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Consumer Patterns of Sustainable Clothing Based on Theory of Reasoned Action: Evidence from Ecuador

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Abstract: Corporations need to understand the factors that influence purchase intention. The current study aimed to understand sustainable clothing patterns in Ecuador. A total of 343 Ecuadorian consumers completed an online survey; the results were analyzed with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). As the outcome, attitude was predicted by perceived environmental knowledge (PEK) and environmental concern (EC). PEK and EC are positively correlated to attitudes towards purchasing sustainable clothing. Additionally, attitude mediated the relationship between these two variables and purchase intention. As measured by PEK, attitude is the most critical factor in determining purchase intention, based on importance performance map analysis (IPMA). The research findings may support firms' marketing and selling strategies to demonstrate that their brands are environmentally green and generate greater consumer interest in current and future customers. The novelty of these findings is supported by the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique results.

Keywords: purchase intention; sustainable consumption; environmental concerns; attitude; subjective norms

1. Introduction

The mass production in the clothing industry is increasingly focused on the take–make–waste approach [1]. This industry is causing severe damage to the global environment [2]. Natural resource scarcity, environmental degradation, deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, and ozone layer degradation are among the negative consequences; distribution and manufacturing contribute to pollution, chemical wastes, and hazards, among other sequelae [3]. Products are often dismissively discarded, even though they can be reused [1]. However, the textile industry is continuously evolving, and circular fashion has emerged as one possible solution to these issues, consisting of recycling and reusing textiles, among others [4].

The global distress concerning these detrimental environmental shifts has been reflected through studies exploring people's knowledge and attitudes concerning environmental consciousness, the value of environmental preservation, and the purchase of environmentally sustainable products [5–7]. Consumers are steadily becoming much more environmentally conscious after realizing the seriousness of environmental problems and the need to diminish the impact of human behavior and consumption on the ecosystem [8].

In a related manner, consumers have a growing demand for sustainable clothing [9]. Environmental concerns, knowledge of potential benefits [10–15], and attitudes towards sustainable products can influence a consumer's purchase intention; however, previous studies point out that there are limits to the extent to which consumers are willing to sacrifice for the sake of an environmental cause [6,16]. Consumer acts are not necessarily about their values or attitudes, which can make it difficult to predict purchase intention for green products in a developing economy [17–19]. Along with a lack of a holistic framework, further research and insight into salient factors affecting sustainable products in the textile industry are required [8,20]. The present study can contribute to the decision making of corporate entities to increase the intention and action of sustainable purchasing by consumers.

The research gap concerns the effects of variables to explain purchase behavior in pandemic times. People's perception has changed due to the pandemic, generating a change in priorities [21–23] and a greater appreciation of social and environmental issues [24,25]. However, it is possible that there is a change in environmental concern, environmental attitude, as well as purchase intention due to the pandemic, so the scientific literature will benefit from understanding the effects of these variables on sustainable clothing purchasing behavior. It is considered that resilience based on environmental sustainability will give rise to increasingly ecological offers, for which it is important to understand if the relationship is fulfilled and to what extent.

This research aims to elucidate how and why an Ecuadorian consumer is more inclined to purchase sustainable clothing. Furthermore, the environmental–attitude–intention–behavior framework offers a thorough evaluation of the public, including their interests, attitudes, and values, to address their evolving behavior choices in Ecuador.

The structure of the present article is as follows. The conceptual framework and characterization of the components included in our framework model are discussed in Section 2. Additionally, previous studies on these linkages are identified, and the present gaps in knowledge are determined. The conceptual approach used to gather and evaluate the data is described in Section 3. The results and findings are presented in Section 4. Finally, Section 5 deals with the study's theoretical, practical, and empirical research constraints.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis

It has been recognized that even when environmental attitude and intention are reported, this does not necessarily become environmental conduct [26]. It has been possible to recognize aspects that may be barriers to green purchasing behavior, such as the lack of environmental concern [20]. Thus, the present study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge by showing a group of specific and unexplored antecedents of consumer decision making regarding the consumption of sustainable clothing and, in addition, to confirm that there is a relationship between the factors that explain the purchase intention and the purchase itself, specifically the purchase of sustainable clothing.

2.1. Perceived Environmental Knowledge and Attitude

Environmental knowledge is knowledge that consumers have about environmental issues, including both positive and negative information. Such knowledge is essential for producers and retailers since it can influence consumer behavior, involving the whole clothing ecosystem as it impacts the appreciation and decisions of consumers, as was described by Pagiaslis and Krontalis based on a survey of 1695 participants who showed that concern for the environment had a positive direct impact on environmental knowledge [27]. In addition, Mostafa found in a study of 1093 Egyptian consumers that ecological knowledge influences attitudes towards green purchase [28], which shows the need to modify production processes of goods and services, and also generate possible changes in the supply chain.

As consumers recognize the effects of production and consumption on the environment, awareness of issues increases, thereby increasing environmental concern, as was

reported by Saari et al., who surveyed 11,675 participants from nine countries in Europe [29]. According to the work of Fraj-Andrés et al. [30], a chain is generated with a direct relationship between the variables so that a green consumer reveals concern for the environment, which leads to a change in purchase intention and commitment, generating green behavior as an outcome.

The fashion industry is offering solutions to consumer concerns. To achieve greener production, firms are looking for alternative ways and means to reduce negative environmental impacts through limited and controlled production, renewing techniques, using biodegradable and recyclable inputs, and optimizing packaging, among other potential changes [14]. Thus, constantly increasing environmentally sustainable clothing—being greener, in this case—would be reflected not only in reduced animal consumption but also resource saving and the broadening of the product portfolio to offer innovative solutions that distinguish companies from competitors so that consumers perceive the product value. Klerk et al., based on a survey of 429 participants in Africa, reported that value perception had an effect on purchase intention [31]. Moreover, using 1634 digital news magazine articles and 33 respondents in a survey, Rese et al. reported that the important success factors of knowledge were factors that drive sustainable buying [32]. Finally, Arslan et al. demonstrated the relationship between consumer lifestyles and sustainable firms [33].

Additionally, to complement ethical utilization, companies must also communicate their social and environmental responsibility practices, identified as indispensable factors by Shen et al. [34], making such information public to be known and recognized by designers, producers, retailers, and consumers. Arslan et al. [33] stated that the production of more significant numbers of environmentally friendly products must be more widely available to consumers, and the availability of environmentally friendly products should be leveraged by paying higher product prices within the industry.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Perceived environmental knowledge is positively correlated to attitude towards sustainable clothing.*

2.2. Environmental Concern and Attitude

Environmental concern can be defined as a person's unwavering knowledge of environmental challenges and attempts to solve such challenges or fulfill their willingness to contribute to the endeavor [35]. Environmental concern is a significant factor influencing consumer decision making, as was described by Ibrahim et al. based on outcomes from 303 students in Malaysia [36]. Consumers concerned about the environment are more inclined to evaluate the environmental impact of their potential purchases, based on 305 questionnaires distributed in China [19]. According to Schultz [37], who surveyed 180 participants, there are three identified levels of environmental concern: egoistic (concern towards oneself), altruistic (concern towards others), and bio-spherical (concern for the ecosystem as a whole). The more environmental concerns a person attains, the more ecologically conscious their purchasing practices, as in Khaola et al. [5]. According to Dagher et al., based on 326 questionnaires in Lebanon [38], the environmental concern factor significantly impacts people's willingness to act in a manner consistent with helping the environment. According to Iversen and Rundmo [39], based on 1450 participants in Norway, environmentally conscious consumers are more inclined to purchase "green" products than consumers with less concern for the environment.

An individual's consistent psychological inclination for specific conduct is reflected in attitude [40]. General attitudes consist of beliefs that manifest as actions relevant to a determined subject [35]. Several consumer behavior models advocate testing factors such as attitudes, according to Ibrahim [36]. Attitudes are critical factors that serve as interpreters of behavior, behavioral intention, and elements that underlie individual differences in behavior [38]. Previous studies have examined the link between environmental attitudes and behavior. Li et al. [19] state that environmental concern, environmental awareness,

attitudes, and behavioral intentions influence households' inclination to purchase energy-efficient products.

Ibrahim et al. [36]'s findings also suggest that environmental concern strongly influences anti-littering attitudes. In various environmentally relevant situations, the impact of specific attitudes on behavior is developed. The more positive an individual's attitude towards specific conduct, the more likely that person is to engage in that behavior. Khaola et al. [5] point out that environmental concerns were a significant factor in perspectives of sustainable products, which affected sustainable purchasing intentions. Environmental concern, perceived as a general attitude, also impacts domain-specific attitudes [19]. Previous studies have determined that environmental concern also affects behavioral intent and inclination towards activity; consumers who are more concerned about the environment have a more favorable attitude toward the environment, which, in turn, promotes their tendency to act in ways and means that are designed to positively impact the environment [36].

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Environmental concern is positively correlated to attitude towards sustainable clothing.*

2.3. Theory of Reasoned Action

Rational decisions are made by consumers when they are exposed to a specific behavior [36]. The Theory of Reasoned Action developed by Fishbein [41] aims to explain behaviors based on behavioral intention. Behavioral intention refers to a person's probability of performing an action and adopting a behavior [42]. According to this theory, two significant constituents determine behavioral intention: attitude and subjective norms. The latter assumes that a person's behavior depends on various factors and influences [43], based on the report of Xiao including 341 participants in the USA. The former refers to consumers' positive or negative evaluations regarding a specific behavior, according to Buabeng-Andoh's study of 487 participants in Ghana [44]. In this sense, it represents the likes and dislikes regarding the purchase intention of an item [45]. Therefore, consumers are more likely to adopt a specific behavior if their attitude towards performing these increases, according to Joshi et al.'s review of 53 empirical articles between 2000 and 2014 [46], and considering the outcomes of Nam et al.'s survey of 542 American consumers [47]. Previous studies revealed that attitude could also be positively associated with "green" purchase intention [17,47,48], and this variable is considered one of the most critical factors in determining purchase intention that is based on sustainability [17].

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *Attitude is positively correlated to purchase intention of sustainable clothing.*

Several factors can also influence attitude. For instance, previous research determined that a positive relationship exists between the need to protect the environment, environmental awareness, environmental values, and environmental concerns based on a survey of 207 online panel members by Yeon [49], 317 responses in Malaysia received by Ghazali et al. [50], and 251 participants in Indonesia studied by Chin et al. [51]. These findings demonstrate that consumers' attitudes are possibly influenced by their respective value systems and motivations, according to 457 participants in Taiwan surveyed by Teng and Lu [52] and 378 participants in India surveyed by Tandon et al. [53]. For example, the current literature provides evidence of a relationship between attitude, environmental knowledge, and "green" purchase intention [18,54]. A highly positive attitude results in a higher purchase intention and subsequent buying behavior. Sultan et al. [55] determined that purchase intention is a mediator between attitude and purchase behavior.

Hypothesis 4a (H4a): *Attitude acts as a mediator between perceived environmental knowledge and purchase intention of sustainable clothing.*

Hypothesis 4b (H4b): Attitude acts as a mediator between environmental concern and purchase intention of sustainable clothing.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Purchase intention is positively correlated to purchase behavior of sustainable clothing.

Subjective norms focus on social pressure from individuals, friends, and family, among others, to perform a specific behavior [44,48]. This emphasizes that close people who offer positive opinions affect consumers' attitudes towards consuming certain goods [54]. Previous studies evidenced a relationship between this variable and environmental-related behaviors [17,47,56,57]. Some researchers found that this variable had a minor impact on purchase intention [58,59]. Other investigators demonstrated that it is one of the most critical determinants [60]. The underlying reason for the difference between the findings of these investigations may be because consumers want to visually outwardly demonstrate their ecological concerns to their family and friends [61].

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Subjective norms are positively correlated with purchase intention of sustainable clothing.

Figure 1 shows the research model.

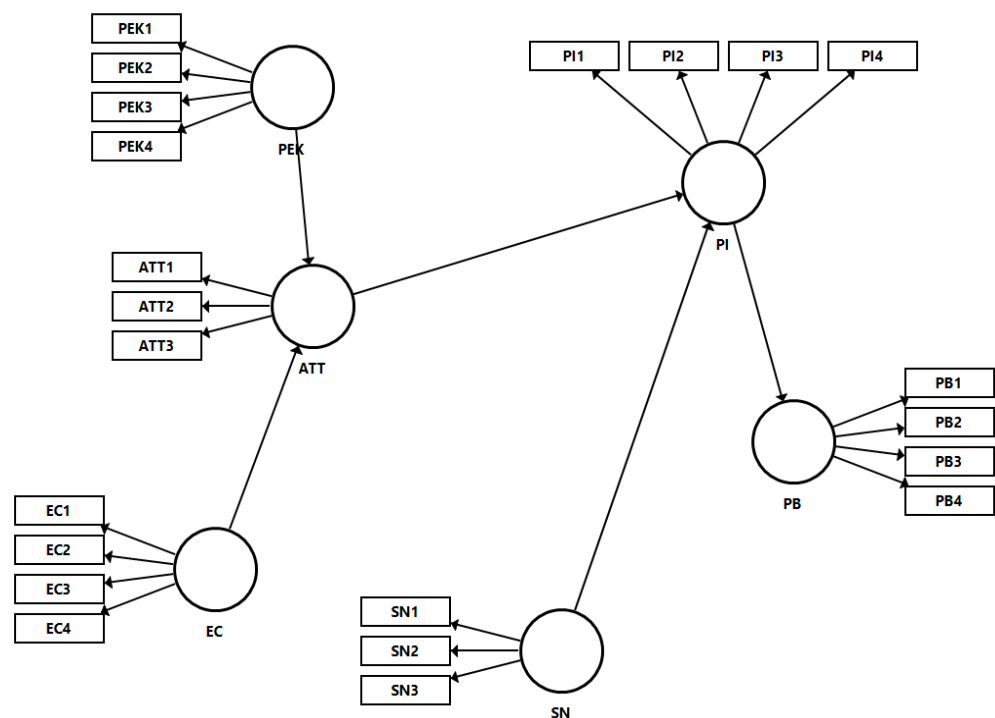


Figure 1. Model of consumer behavior.

3. Methodology

The present study was undertaken in the fashion industry of Ecuador. The quantitative information was collected through online surveys.

3.1. Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was employed in this investigation. It consists of 33 items. The instrument was built based on items in the literature and previous studies [40–42]. Before presenting the main questions, respondents were informed about the objectives of the investigation and the time it would take them to fill in their responses. The survey contains a section on sociodemographic information, such as age, gender, level

of education, occupation, and monthly income. Regarding each construct, items were assessed through a Likert-type scale of 5 options (from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree), used in previous studies [62–64]. The items for the variables were based on different authors. Attitude items were adapted from Chan [65], Ling-Yee [66], and Park and Lin [67]. Subjective norm items were adapted from [68]. Perceived environmental knowledge items were adapted from Ellen et al. [69]. Items for environmental concern were adapted from Dunlap et al. [70] and Lee [71]. Items to measure purchase intention were adapted from Kumar et al. [72] and Park and Lin [67]. Finally, purchase behavior items were adapted from Lee [71] and Schlegelmilch et al. [73].

3.2. Sample

The information was gathered from 5 to 22 September 2021, collecting 343 valid responses from Ecuadorian consumers. The data were collected through a non-probability sampling method (snowball). Table 1 displays the sociodemographic results of the respondents.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Demographic	Specifications	Counts	Proportion (in %)
Gender	Female	197	57.43%
	Male	146	42.57%
Monthly Income	No income		66.68%
	<250 USD		26.04%
	250–375 USD		3.49%
	376–500 USD		2.33%
	501–625 USD		0.58%
	>625 USD		0.87%
Educational Level	Elementary School Complete	49	12.50%
	Middle and High School Complete	281	9.70%
	Undergraduate Students	38	71.50%
	College/Institute Complete	13	3.30%
	Postgraduate	1	0.30%
	Other	11	2.80%
Occupation	Studying	378	94.20%
	Working	1	0.30%
	Studying and Working	11	6.80%
	Other	3	0.80%
Purchase frequency of clothes per month	Never	74	18.80%
	1–2 times	258	65.60%
	3–5 times	49	12.50%
	6–7 times	4	1%
	>8 times	8	2%
Consumption frequency of sustainable products	Never	23	4.90%
	Rarely	147	37.40%
	Occasionally	181	46.10%
	Mostly	30	7.60%
	Always	12	3.10%
The overall attitude towards sustainable products	Very Negative	3	0.80%
	Negative	5	1.30%
	Neutral	153	38.90%
	Positive	177	45%
	Very Positive	55	14%

3.3. Analysis of Data

The information was filtered and coded using Microsoft Excel. Then, the data were analyzed through the SmartPLS program. The partial least squares (PLS) assessment model allowed the analysis of the reliability and validity of the model. A model is reliable

if loads are higher than 0.65. Cronbach's alpha and the composite reliability exceeded 0.65 [74]. Secondly, convergent validity was assessed, with the average variance extracted exceeding 50%. Finally, the discriminant validity of the model was corroborated with the Fornell–Larcker criterion [74]. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was later employed to determine the significance of relationships. Finally, importance performance map analysis (IMPA) was applied to determine the most critical construct in determining purchase intention of sustainable clothing.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement Model Assessment

In this study, the model was assessed through a two-stage methodology process. The first step was to measure the model assessment, known as reflective analysis. Outer loading was analyzed to determine existing correlations between items and constructs. Most of the inputs exceeded 0.65, the minimum required for exploratory analysis [74] (Table 2).

Table 2. Measurement items and outer loadings.

Construct	Item	Detail	Outer Loading
Perceived Environmental Knowledge (PEK)	PEK1	I know how to behave sustainably	0.701
	PEK2	I know how I could lower the ecological harm with my behavior	0.755
	PEK3	I understand how I could reduce the negative environmental consequences of my behavior	0.797
	PEK4	I understand how to protect the environment in the long term	0.706
Environmental Concern (EC)	EC1	I am concerned about the environmental development	0.825
	EC2	I am concerned about the long-term consequences of unsustainable behavior	0.784
	EC3	I often think about the potential negative development of the environmental situation	0.732
	EC4	I am concerned that humanity will cause lasting damage to the environment	0.728
Attitude (ATT)	ATT1	Generally, I have a favorable attitude towards the sustainable version of clothes	0.725
	ATT2	I am positive-minded towards buying secondhand clothes	0.682
	ATT3	I like the idea of buying sustainable clothes instead of conventional clothes to contribute to environmental protection	0.845
Subjective Norms (SN)	SN1	My friends expect me to buy sustainable clothes	0.79
	SN2	My family expects me to buy sustainable clothes	0.898
	SN3	People who are important to me expect me to buy sustainable clothes	0.911
Purchase Intention (PI)	PI1	I consider purchasing sustainable clothes	0.792
	PI2	I intend to buy sustainable clothes instead of conventional clothes in the future	0.874
	PI3	I might buy sustainable clothes in the future	0.825
	PI4	I would consider buying sustainable clothes if I happen to see them in an online store	0.772
Purchase Behavior (PB)	PB1	I choose to buy exclusively sustainable clothes	0.767
	PB2	I buy sustainable clothes instead of conventional clothes if the quality is comparable	0.67
	PB3	I purchase sustainable clothes even if they are more expensive than conventional clothes	0.679
	PB4	When buying clothes, I pay attention that they are sustainable	0.667

Internal consistency reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). Since all the results are above 0.6, the items used per construct show similar results (Table 3).

Table 3. Internal consistency reliability.

Latent Variable	Items	Mean (SD)	Cronbach's Alpha	CR
ATT	3	2.059 (0.652)	0.671	0.797
EC	4	2.294 (0.638)	0.768	0.852
PB	4	2.743 (0.716)	0.664	0.79
PI	4	2.509 (0.574)	0.725	0.829
PEK	4	2.187 (0.671)	0.832	0.889
SN	3	2.128 (0.489)	0.836	0.901

Convergent validity is tested through average variance extracted (AVE), which exceeded 0.5, the minimum recommended, demonstrating that the construct explains more than 50% of the variance of the individual items per construct. Finally, discriminant validity was analyzed through the Fornell–Larcker criterion [75]. It corroborated that the variance extracted square root (numbers in bold) was more significant than the correlations presented by one subscale with the rest of the subscales. Interestingly, the shared variance of all model constructs is not more significant than their respective AVEs, demonstrating discriminant validity (Table 4).

Table 4. Convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Construct	AVE	ATT	EC	PB	PI	PEK	SN
ATT	0.568	0.754					
EC	0.59	0.458	0.768				
PB	0.486	0.398	0.373	0.697			
PI	0.548	0.491	0.655	0.372	0.741		
PEK	0.667	0.587	0.513	0.592	0.47	0.817	
SN	0.753	0.402	0.299	0.413	0.297	0.403	0.868

4.2. Structural Model Assessment

The variance inflation factor (VIF) registered per item was between 1.976 and 3.235, focusing on formative assessment, confirming multi-collinearity. The final step in the process is related to the statistical significance of relations (Table 5).

Table 5. Discriminant validity.

Construct	VIF	Construct	VIF
ATT1	1.193	PEK1	1.249
ATT2	1.238	PEK2	1.438
ATT3	1.303	PEK3	1.51
EC1	1.784	PEK4	1.361
EC2	1.512	PI1	1.639
EC3	1.407	PI2	2.374
EC4	1.444	PI3	2.047
PB1	1.572	PI4	1.571
PB2	1.06	SN1	1.611
PB3	1.419	SN2	2.359
PB4	1.476	SN3	2.417

ATT: attitude towards sustainable clothing consumption; EC: environmental concern; PB: purchase behavior PEK: perceived environmental knowledge; PI: purchase intention; SN: subjective norms.

Table 6 shows R-squared and adjusted R-squared to judge the goodness-of-fit of the model tested.

Table 6. R-squared and adjusted R-squared.

Latent Variable	R-Squared	Adjusted R-Squared
ATT	0.273	0.27
PB	0.351	0.349
PI	0.378	0.375

4.3. Structural Model Assessment

The variance inflation factor (VIF) registered per item was between 1.060 and 2.417, focusing on formative assessment, confirming multi-collinearity. The final step in the process is related to the statistical significance of relations. We applied the bootstrapping method at 5000 iterations since all p -values < 0.05 , and hypotheses from 1 to 6 (excluding H4) are supported. Moreover, the effect size (f^2) was added to define the direct impact of a variable. As demonstrated, H1 and H5 registered a more significant impact. Table 7 displays all the results.

Table 7. Hypothesis testing with effect size.

H	Hypothesis	Beta	SE	T-Value	p -Value	Supported	f^2	Interpretation
H1	ATT \rightarrow PI	0.507	0.046	10.987	0	Yes	0.347	Large
H2	EC \rightarrow ATT	0.239	0.06	3.953	0	Yes	0.045	Small
H3	PI \rightarrow PB	0.334	0.057	5.839	0	Yes	0.54	Large
H5	PEK \rightarrow ATT	0.592	0.036	16.262	0	Yes	0.088	Small
H6	SN \rightarrow PI	0.199	0.046	4.315	0	Yes	0.054	Small

Attitude acts as a mediator between PEK, EC, and PI. Moreover, PI can act as a second mediator between PEK, EC, and PB, demonstrating that increased attitude due to high PEK and EC increases PI. If PI increases, the probability of adopting PB is higher, confirming the Theory of Reasoned Action. Table 8 shows the specific indirect effects as determined in the overall model.

Table 8. Specific indirect effects.

Scale	Original Sample	Mean	Standard Deviation	T-Statistics	p -Value
PEK \rightarrow ATT \rightarrow PI \rightarrow PB	0.121	0.124	0.035	3.499	0.001
EC \rightarrow ATT \rightarrow PI	0.3	0.303	0.034	8.838	0
PK \rightarrow ATT \rightarrow PI	0.1	0.102	0.022	4.582	0
ATT \rightarrow PI \rightarrow PB	0.072	0.074	0.022	3.305	0.001
EC \rightarrow ATT \rightarrow PI \rightarrow PB	0.169	0.171	0.034	4.965	0
SN \rightarrow PI \rightarrow PB	0.118	0.12	0.029	4.007	0

4.4. Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA)

We extended the assessment model by adding the importance performance map analysis (IPMA), and purchase intention was used as a target variable. This method contrasts the importance of total effects with the respective variables' average values (performance) [50]. As observed, attitude is considered the most critical factor in purchasing sustainable clothing (PI). For instance, an increase of one point in attitude performance leads to an increase in purchase intention (PI) performance by a total effect of 0.488. Conversely, subjective norms have lower importance than attitudes but have a higher total effect than EC. This finding is likely the result of SN not being mediated by ATT, whereas PEK and EC are. Finally, it is essential to provide further discriminatory attention to EC and PEK since they are shown to be the predictors of attitude, and this is statistically shown to be the most critical factor of PI (Figure 2).

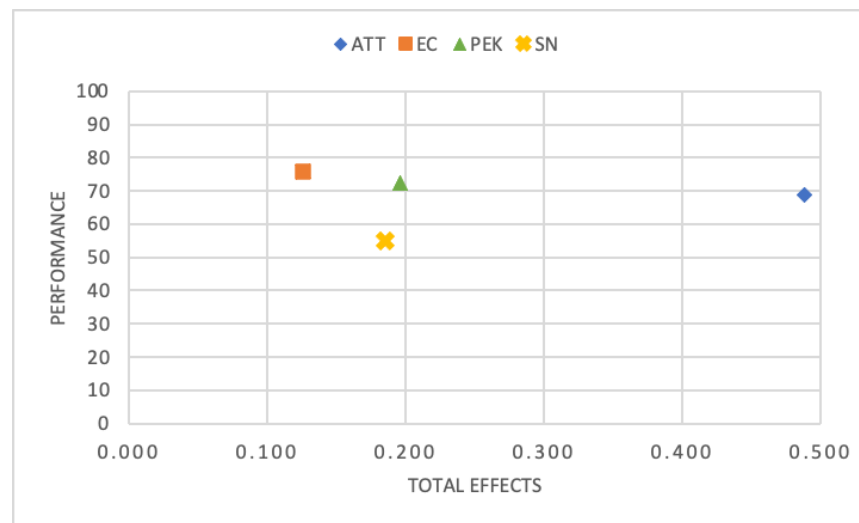


Figure 2. Importance performance map analysis with purchase intention as the target construct.

Figure 3 shows the statistical analysis of the consumer behavior model.

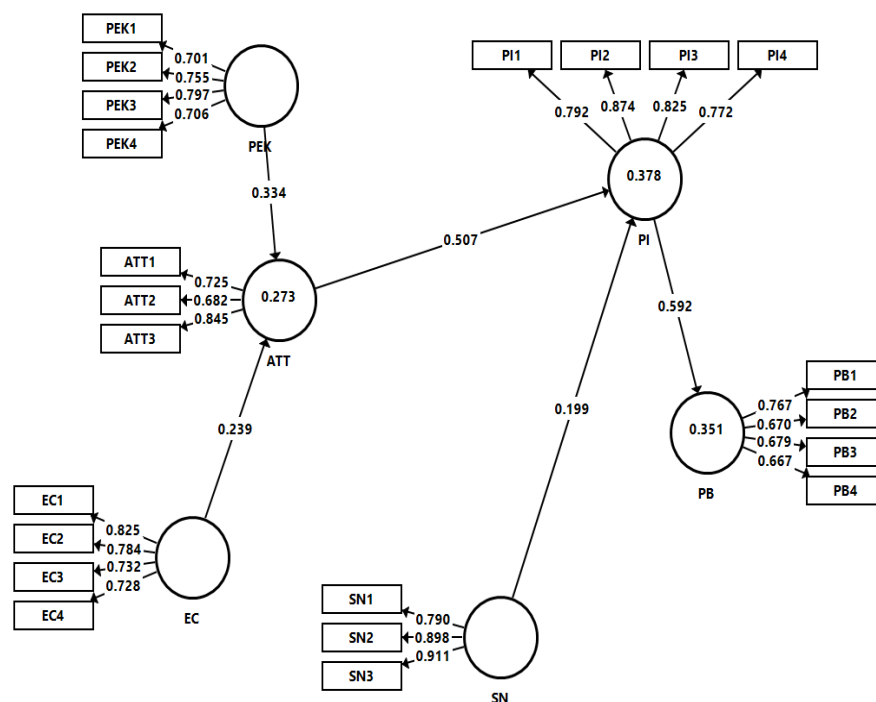


Figure 3. Consumer behavior model analysis.

5. Discussion

The results show various items that have a factorial load greater than 0.7, which contribute to the measurement of each variable. In the case of perceived environmental knowledge, living sustainably is an important element to subsequently generate the intention and behavior of purchasing sustainable clothing, as previously described by Lin and Chen [76]. The item “I know how I could lower the ecological harm with my behavior” also proved to be relevant within the model, which recognizes that the person feels that he or she can be the protagonist with his or her behavior of harm to the environment, as described by Leclercq. On the other hand, the items “I understand how I could reduce the negative environmental consequences of my behavior” and “I understand how to protect the environment in the long term” represent the understanding that the person is

able to contribute to the reduction in negative effects on the environment, as described by Blerly et al. [77].

The items linked to environmental concern, which were “I am concerned about the environmental development”, “I am concerned about the long-term consequences of unsustainable behavior”, “I often think about the potential negative development of the environmental situation”, and “I am concerned that humanity will cause lasting damage to the environment also had high values”, show that there is a real consumer concern regarding environmental development, the long-term consequences of unsustainable behavior, the potential negative development, and the damage that humanity can cause to the environment, as was described by Rausch and Kopplin [20] and Park and Lin [67].

The items pertaining to attitude towards sustainable clothing, “Generally, I have a favorable attitude towards the sustainable version of clothes”, “I am positive-minded towards buying secondhand clothes”, and “I like the idea of buying sustainable clothes instead of conventional clothes to contribute to environmental protection”, had high values in factor analysis, as described by Jung et al. [78]. With respect to subjective norms, good values for the items “My friends expect me to buy sustainable clothes”, “My family expects me to buy sustainable clothes”, and “People who are important to me expect me to buy sustainable clothes” are similar to those reported by Kumar et al. [79].

As it was evaluated, adding predictors such as environmental concern and perceived environmental knowledge to the TRA model demonstrated the extent to which consumers are concerned about their environmental impact, leading to the adoption of sustainable purchase habits [47,48]. According to previous studies, consumers with significant environmental concerns were more likely to take action to reduce their ecological footprint [17,47]. In response, individuals are more likely to consume sustainable products consistent with and parallel to the theoretical basis from previous sources [19]. Our outcomes led us to verify the perceived environmental knowledge as a factor involved in consumer behavior, attitude, and purchase intent, through which a higher perception of current environmental threats and climate change propitiated by human consumption and the respective pressure exerted on the planet can influence the adoption of responsible consumption, as well as “green” purchase behavior [5,6,16,47].

The present study, carried out in Ecuador, demonstrated that attitude and PI are correlated, but attitude growth leads to an increase in PEK, EC, and PB. The findings further highlight similar results as past studies [19,33,54]; thus, the previous hypotheses are further supported. After testing the hypotheses and the effect of sample size, it was concluded that the design of the Theory of Planned Behavior in Ecuador demonstrated a positive relationship between the variables, including PEK with ATT, EC with ATT, ATT with PI, and attitude as a mediator between those variables. A positive attitude having an impact on the other variables incrementally translates into the purchase intention and behavior being inclined towards sustainability. A striking finding is that consumers consider that others, including family, expect them to purchase sustainable products, affirming that, in terms of clothing, there are now sustainable options over conventional, and ideas that their decisions contribute to environmental protection.

6. Conclusions

Consumers are astute and are increasingly becoming more aware of alternative products considered more environmentally friendly than conventional goods. This “green” consumer awareness is spreading worldwide, and the population is starting to adopt pro-environmental behaviors such as sustainable clothing consumption. In this study, purchase intention was indeed influenced by environmental concern and perceived environmental knowledge. Environmental attitude was the mediator in this relationship since the evaluation made by consumers is based on the two variables mentioned above. Subjective norms have a small effect on purchase intention but are still present. Extending the Theory of Reasoned Action allowed an enhanced understanding of Ecuadorian consumer reality. Finally,

attitude is the most critical factor that determines the purchase intention of sustainable clothing, which was corroborated through the PLS-SEM method and IMPA.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

This study has made it possible to substantiate that knowledge is a factor that influences attitude, which demonstrates that generating training and disseminating information can change the attitude of the potential buyer in the future. On the other hand, it has also been shown that environmental concern has an effect on attitude. Subsequently, based on the TPB, the attitude has a known influence on the purchase intention as well as the subjective norm. It is necessary to highlight that there is little evidence of these relationships between variables to explain the intention to purchase sustainable clothing in emerging countries, so it will be useful for comparisons with consumers in other regions.

As previously suggested, “green” purchasing behavior refers to the direct consumption of goods with a reduced environmental impact [38]. Environmental awareness and attitudes influence green purchasing decisions; furthermore, assessing how environmental concern and subjective norms shape “green” purchase behavior and purchase intention has been studied [6,48]. The modest beta correlation between subjective norms and purchase intention supports the prior literature findings [20,52].

Lastly, it is pertinent to emphasize how individuals assess their perceptions of sustainable clothes via PEK and EC, with attitude having a highly impactful role in this mental process [20]. Interestingly, the indirect influence of environmental knowledge on purchase intention enabled through attitude proved to be closely related [8,18], which can be attributed to the previously established influence of perceived environmental knowledge over attitude regarding sustainable products and “green” purchase behavior [16]. As mentioned above, individuals with environmental concerns are more likely to develop a favorable attitude toward the environment and ultimately assume a purchasing behavior for sustainable products [19,36].

6.2. Industrial Implications

Companies must increasingly adapt their processes and machinery to what is known as Industry 4.0, where inputs are used efficiently, based on clean processes and sustainable raw materials. Companies will be able to adapt gradually, changing some specific processes and then gradually implementing the change in an extended way in the other processes. Policy makers should use these results to ensure that national regulations need to promote the manufacture, sale, and export of sustainable clothing. Evaluating the responses aims to identify consumer behavior to recognize attitude change and provide information that other researchers and industry participants can use to better understand consumer choices (i.e., organic foods, traditional herbal medicines, and nutraceuticals). Clothing producers can use the information obtained from the findings to optimize and communicate their sustainable practices and consider the importance given to aspects such as the increased search for sustainable solutions, and, therefore, the increased care for the environment and the social responsibility which can be imparted.

6.3. Limitations and Future Research

This research presents some limitations regarding its generalizability. Firstly, collecting a more significant number of responses from demographic groups of other ages and backgrounds is recommended, strengthening and deepening the investigation of other cohorts of the population. Secondly, the Theory of Reasoned Action was applied but can be adapted and segued into the Theory of Planned Behavior by adding new constructs, including perceived behavioral control. Limitations also include the lack of specifications in the items about the type of clothing. The collection of data was during the COVID-19 pandemic, so a post-pandemic evaluation of consumers during less turbulent times is needed.

For future research, it will be interesting collect and collate data after the pandemic and compare those outcomes against current outcomes. This study primarily focused on concerns and awareness of current environmental issues from consumers' perspectives, such as natural disasters, warfare, recessions, and additional pandemics. Nonetheless, other variables may influence attitudes towards sustainable clothing consumption, such as greenwashing, which is when companies attempt to conceal the possible negative impacts of their environmental operations [20]. Furthermore, additional variables can be assessed to evaluate their impact within the model, including social influence and word of mouth.

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