies need to understand the attitude and buying behavior of the consumers to develop their products and strategies accordingly (Kuchinka, 2018).

## ***2.2: Brands' Commitment to Sustainable Development as Perceived by Consumers***

Sustainability is an approach to use the current resources to fulfill your needs keeping in mind that future generations can also use these resources to fulfill their needs too (Rajput, 2022). It is the belief and value system that determine the development strategies of the brands and organization not to neglect the environmental and social factors for the gain of financial profit only (Zikria,2020). Sustainable development gives companies and brands a complete advantage of the reputation and positive consumer perception (Singh, A., & Sharma2022).). As the consumer is becoming more knowledgeable about sustainable development so the brands and organizations need to express their commitment to sustainable development initiatives along with the features of the products. It is supported through various studies that companies that work for sustainable development get a strong corporate image among their stakeholders. Regarding the apparel market, the consumer has more eco-awareness (Saha & Mathew,2022). It has emerged as a growing trend. The apparel industry is focusing on ethical issues and it has added sustainable development processes beyond the designs and style of the garments (Zikria,2020). Sustainable development a way of living, a commitment to fulfill the responsibility to save the resources. In business sustainability is a philosophy of not damaging the environmental and social system only for financial gain (Zikria,2020). Brands that follow sustainable development practices earn a positive image and position among the consumers which are ethically minded (Sánchez-González, I., Gil-Saura, I., & Ruiz-Molina, M. E. 2020). On the basis of the above-cited literature the primary Hypothesis has been projected as;

**H1:** Ethically minded consumer behavior has a positive and significant effect on brands' commitment to Sustainable Development as perceived by consumers.

## ***2.3: Brand Equity and Perceived Value***

Brand equity is a very important subject in marketing that adds value to the products and services. Many researchers have discussed brand equity in their research work however the literature on it is still without any conclusion and well arranged. Brand equity is the consumer perceived gain from the products or services of a brand as compared to the similar products and services of other brands. Brand equity is a kind of intangible asset which has great worth for the organization. Emerging robust consumer-based brand equity illustrates that the brand lodges a strong position in the consumer mind not necessarily that it is also strong in the market (Jeon,2021).

Many researchers have studied perceived value in the field of consumer behavior and its interaction with other variables like loyalty and brand equity. Different elements contribute to consumer perceived value which is gained for the money spent, quality, emotional value, and social value. In terms of quality, the benefits are associated with the features of the products or services. Value for Money

refers to the benefits against the cost that occurred. Emotional value refers to the feeling generated due to the use of a product or service. Social value refers to the overall benefit of society which is associated with the consumption of a product (Sánchez, 2020). Some studies have explored the effect of perceived brand value on brand equity and found positive relationship between them and perceived value has a correlation with brand equity. Perceived brand value has positive effect on brand equity Al-gharaibah, O. (2020).

In the field of marketing perceived value has not been given importance as an intervening variable. Perceived value has an affect on customer satisfaction and brand equity Al-gharaibah, O. (2020).

Based on the above literature the 2nd Hypotheses has been proposed as under

**H2:** Perceived value has a positive and significant effect on Brand equity.

Consumer Perceived value is the value that a consumer gains from a product. Markets define it as positive and negative points of a product or service according to the consumer point of view as per the ability of the product or service to fulfill consumer needs and expectations. The studies have shown that consumer is ready to pay a high price for a brand that is high in brand equity besides consumer does not pay a high price for the product which has low brand equity (Hassan,2021). Various researchers have studied the impact of perceived value on the purchasing intention of the consumer (Sánchez, 2020).

Companies have learned that adding the sustainable development as marketing tool. Only claims or advertising is not enough consumer experience and positive comments regarding brands efforts towards sustainable development has a positive impact on brand equity. Kuchinka, D. G., Balazs, S., Gavriletea, M. D., & Djokic, B. B. (2018)

The environmental pillar of sustainable development has gain more attention of the consumers within the last many years. This approach towards the sustainable development has become an important element in strengthening the company image in the market. It is vital that marketers and brand managers should understand how the sustainability practices are perceived among the consumers and impact on brand equity. Now consumers have better knowledge about the sustainable development and taking the responsibility to preserve the natural resources. This awareness and sense of responsibility influence their buying decision making. The brands steps towards sustainable development give more satisfaction to these consumers and have an impact on brand equity Serrano Ardila, L. C. (2021).

The third hypothesis was formulated on the bases of the studies as below;

**H3:** The Brands' promise to sustainable development as perceived by consumers has a positive and significant effect on brand equity

#### **2.4: Loyalty**

Loyalty is a robust predisposition for frequent purchasing preferably a choice product or service. Loyal consumers are a key source of growing business and also

obliging in fascinating new consumers (Akbari,2016). In the literature loyalty is composed of behavioral based on past experience and attitudinal based on future intentions .Loyalty is a robust commitment of the consumer to purchase the products from the same brand .Many researchers concluded a strong relation between brand equity and loyalty Sánchez-González, I., Gil-Saura, I., & Ruiz-Molina, M. E. (2020). During the last four decades brand loyalty has got the special attention of the marketers to retain the existing consumer as well as to attract the new . Many studies have explored that brand equity has a strong relation with brand loyalty Al-gharaibah, O. (2020).

Loyalty is the level of emotional attachment to a brand and it is very valuable for an apparel brand. A review of literature has revealed that most studies have been done to explore brand loyalty in the services sector e.g., hospitality, telecommunication, while such studies have been conducted very rarely in the apparel sector earlier studies, have discovered the connections between the factors of brand loyalty in exclusive industry settings like a hotel, restaurant, and mobile technology, with little or no studies being conducted on the apparel industry. Based on these factors the fourth hypothesis has been constructed as below;

**H4:** Brand equity has a significant and positive effect on the loyalty

### **2.5: Word-of-Mouth (WOM)**

Word of Mouth is the distribution of info amongst the consumer who is contented by a product stake their practices with others (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). It propagates rapidly, it multiplies one tell two tells four, and so on. Customer loyalty encourages them to share their feelings with other people in a positive manner (Jain,2012). Several researchers investigated the relationship between loyalty and word of Mouth (Akbari,2016).

Word of mouth is a type of communication among the consumers about the brand characteristics ,its products and services. Word of mouth communication can be positive or negative it affects the consumer buying behavior Purwanto, E., Deviny, J., & Mutahar, A. M. (2020).

It was studied that loyal customer to a brand share their positive feeling about this brand with other people .In marketing research the loyalty and formation of word of mouth has been intensively discussed . Several authors have concluded that there is a positive relation between loyalty and word of mouth communication .Mostly the loyal consumers are willing to share the information about the brands with others Sánchez-González, I., Gil-Saura, I., & Ruiz-Molina, M. E. (2020).

Many studies have explored that loyalty is a basic contributor to the word of mouth and consumer-like to share their experience with others. On the basis of the above information the fifth hypothesis has been developed as below;

**H5:** Loyalty has a substantial and constructive effect on word-of-mouth communication

### 3. Methodology:

To evaluate the five proposed hypotheses, a quantitative research method was used. A close-ended questionnaire was adapted. This questionnaire was used to collect the data related to EMCB, BCSD, perceived value, brand equity, consumer loyalty toward the store and word of mouth communication. The construct of the questionnaire was supported by the many researchers to collect the information for these variables. To measure the responses related to all items five-point likert-type scales were used instead of seven-point likert type scale which is easy to respond Sánchez-González, I., Gil-Saura, I., & Ruiz-Molina, M. E. (2020). The validity and reliability of the adapted questionnaire was tested before circulating it to respondents.

The information was gathered through the questionnaire from the ethically-minded consumer behavior, Brand pledge to Sustainable development, alleged value, brand equity, consumer loyalty to the Brand, and word-of-mouth endorsements. Convenience Non-probability sampling was used. Six hundred questionnaires were distributed among the various people and 230 valid responses were received back. The first 23 questions in the structured questionnaire were related to the variable under the study, Questions from serial numbers 24 to 28 were related to the profile information of the respondents. To measure the 5- Point Likert Scale was employed (1= strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neutral, 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree) (Akbri ,2016). Table: 01, shows the distribution of the sample based on the socio-demographic variables in terms of gender, age, education, income, and marital status.

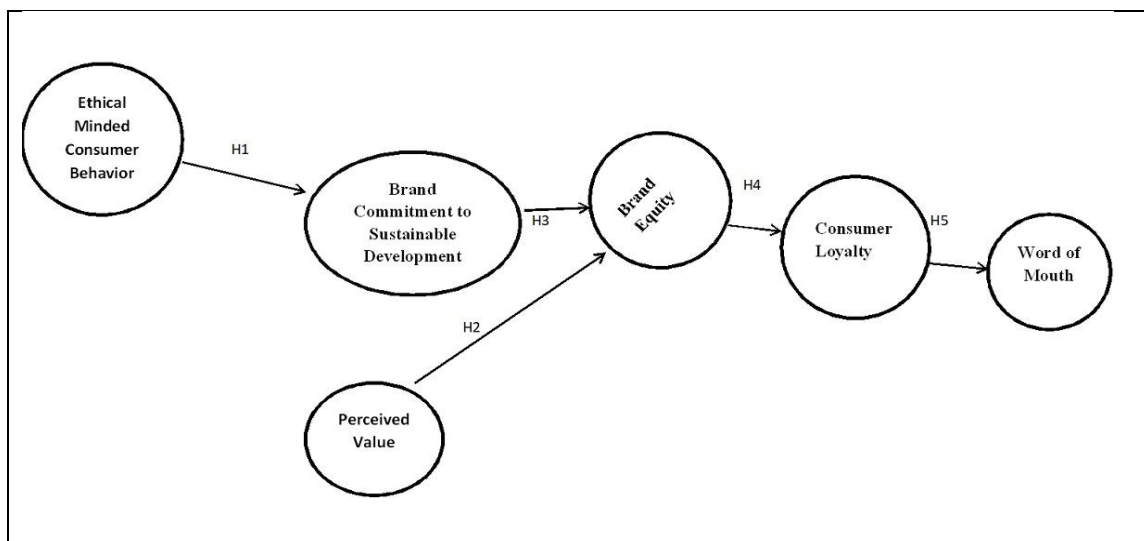
**Table 01: General Samples Details**

Variable	Total	%
	217	
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	126	58
Female	91	42
<b>Age</b>		
Below 20 Years	16	07
21 -30Years	87	40
31- 40Years	52	24
41-50 Years	37	17
51- above	25	12
<b>Education</b>		
Primary and Below	0	0
Intermediate	16	07

Graduation	92	43
Master and above	109	50
<b>Income (PKR)</b>		
Below 25000	69	32
26000 to 40000	28	13
41000 to 55000	35	16
56000 to 70000	22	10
70000 to above	63	29
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	105	48
Married	112	52

The different processes for the examination of outcomes attained from-composing posed were applied. In the primary step, the reliability of all the used scales was checked and in the next step, the relations amid the variables were crisscross to take or reject the hypothesis.

#### 4. Analysis of the Results



**Theoretical Framework Model (Figure:01)**

#### 4.1: Measurement Instrument Validation Process

In order to evaluate the proposed model, the reliability and validity of the measurement model were evaluated using the PLS software. The reliability of all scales was confirmed as values of Cronbach’s alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) of all scales are more than 0.5.



**Table 02: Conformity Factor Analysis Results**

Construct	Item	Standardized Factor Loading (SFL)	Cronbach( $\alpha$ )	CR	AVE
F1EMCB			0.653	0.782	0.420
	EMCB1	0.602			
	EMCB2	0.704			
	EMCB3	0.542			
	EMCB4	0.690			
	EMCB5	0.689			
F2 BCSD			0.627	0.780	0.471
	BSCD1	0.657			
	BSCD2	0.669			
	BSCD3	0.709			
	BSCD4	0.707			
F3 BE			0.632	0.801	0.574
	BE1	0.774			
	BE2	0.698			
	BE3	0.798			
F4 L			0.691	0.810	0.517
	L1	0.760			
	L2	0.695			
	L3	0.648			
	L4	0.767			
F5 PV			0.659	0.794	0.491
	PV1	0.641			
	PV2	0.727			
	PV3	0.724			
	PV4	0.708			
F6 W			0.760	0.861	0.674
	W1	0.836			
	W2	0.827			
	W3	0.800			

For the scrutiny of discriminant cogency for the measurement tool, as a first step, it was pointed out that to examine the discriminant validity in the measurement tool, initially, it was found that the projected relationships amid two factors were fewer than the square root of the normal discrepancy extracted of each factor. At the second stage, all the HTML ratios values were under 0.90 and on the comparison of the factor loadings across the columns, the item loadings for their own construct were in all

cases greater than their cross-loadings with other constructs (Sánchez-González, I., Gil-Saura, I., & Ruiz-Molina, M. E. 2020). Therefore, from Table 3 it can be seen that this condition was met in all cases.

**Table 03. Measurement Model Discriminant Validity**

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
F1 BSCD	0.686					
F2 BE	0.339	0.758				
F3 EMCB	0.487	0.299	0.648			
F4 L	0.496	0.516	0.356	0.719		
F5 PV	0.480	0.472	0.460	0.401	0.701	
F6 W	0.366	0.758	0.337	0.538	0.480	0.821

Values on the diagonal are the square roots of the AVE. Under the diagonal: squared correlations amid factors. Above the diagonal: hetero-trait–mono-trait ratio (HTMT).

Following, the organizational calculation model was projected by means of the partial least squares (PLS) regression technique to admit or reject the hypotheses based on t value and p-value.

**Table 04: Structural Equation Model Results**

Hypothesis	Relation	Path Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	P-Value	Results
H1	EMCB $\longrightarrow$ BCSD	0.487	0.000	Supported
H2	PV $\longrightarrow$ BE	0.401	0.000	Supported
H3	BCSD $\longrightarrow$ BE	0.147	0.041	Supported
H4	BE $\longrightarrow$ L	0.516	0.000	Supported
H5	L $\longrightarrow$ W	0.538	0.000	Supported

**Note:** EMCB =Ethically minded consumer behavior, BCSD =Brand Commitment to Sustainable Development PV=Perceval values, BE=Brand equality, L=Loyalty, W=Word of Mouth

## 5: Results and Discussion

As it has earlier indicated, the study has two set objectives;

- i- To understand the relationship between ethically-minded consumer behavior and the perceived value of brand commitment to sustainable development.
- ii- To study the impact of “ethically-minded consumer behavior” on a brand stanch to sustainable development and its added influence along with perceived worth and its effect on the chain “Brand equity-loyalty-word of mouth communication.

To study these relationships questionnaire was developed and circulated to the different cities of Punjab Pakistan through WhatsApp and email. Five Hypotheses were constructed. All these set hypotheses were tested and supported through the analysis. H1 was reinforced and displayed the constructive and important relationship amid ethically-minded consumer behavior and Brand commitment to sustainable development this datum was also designated by other researchers (Rasool, S., Cerchione, R., & Salo, J. 2020). H2 was also braced showing the positive and important relationship between professed value and Brand equity, it was also manifest by (Al-gharaibah, O. 2020). Brand commitment to Sustainable development and Brand equity has a positive and significant relationship H3 in line with the study conducted by (Sánchez-González, I., Gil-Saura, I., & Ruiz-Molina, M. E. 2020). Brand equity and Loyalty have a substantial and optimistic relationship H4 was putative which was also reinforced by the research led by (Hossain et al.,2020). Loyalty and word of mouth have a constructive and important connection H5, which was putative equally by the study completed (Sánchez-González, I., Gil-Saura, I., & Ruiz-Molina, M. E. 2020).

## **6: Conclusions and Future Considerations**

This research study has elaborated the ethically minded consumer behavior and its impact on a Brand commitment to sustainable development as well as the study of its effect on the creation of brand equity in the apparel market of Pakistan. It was noted that there was a positive and significant impact of EMCB on BCSD. The results concluded the positive and significant effect of BCSD and Perceived value on brand equity. It was also observed that there was a positive and significant impact of Brand equity on consumer loyalty. It was noted that when consumers realized the positive actions of a brand towards sustainable development the brand equity increased and they perceived it valuable a long-term affiliation with the brand was developed which led to loyalty and positive word of mouth development. This datum was also reinforced by the current literature. Generally, the results divulge that consumer behavior inspires brands to sustainable development. The brand's energies to sustainable development in the garments and industry market in Pakistan are certainly professed by the consumer. It boosts brand equity, loyalty, and encouraging word of mouth.

This study has several implications for managers and academia. As a result of exposure and information, consumer behavior has changed in Pakistan and requires that organizations and brands must take necessary steps for owing sustainable development goals. This pledge to sustainable development is completely supposed by the consumer to boost brand equity, Loyalty, and constructive word of mouth. This changed conduct should be measured by the brand executives while developing their Strategies.

There were some limitations as shared below;

- The research was conducted in the cities of Punjab Pakistan. Where the level of education and earnings are high. This study should also be conducted in other cities of Pakistan.
- The researchers have conducted this study for the apparel industry it should also be conducted on the other industries.
- At the final note for the further study in line with this study mediated relationship between variables used in this proposed model should be done. The new variable can also be introduced like brand image, satisfaction, perceived quality.

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