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"Me or the others?"

An empirical investigation into egoistic and altruistic drivers of ethical consumption

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Abstract

The contingent four-component model of ethical decision-making has been widely used to investigate moral intent and is also applicable to ethical consumption. This study extends the model by including decision-relevant information on neglected product safety. The consideration of perceptions of health risk offers insight whether ethical consumption is more strongly determined by altruistic motives or egoistic motives. Based on a sample of 281 German consumers, PLS structural equation modeling and additional mediational analysis the study shows that both motivational processes drive ethical consumption. In addition, the study reveals unexpected gender effects. While ethical consumption of females is determined by negative affect and egoistic motives (i.e., health concerns), males' behavior is regulated by altruistic motivational processes (i.e., ethical judgement and perceived moral obligation).

Keywords

Ethical consumption, negative affect, moral judgement, moral obligation, health risk

1. Introduction

Ethical consumerism has gained particular interest in the last two decades due to consumers' concern over societal and environmental issues. Discussions concerning corporate and environmental scandals or poor working conditions are omnipresent in the media. Thus, consumers increasingly question the resulting consequences of their own actions for themselves as well as for others. Literature describes ethical consumption as a behavioral pattern that challenges consumers to reconsider their everyday consumption choices from a moral point of view (Pecoraro and Uusitalo, 2014). According to Harper and Makatouni (2002, p. 289), being an ethical consumer thus means "buying products which are not harmful to the environment and society". Products that are sourced, made and distributed in consideration of, for instance, human rights, sustainability, environmental and animal friendliness or labor conditions are classified as ethically tenable. Crane and Matten (2010, p. 370) define ethical consumption as "the conscious and deliberate choice to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values". Therefore, consumers have become

powerful stakeholders who "make legitimate claims" and purposely use their influence on business (Park and Rees, 2008, p. 490) and assess organizations according to moral values (Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004). Various studies indicated positive effects of corporate environmental ethics on competitive advantages (Abbott, 1983; Chang, 2011), on investors (Cacioppe et al., 2008; Hockerts and Moir, 2004), improvement of brand image and reputation as well as attraction and retention of a quality workforce (Cacioppe et al., 2008).

Literature on ethical consumption in general mostly concentrates on the following three aspects: (i) developmental effectiveness, (ii) business ethics and (iii) marketing strategy (Nicholls, 2002). However, research has endeavored to explain ethical consumer behavior, too. For instance, research analyzes the gap between consumers' favorable attitude toward ethical products and their actual purchasing behavior (e.g., Carrington et al., 2014; Sebastiani et al., 2013) or whether and why consumers are willing to pay a surcharge for ethical products (e.g., De Pelsmacker et al., 2005a; Tully and Winer, 2014). Several studies focus on the antecedents of ethical consumer behavior such as motivational, attitudinal, or cognitive drivers of consumption, and past research, for example, considers utilitarian motives (e.g., Freestone and McGoldrick, 2008), risk perception (e.g., Goddard et al., 2013), norms and attitude (e.g., Chatzidakis et al., 2016), moral intensity (e.g., Culiberg, 2014), or self-accountability (e.g., Passyn and Sujan, 2006). Furthermore, some studies explore the relevance of individuals' culture (e.g., Hoffmann, 2014) and personality traits (e.g., Lu et al., 2015) in the inclination to engage in ethical consumption.

A limited number of studies consider emotions and emotion-related constructs as determinants of ethical consumer behavior. For example, Arli et al., 2015 investigate proneness to guilt and shame and show that guilt-prone individuals are less likely to behave in an unethical manner. Antonetti and Maklan, 2014 focus on post-purchase guilt and pride and show that reactive negative emotions may impact future consumer behavior. Consumers then must trade-off different motives to buy certain items from different brands (e.g., hedonistic vs. utilitarian motives), and motives to switch become decisive. Therefore, it is obvious that consumers must balance conflicting behavioral drives when they determine whether to opt against the consumption of allegedly unethical products. They often find themselves in ethical dilemmas in which they must choose between product alternatives that are more or less ethically favorable (e.g., Marks and Mayo, 1991). For example, consumers must ask themselves day to day whether they should buy products from local producers or from multinational corporations, care about fair-trade certifications or punish unethical business practices through boycotts. Moral values or ethical judgments may function as a mechanism that regulates consumer behavior in this context (Manchiraju and Sadachar, 2014), and these values represent the basis of ethical judgment (e.g., Lindenmeier et al., 2012a). A shift in everyday consumption patterns toward ethical purchasing alternatives is supposed to have far-reaching positive implications for society as a whole (Albinsson et al., 2010). Although benefits of buying products that are manufactured with particular attention to, e.g., not harming the environment, animals or people appear to be obvious, many consumers do not opt for ethical purchasing alternatives. Overall, the purchasing process of ethical products is complex and becomes even more

complicated when consumers are confronted with ethically-questionable behavior by company or brand that they favor.

In order to capture ethical decision-making processes, Rest, 1986 developed a sequential four-stage model. The model states that after recognizing a moral issue, people evaluate the situation and develop a moral obligation based on this judgment which influences their engagement in moral behavior. The contingent four-component model has already been investigated in different contexts, such as accounting ethics (Cohen and Bennie, 2006), privacy violations and security breaches in the IT area (Haines and Leonard, 2007a; 2007b) or pushy behavior of salespersons in a retail store scenario (Haines et al., 2008). While these studies focus on the individual's moral intent, Davies and Crane, 2003 apply the model on the organizational level and investigate ethical decision-making in fair-trade companies. The present study extends this research by applying the model to the research context of ethical consumption. More precisely, the study investigates the intention to switch to ethical product alternatives in the case of product safety negligence. Magnusson et al., 2003 indicate that egoistic motives such as health consciousness and safety are determining the attitude towards certain products. Assuming that the product to be consumed might be detrimental to the consumers' own health, this study introduces a self-centered motivator in the sense of perceived health risk to the model. This allows clarifying whether the commonly explored determinants ethical judgment and moral obligation continue to precede moral intent or whether the fear of possible health detriments weighs higher in the decision-making process. Additionally the study tests whether the causal relationship between negative affect and ethical consumption intention is mediated by the considered egoistic and/or altruistic motivational constructs. Finally, this study explores gender differences. Gender differences have already been widely investigated in the general context of ethical behavior (cf. Chonko and Hunt, 1985; Dawson, 1997; Deshpande, 1997) and in connection with the contingent four-component model (cf. Haines and Leonard, 2007a, 2007b). However, taking two decision-making routes into account helps to reveal whether males/females' ethical consumption behavior is more strongly driven by egoistic or altruistic motivational processes.

We outline our conceptual model in the subsequent sections. Thereafter, based on a quota sample of German fashion consumers (N=281), we validate the delineated hypotheses by means of PLS structural equation modelling. Finally, based on the study results and limitations, we discuss practical implications for companies and non-governmental organizations, as well as avenues for future research.

2. Theoretical underpinnings and hypotheses development

In line with the cognitive-experiential self-theory by Epstein, 1993 and the work of Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999 the present study suggests an affective-cognitive model of ethical decision-making and assumes dual processing when consumers are confronted with unethical firm behavior. According to the theory's rationale, there is unconscious and experiential processing which is affect-induced and triggers intuitive reactions, such as e.g. an immediate intention to switch to ethical products. In parallel, there is an affect-induced rational process

which encourages thoughts about choice alternatives (Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999) and is based on rules and reasoning taken from the socio-cultural environment (Epstein, 2003). The assumption of dual processing is substantiated by Strack and Werth, 2006 who suggest a reflective-impulsive model of consumer behavior. This dual-system approach assumes impulsive and reflective mechanisms which contribute to behavioral outcomes such as shopping behavior.

Considering this notion, the present study suggests first, that negative affect pushes a person toward a behavior, which hinders this negative feeling to reoccur in the future (Epstein, 2003). In this sense, switching intentions are triggered unconsciously and intuitively. This reasoning is underpinned by Strack and Werth, 2006 who consider impulsive mechanisms as stimuli-induced affective reactions which involve emotional arousal. Hereby, it should be noted that impulsive behavior is not considered to be irrational but can serve as a decision heuristic in case of information overflow (Hausman, 2000) and is more efficient in time-consuming and cognitively demanding situations (Thompson et al., 1990). Parallel to that and considering Rest's, 1986 model of ethical behavior, the study assumes more rational cognitive processing in the form of ethical judgments, the formation of moral obligation, and the assessment of health risks which consumes more cognitive resources. These so-called reflective mechanisms (Strack and Werth, 2006) represent cognitive processes assessing whether the intended behavior is desirable and feasible.

Against the background that affect precedes cognitive processes (Zajonc, 1980) and that emotional states and feelings also penetrate reflective processes (Strack and Werth, 2006), ethical judgment and perceived health risk are conceptualized as consequences of negative affect in this study. Moreover, when consumers make ethical judgments about company behavior or try to assess health risks they have to process considerable quantities of information and are subject to information asymmetry. In contrast to that, "self-referencing facilitates the elaboration of incoming information" (Escalas, 2006, p. 421) which is why negative affect and self-referential processes can occur at the same time (Authors, nd). Figure 1 gives an overview over the developed model.

Figure 1 about here

2.1 Negative affect

Positive and negative affect are orthogonal dimensions which assess the mood of individuals such as consumers. High positive affect indicates enthusiasm and alertness. Negative affect represents the individual level of emotions such as anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness (Watson et al., 1988) which may evolve in case of irresponsible firm behavior. Rook, 1987 states that stimuli, which instantaneously arise in

confrontational situations trigger impulsive behavior, and, according to Weinberg and Gottwold, 1982, these behaviors often involve emotional activation. Bougie et al., 2003 for example found that anger as an affective response to service failure predicts switching behavior. In a volunteering context, which corresponds to the prosocial character of ethical consumption, Lindenmeier, 2008 revealed that ad-induced arousal positively affects helping behavior, which is substantiated by Bennett, 2009 who found that emotional websites increase impulsive donation. Moreover, impulse buying is related to the relationship between valence and approach or avoidance behaviors respectively (Strack and Werth, 2006). According to this notion, negatively valenced stimuli encourage avoidance behavior whereas positively valenced ones foster approach behavior. In this context, to keep buying unethical products can be considered as an avoidance goal. Since firm behavior is negatively valenced in this study's context, the avoidance goal can be attained by switching to more ethical substitutes. Moreover, referring to the negative-state-relief-hypothesis (Cialdini et al., 1987), spontaneously switching to more ethical brands can be considered as a means to balance negative affect. According to Bennett, 2009 impulsive donation serves as a self-gift which rewards the donor with satisfaction, a brighter mood and an improved self-perception. In this context, he identified impulsive behavior to be associated with the individual's need for immediate gratification (Mischel and Ebbesen, 1970). Against this theoretical background hypothesis H_1 is derived as follows:

H_1: Negative affect has a positive effect on the intention to switch to more ethical product alternatives.

2.2 Ethical judgment

Ethical judgment of corporate behavior is based on consumers' moral values (Lindenmeier et al., 2012b) and is considered as a further component of our conceptual considerations (see Figure 1). Moral values are "the moral principles and standards that guide behavior of individuals or groups as they obtain, use, and dispose goods and services" (Muncy and Vitell, 1992, p. 298). Ethical decision-making is based upon moral philosophies, such as the deontological/teleological paradigm (Murphy and Laczniak, 1981) or the concept of idealism and relativism (Forsyth, 1980). Based on an adapted version of the multidimensional ethics scale (Reidenbach and Robin, 1990) the current study considers relativism, teleology, and the deontological dimensions moral equity and contractualism as the basis of ethical judgment. The study investigates ethical judgment as the consumers' cognitive assessment of irresponsible corporate behavior. This involves elaborate information processing because consumers have to recall the facts and circumstances of alleged misconduct and are confronted with contradictory and imperfect information.

Relativism rejects universal moral norms and allows for situational ethical judgment. Relativists are skeptics who weigh circumstances over ethical principles and whose moral judgment depends upon the nature of the situation (Forsyth 1980; 1992; Karande et al., 2002). Sparks and Hunt, 1998 revealed a negative correlation between relativism and individual ethical sensitivity. Likewise Singhapakdi et al., 1999 found a negative effect of relativism on moral intensity. Moreover, several studies revealed a negative correlation of

relativism with the inclination to behave ethically (Erffineyer et al., 1999; Singhapakdi et al., 1995; 1999; van Kenhove et al., 2001). In line with these findings Nebenzahl et al., 2001 found that increased relativism is associated with a more pronounced inclination to unethical shopping behavior.

Deontologists are individuals who focus on obligations and moral rules differentiating between right and wrong (Karande et al., 2002; Barnett et al., 2005; Bateman and Valentine, 2010). In addition, deontologists obey universal rules without taking into account what, e.g., a purchase could contribute to their overall wellbeing or happiness (Barnett et al., 2005). However, teleologists evaluate the ethics of their actions on consequences and outcomes (Barnett et al., 2005; Bateman and Valentine, 2010). Barnett et al., 2005 illustrate the deontological and the teleological judgment with the example of products manufactured by child labor. According to the teleological paradigm, the purchase of such products is ethical as long as it does more good than harm (Vitell et al., 2001). Contrary and considering the deontological paradigm, purchasing such products is ethically wrong and, thus, should be refused. Iwanow et al., 2005 found that apparel consumers are content with purchasing goods from less developed countries and, therefore, assumes that they hold a teleological attitude and consider consequences for all stakeholders involved rather than considering deontological values. Against this theoretical background, we assume that fashion consumers' ethical buying intention is increasing with an unfavorable ethical judgment of alleged corporate misconduct and hypotheses H_2 reads as follows:.

H_2: Ethical judgment of corporate behavior has an effect on the intention to switch the ethical products: The more unfavorable the ethical judgment the higher the intention to switch to more ethical product alternatives.

2.3 Moral obligation to help others

Dickson, 1999 shows that a significant part of US consumers cares about the working conditions of the apparel industry in the US and foreign countries and is willing to take action against non-compliant retailers and manufacturers. Considering Maslow's, 1954 hierarchy of needs, the motivation to help others is categorized as a self-transcendence need and is associated with the ethical concepts of benevolence and universalism (e.g., Manchiraju and Sadachar, 2014). Authors such as De Pelsmacker et al., 2005b and Doran, 2009 reveal a positive effect of self-transcendence needs on consumers' willingness to engage in ethical consumption. However, pure altruism does not sufficiently explain observed levels of helping motivation. Besides reciprocity norms as well as kin-selection approaches, altruistic or prosocial behavior can be explained by the fact that consumers may receive a positive and self-rewarding warm-glow feeling from helping others (Lindenmeier, 2014). This warm-glow effect of giving is also known as the impure altruism model (Andreoni, 1990). Thus and for instance, boycott participation can be regarded as a possibility to satisfy self-transcendence needs as well as to evoke warm-glow feelings. Several studies suggest that moral obligation predicts moral intent (Beck and Ajzen, 1991; Leonard et al., 2004). Moreover, it can be regarded as an attitude reflecting the consumers' felt responsibility to change behavior on account of the given circumstances (Haines et al., 2008). Since attitudes are closely related with the formation of behavioral intent, we assume that the moral obligation to help others has a direct

and positive effect on consumers' inclination to purchase ethical products and hypothesis H_3 is formulated as follows:

H_3: Moral obligation has a positive effect on the intention to switch to more ethical product alternatives.

Moral obligation is supposed to be "a decision making sub-process that occurs after an individual makes a moral judgment and prior to establishing a moral intention" (Haines et al., 2008, p. 391). In case that the consumer is confronted with an ethically questionable situation and makes a moral judgment upon it, the consumer assesses in the decision-making sub-process if personal moral codes are met. If there is a discrepancy the individual will feel the moral obligation to intervene. Hence, hypothesis H_{3a} reads as follows:

H_{3a}: Ethical judgment and moral obligation jointly mediate the positive effect of negative affect on the intention to switch to more ethical product alternatives.

2.4 Perceived health risk

Contrary to the felt moral obligation to help, perceived health risk can be assigned to Maslow's, 1954 category of security needs and, thus, is primarily marked by self-interest. According to Sirgy, 2012 personal health represents an important life domain. Harmful products (e.g., toxic apparel, genetically manipulated food, or hazardous toys) can damage the consumers' or their dependents' health and, hence, consumers with a pronounced perception of health risk should be inclined to switch to ethically produced products. In addition, Carrigan et al., 2004 also identified self-interested health concerns as a motivational driver for ethical consumption. In particular, environmentally conscious consumers show an above-average concern for their own health, too, and are ready to put in more effort to behave ethically responsible (Antil, 1984; Schwepker and Cornwell, 1991). Considering food products, Joergens, 2006 states that consumers' ethical commitment increases with perceived positive influence on health. Hence, we hypothesize a positive and direct effect of perceived health risk on ethical buying intention and hypothesis H_4 reads as follows:

H_4: Perceived health risk has a positive effect on the intention to switch to more ethical product alternatives.

Watson and Pennebaker, 1989 found a relationship between negative affect and the reporting of physical problems. To explain this correlation they developed the so-called symptom perception hypothesis which states that people "differ in how they perceive, respond to, and/or complain about" health issues according to their level of negative affect (Watson and Pennebaker, 1989, p. 240). People who show higher levels of trait negative affect tend to first, perceive physical symptoms sooner and second, to overreact to it (Watson and Pennebaker, 1989). Moreover, negative affect is often associated with health complaining behavior (Beiser, 1974; Bradburn, 1969). Against this theoretical background hypothesis H_{4a} is derived as follows:

H_{4a}: Health risk mediates the positive effect of negative affect on the intention to switch to more ethical product alternatives.

3. Gender effects

Finally, the current study explores into the effects of gender within the ethical decision-making process. Despite the fact that several meta-analyses only showed limited support for gender differences in ethical behavior (e.g. Landry et al., 2004; Walker, 2006), we assume gender to be an important variable in the context of this study as differences in cognitive processing styles and reactions to stimuli occur (Meyers-Levy and Loken, 2015). In this context, it is important to highlight that gender-specific comportment cannot be exclusively explained by genetic predispositions. Gerson and Peiss, 1985, p. 327 define gender as "a set of socially constructed relationships which are produced and reproduced through people's actions". Socio-cultural theories suggest a higher sensitivity for environmental factors for women resulting in a higher willingness to adjust their behavior accordingly (Wood and Eagly, 2012). Moreover, Lindenmeier et al., 2012b indicated a more noticeable negative reaction to unethical corporate behavior for females as well as stronger willingness to draw consequences and blame the company (Laufer and Gillespie, 2004). Meyers-Levy and Loken, 2015 find evidence for women being more other-oriented and processing information in a more comprehensive way, whereas males have a higher self-related focus. Various studies also indicate a stronger tendency for women to avoid health risks, to pursue a healthy lifestyle (von Bothmer and Fridlund, 2005) and to react more severely to negative incidents such as product harm (Meyers-Levy and Loken, 2015). Besides, females are supposed to show a greater awareness of consequences of their action and therefore show enhanced interest and engagement for environmental behavior compared to men (Zelezny et. al., 2000). According to Courtenay, 2000, males are more likely to dismiss their health needs in order to prove themselves as the stronger sex. Moreover, males are supposed to experience a comparatively higher social pressure, leading to societally desirable actions (Courtenay, 2000).

4. Research methodology, study design and measurement

4.1 Study design

The starting point for the current study is the Greenpeace "Detox Catwalk" campaign (Greenpeace e.V., 2013), which criticizes the use of toxic chemicals in garment production. In addition to significant health risks for consumers, chemicals can cause environmental damage in textile-producing countries. Textile workers and people living nearby production plants are particularly exposed to the risk of becoming seriously poisoned. During the "Detox Catwalk" campaign several well-known fashion companies voluntarily agreed to waive the use of highly toxic chemicals in garment production. However, several companies abandoned their promises and Greenpeace thus classified them as "Greenwasher" companies.

The German adult population represents the basic population of the current study. A quota sampling procedure was applied and gender and age were considered as quota criteria. Student research assistants distributed and recollected self-administered questionnaires according to the quota criteria. The data collection took place in November and December 2014 and yielded a sample of 301 respondents. The sample was reduced to 281 cases due to the deletion of unusable answers. The respondents' average age is 43.14 years with a gender distribution of 51.60% (females) to 48.40% (males). In 2015, the average age in Germany was 44.2 years (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017a) with a gender distribution of 50.70% (females) to 49.30 (males) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017b). Taking into account that the present study considered respondents between 19 and 70, the sample should be representative for the German population regarding gender and age. 32.38% of the interviewees own a university entrance qualification and thus, their educational level is slightly above average. In 2015, 30.76% of the German population between 20 and 65+ had university entrance qualifications (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017c). Table 1 shows the distribution of females and males across age groups and educational level.

Table 1 about here

All interviewees received general information on the use of poisonous chemicals in garment production and their detrimental impact on textile workers, the environment in manufacturing countries, and consumers. Moreover, they were provided with information on the Greenpeace campaign and it was indicated that sportswear brand A is classified as "greenwasher" whereas brand B ranks as "trendsetter". Greenpeace blamed so-called greenwasher companies to mislead consumers by publicly committing themselves to the Detox campaign without translating it into real action. According to Greenpeace, so-called trendsetter companies show credible commitment to ensure toxic-free textile production. Against this background the interviewees were asked to reflect whether switching from brand A to brand B would be a viable option. Thereafter they were instructed to answer the questionnaire based on the described Detox case. The respondents were asked to reply to the questionnaire honestly and have been informed that their answers will be treated confidentially. Therefore, they should be less inclined to give social desirable answers.

4.2 Measurement

The variables depicted in Figure 1 represent reflective constructs, except ethical judgment, which is operationalized as a reflective-formative second order construct. All constructs were measured on 7-point

likert scales except negative affect where we used a 5-point scale (see Appendix A). All scales were anchored with “totally agree” and “totally disagree”. The intention to switch to a more ethical product alternative, perceived health risk and moral obligation were measured based on typical question items. To assess the interviewees’ ethical judgment of the criticized business practice we applied an adapted version of Reidenbach and Robin’s, 1990 multidimensional ethics scale. We consider the teleological dimension of the scale reversely coded. Hence, higher values of moral equity, relativism, contractualism and teleology represent a less favorable ethical judgment of business behavior. The consideration of these different ethic scales allows a comprehensive ethical judgment of incidents such as irresponsible corporate behavior but also implies high model complexity. In order to reduce complexity, ethical judgment has been conceptualized as a hierarchical component, which consists of a superordinate, higher-order construct and two or more lower-order constructs (Hair et al., 2014). In the present study, the reflectively measured lower-order constructs moral equity, relativism, contractualism, and teleology are condensed into a superordinate ethical judgment construct which is measured formatively. According to Chin, 1998 and Becker et al., 2012 the reflective-formative measurement model should be picked when reflective constructs contribute to a more general concept which mediates the effects of the lower-order constructs on other endogenous variables. In order to be able to account for other antecedents of ethical judgment than its formative indicators (i.e., negative affect and perceived health risk), we applied the so-called two-step-approach (Hair et al., 2014). In a first step, the repeated-indicators approach was used to compute the latent variable scores of the lower-order constructs which were then used as formative indicators in a second step to form the higher-order construct.

Table 2 about here

In order to examine item-reliability, indicator loadings have been computed for all reflectively measured items. The results show that they commonly exceed .70. Four items of the negative affect construct exhibit indicator loadings below .70 but are significant at $p = .00$. (see Appendix A). Moreover, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) are above the critical thresholds of .50 and .70 respectively which confirms the reflective constructs’ convergent validity and internal consistency (see table 2). The Fornell-Larcker criterion indicates discriminant validity (see table 3).

Table 3 about here

In order to assess the relevance and contribution of the formative indicators to the higher-order construct ethical judgment we tested their outer weights' and outer loadings' significance (Hair et al., 2014). The analysis of the indicators' relative (absolute) importance, measured by the indicators' outer weights (loadings) revealed that contractualism has the largest relative and absolute importance (.62; p = .00/.91; p = .00) when compared to moral equity (.21; p = .03/.70; p = .00) and relativism (.31; p = .00/.71; p = .00). The outer weight of teleology is not significant (.14; p = .10). However, formative indicators should not automatically be removed in this case. Hair et al., 2014 recommend keeping formative indicators with loadings above .50. Because teleology's outer loading is only slightly below this threshold and significant (.49; p = .00) we decided to keep teleology in our model. Regarding the formative relationship between the lower-order constructs and the superordinate ethical judgment construct, the lower-order constructs' VIF values < 2 indicate that there are no collinearity issues (Hair et al., 2011).

Moreover, we assessed measurement invariance between gender groups by applying the three-step MICOM procedure (Henseler et al., 2016). Configural invariance is established by design since we applied the same model setup, data treatment and algorithm for both model estimations. Compositional invariance can be confirmed for all latent constructs except moral obligation. Since the mean values as well as the variance of the ethical judgment construct differ across groups there is partial measurement invariance. Hence, path coefficients between the subsamples can be compared (Henseler et al., 2016).

5. Study results

5.1 Descriptive statistics and gender-specific mean differences

Mean values of moral equity, relativism, contractualism, moral obligation and behavioral intent are comparatively high whereas the health risk of wearing apparel of greenwasher companies is perceived to be moderate. Since negative affect was measured on a five-point scale the emotional reaction to the allegations is moderate. Gender-specific descriptive statistics show that females' emotional reaction to the allegations is stronger. Moreover, females show a more unfavorable ethical judgment, have a higher perceived health risk, stronger feelings of moral obligation and are more inclined to switch to a more ethical product alternative (see Appendix B). The differences in mean values are significant at a 1% significance level, except for relativism (5% significance level). In sum, these findings support the assumption of gender-specific differences.

5.1 Results of structural equations modelling

The proposed model and hypotheses were tested using partial least squares (PLS) which is a variance-based structural equation modeling approach. To estimate the relationships we used SmartPLS 3.0 (Ringle et al., 2015). Path coefficients and R^2 are depicted in table 4. H_1 supposed a positive and direct effect of negative affect on the intention to switch to more ethical products. However, this proposed relationship cannot be confirmed. Consistent with H_2, H_3, and H_4 ethical judgment, moral obligation, and perceived health risk have positive and direct effects on the intention to switch to more ethical product alternatives.

Table 4 about here

The gender-specific analysis has been conducted based on a multi-group analysis (MGA) feature implemented in the SmartPLS 3.0 software. According to the MGA results depicted in figure 2, H_1 can be confirmed for female respondents but not for male respondents. However, empirical evidence is not conclusive in this respect. The MGA shows that the effect of negative affect on switching intentions is significant in the female subsample whereas it is not significant when conducting a subsequent mediation analysis with PROCESS (see table 6). Consistent with H_2 and H_4, ethical judgment and perceived health risk have both positive and direct effects on the intention to switch brands. These results are valid for both gender groups. In line with H_3, moral obligation has a direct and positive effect on the males' behavioral intent. However, this relationship has to be rejected for female respondents.

Table 5 about here

Figure 2 about here

5.2 Results of the mediational anlysis

Mediation analysis was conducted with Hayes's, 2013 PROCESS SPSS macro. Because the model includes several subsequent mediators the authors used model 6. Mediation analysis with PROCESS (see table 6) shows that the direct effect of negative affect on switching intention is not significant in the complete sample which is in line with PLS results depicted above. Ethical judgment and moral obligation jointly mediate the effect of negative affect on the considered dependent variable. The findings support full mediation and hence, H_{3a} can be confirmed. A separate analysis of ethical judgment and moral obligation reveals that both variables mediate negative affect's effect on switching intentions. In line with H_{4a}, the present study results reveal that negative affect's effect on the intention to switch to more ethical products is fully mediated by perceived health risk (see table 6).

Regarding the gender-specific differences in the mediational effects, ethical judgment and moral obligation jointly mediate the effect of negative affect on the dependent variable in the male subsample (H_{3a}). However, there is no joint mediation effect of ethical judgment and moral obligation in the female subsample. Analyzing the role of ethical judgment and moral obligation as mediating variables separately, study results reveal that ethical judgment mediates negative affect's effect on switching intention in both subsamples. However, a mediating effect of moral obligation can only be confirmed for males. Considering the mediating role of perceived health risk, H_{4a} has to be confirmed for both females and males (see table 6).

Table 6 about here

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6. Conclusions

6.1 Summary and discussion of study results

Referring to Rest's, 1986 four component model, the intention to switch to ethical product alternatives is an ethical decision-making process which involves negative affect (recognizing a moral issue), ethical judgment, and moral obligation. Moreover, the present study reveals perceived health risk as another decisive variable in this context. Contrary to initial assumptions, negative affect due to detrimental conditions in sportswear apparel factories has no direct effect on the intention to switch to more ethical products. Hence, the study does not indicate switching intentions as a mainly affect-driven behavioral pattern as we suggested in reference to Epstein's, 1993 cognitive-experiential self-theory and the dual-system approach by Strack and Werth, 2006. Therefore, ethical consumption cannot be classified as a type of impulsive switching that is based

on decision heuristics when confronted with information overload on corporate misbehavior. Moreover, there is no pronounced evidence that consumers engage in an affect-driven product-switching behavior in order to cope with negative affect as we assumed with regard to the negative-state-relief-hypothesis. Contrary, ethical judgment, moral obligation, and perceived health risk directly impact switching intentions. The less favorable the ethical judgment on corporates producing their apparel in third world's sweatshops and the higher the felt moral obligation towards local workers, the higher is the intention to purchase more ethical product alternatives. This confirms to previous studies, which revealed that consumers' unfavorable judgments of business practices provoke buying decisions that are disadvantageous for the company concerned (cf. Lindenmeier et al., 2012b). The found effect of moral obligation confirms De Pelsmacker et al.'s, 2005b notion of helping others as a self-transcendent motivational driver for ethical consumption behavior and substantiates the work of Beck and Ajzen, 1991 as well as of Leonard et al., 2004 who identified moral obligation as a predictor for moral intent. Moreover, results show that consumers who consider wearing such apparel as being detrimental to their health are more inclined to switch to ethical brands. This is in line with Maslow, 1954 according to whom individuals pursue self-interests such as security needs. When they consider their health as an important life domain (Sirgy, 2012) to be at risk, they are more inclined to purchase products which are supposedly risk-free. Moreover, this study's results substantiate the role of self-interested health concerns as a driver for ethical consumption (Carrigan et al., 2004).

Notwithstanding the absence of a direct effect of negative affect it influences behavioral intent indirectly through ethical judgment, moral obligation, and perceived health risk. The role of ethical judgment and moral obligation as mediating variables can be traced back to the empathy-altruism hypothesis. Emotional activation in terms of negative affect alerts the consumers' moral consciousness and translates into ethical consumption since consumers consider it as a kind of helping behavior to alleviate third world workers' suffering. Moreover, it substantiates the findings of Lindenmeier, 2008 who revealed that emotional activation positively affects the individual's inclination toward helping behavior. The mediating effect of perceived health risk can be laid down to appraisal theory. When confronted with an unpleasant event, consumers assess the consequences of the event for their individual well-being (Bougie et al., 2003). If the consumers appraise firm behavior such as negligence of product safety to be detrimental to their health, they engage in action tendencies. Moreover, it is in line with previous research which revealed that negative affect is often associated with health complaining behavior (Beiser, 1974; Bradburn, 1969).

Regarding the gender-specific analysis, study results reveal that women are mainly motivated to switch brands by perceived health risk. Besides perceived health risk, males' switching intentions are primarily motivated by an unfavorable ethical judgment of the criticized business practice as well as the felt moral obligation toward third-world workers. Hence, study results show that individuals take different decision-making routes. Males seem to be oriented toward the well-being of others when making a purchase decision in favor of ethical substitutes whereas females are supposed to mainly focus on the well-being of the self. This extends Rest's, 1986 four-stage model insofar as it adds a self-oriented route of ethical decision-making.

Counterintuitively, other-oriented motives are more pronounced among males whereas females are more driven by self-centered motives (i.e., health protection). An explanation for these findings is provided by various authors (e.g. Lopez-Zafra and Garcia-Retamero, 2012; Wood and Eagly, 2012) that indicate the malleability of gender identities due to social influences. In addition, the pronounced effect of possible health risk for women can be explained by their higher levels of health-consciousness (von Bothmer and Fridlund, 2005). In addition, referring to evolutionary theory of consumer behavior, males are more venturesome and thus give less weight to health-related concerns (Ellis et al., 2012).

6.2 Theoretical and managerial implications

The current study analyzes whether ethical consumption is still determined by ethics and morality or whether altruistic motives get alternated by self-centered aspects such as health protection. Managerial implications can be derived for three different stakeholders – (i) for-profits offering ethical products, (ii) corporates which are delineated as greenwasher companies and confronted with switching behavior due to irresponsible conduct, and (iii) non-profit organizations urging consumers to switch to ethically produced garments.

As the results indicate that ethical decision-making is influenced by gender, our paper suggests a two-pronged targeting approach. In order to increase switching intentions of females, marketing efforts for ethical products should be focused on sending positive information about ecological product features or sustainable production procedures in order to encourage health-protection motives. In addition, companies could attempt to positively influence female consumers' ethical judgment of their own business practices. In order to strengthen males' switching intentions, potential negative effects of consuming unethical products should be highlighted to evoke awareness of social responsibility and increase moral obligation (Haines et al., 2008). If legally possible, launching negative information about the working conditions at competing brands' production plants could enhance switching intentions as well. In addition, companies could try to positively influence male consumers' ethical judgment of their own business practices.

Non-profit organizations advocating for the switch from greenwasher to trendsetter companies could collaborate with ethical producers and promote their products as ethical substitutes. Hereby, they could try to target the female consumer segment by highlighting health-related benefits of ethical products. With regard to the male consumer segment they should focus on their felt moral obligation toward third-world workers. Moreover, they could try to negatively influence consumers' ethical judgment about corporate misconduct by priming contractualistic and moral equity norms. Furthermore, organizations who want to persuade consumers to switch products and brands should enhance negative affect by sending out emotion-inducing messages and drastic pictorial representations of suffering entities.

Regarding companies which are accused of greenwashing it should be stated that a positive corporate social responsibility image may function as an insurance policy against detrimental effects against consumer

resistance and switching intentions (e.g., Lindenmeier et al., 2012a). Moreover, regarding the female consumer segment, these companies should try to weaken perceived health risks by e.g. launching producer stories or by disclosing health standards they apply to textile processing. Regarding male consumers, alleged greenwasher companies should try to mitigate unfavorable ethical judgments by pronouncing teleological ethical norms. Moreover, they could reduce males' felt moral obligation towards third-world workers.

6.3 Limitations and future research

The results of the current study must be interpreted in consideration of its limitations. First, regarding external validity, the harmful effects of apparel production on workers and consumers represent a specific instance of alleged unethical behavior, and it is not clear whether these study results can be transferred to other cases. In particular, other types of fashion consumer motives (e.g., utilitarian motives) could be relevant with regard to other instances of corporate misbehavior (e.g., corporate fraud). Second, concerning external validity, the current study considered a sample of German consumers and the transferability of study results to other countries or cultures might be limited. Third, concerning measurement invariance issues of the moral obligation construct, gender-specific differences concerning moral obligation have to be interpreted with caution. Finally, the interviewees' responses may have been distorted due to the social desirability bias.

The present study opens avenues for future research. First, future research could consider different types of ethical issues. For example, one could analyze whether study results can be confirmed for boycott campaigns (e.g., production of fur clothing). Second, future research could enhance the delineated conceptual framework by considering emotional constructs (e.g., guilt and anger). Third, future research could examine ethical judgments that consider further ethical ideologies. Given Barnett et al.'s, 2005 and Karande et al.'s, 2002 work, future research could examine how alleged unethical business practices are judged from the perspective of virtue ethics, ethical egoists, and/or idealistic skeptics.

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Figure 1
Conceptual considerations.

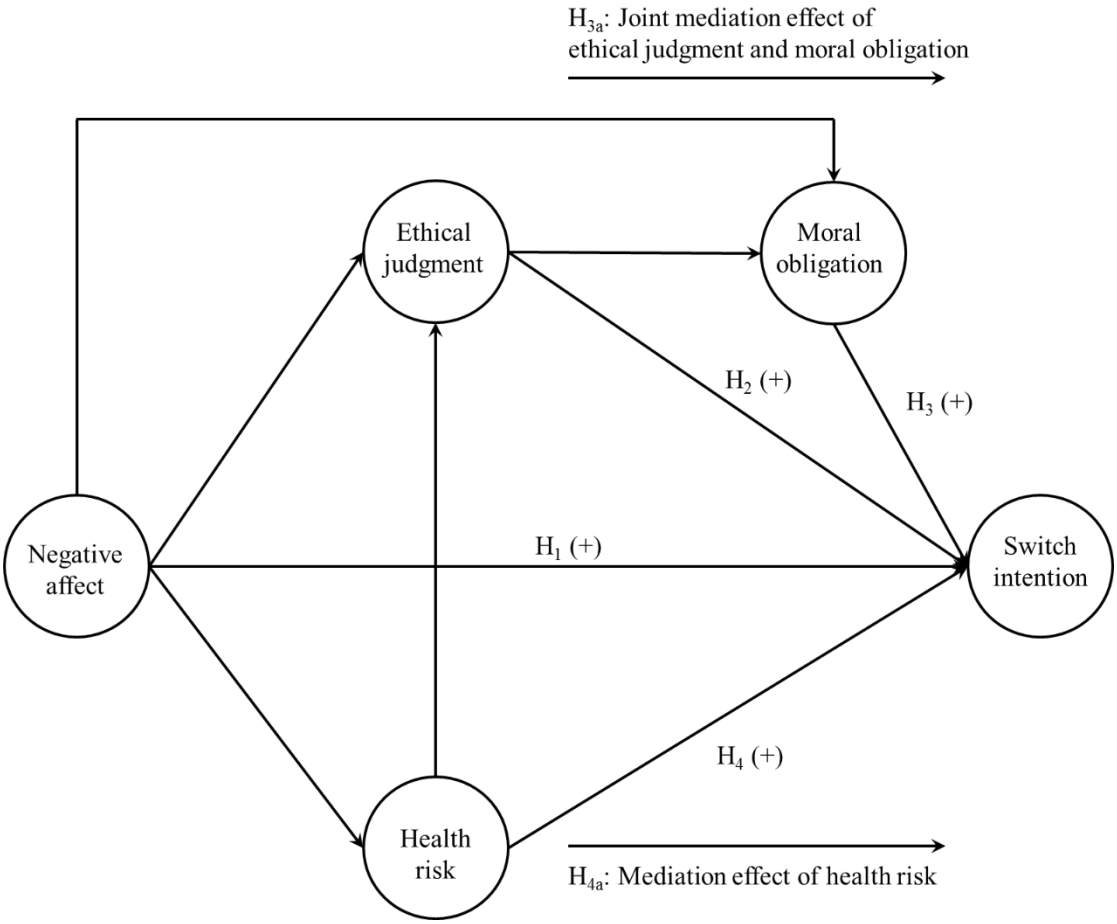


Table 1
Sample characteristics.

		Gender		Total
		Men	Women	
Age	19 to 24	28	24	52 (18.51%)
	25 to 34	23	15	38 (13.52%)
	35 to 44	16	30	46 (16.37%)
	45 to 54	25	32	57 (20.28%)
	55 to 64	34	35	69 (24.56%)
	65 to 70	9	3	12 (4.27%)
	Missing data	1	6	7 (2.49%)
Educational level	Secondary school	10	4	14 (4.98%)
	Lower secondary school	4	4	8 (2.85%)
	Completed apprenticeship	23	49	72 (25.62%)
	Advanced technical college	6	5	11 (3.91%)
	General qualification for university entrance	37	43	80 (28.47%)
	Other	47	34	81 (28.83%)
	Not specified	7	6	13 (4.63%)
	Missing data	2	0	2 (0.71%)
	Total	136 (48.40%)	145 (51.60%)	281 (100%)

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and assessment of measurement model.

	Mean	SD	AVE	CR
Ethical judgment	-	-	-	-
• Contractualism	5.67	1.44	.78	.88
• Moral equity	6.42	.86	.65	.88
• Relativism	5.58	1.45	.92	.96
• Teleology	3.58	1.54	.69	.87
Health risk	3.79	1.77	.87	.95
Moral obligation	5.56	1.15	.73	.89
Negative affect	2.65	.88	.50	.91
Switch	5.18	1.66	.88	.96

Note: Mean values and SD cannot be calculated for higher order-constructs. AVE and CR are not calculated for formative constructs.

Table 3
Fornell-Larcker criterion.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Ethical judgment	-				
(2) Health risk	.46	**.93**			
(3) Moral obligation	.42	.35	**.85**		
(4) Negative affect	.47	.45	.48	**.70**	
(5) Switch	.56	.51	.42	.41	**.94**

Note: The diagonal line equals the square root value of AVE. AVEs are not computed for formative measures (ethical judgment). Lower-order constructs are not included.

Table 4

Path coefficients (f^2).

	NA	EJ (R^2 = .29)	HR (R^2 = .20)	MO (R^2 = .27)	SW (R^2 = .41)
Negative affect		.32*** (.12)	.45*** (.25)	.36*** (.14)	$.06^{ns}$ (.00)
Ethical judgment				.25*** (.07)	.34*** (.13)
Health risk		.32*** (.12)			.27*** (.09)
Moral obligation					.16** (.03)
Switch					

Notes: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$. NA = Negative affect, EJ=Ethical judgment, HR = Health risk, MO = Moral obligation, SW = Switch. Significance levels are based on 1.000 bootstrapping runs.

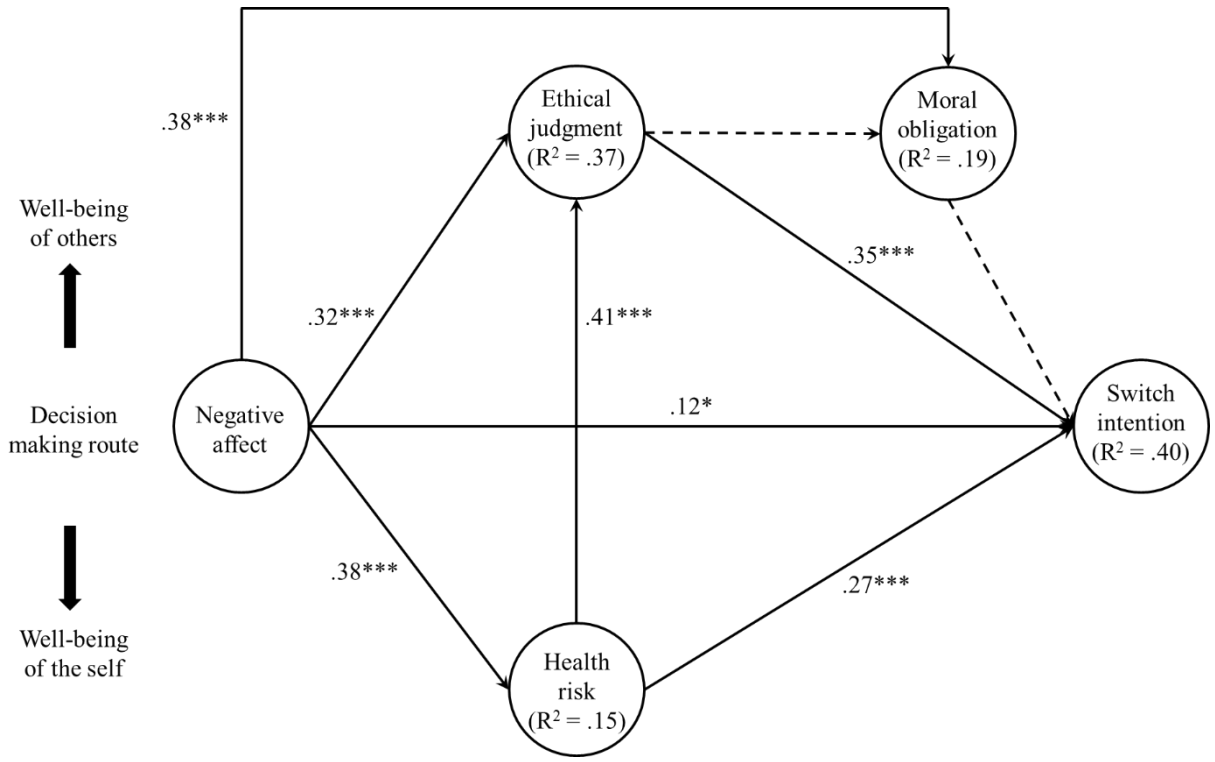
Table 5
Gender-specific path coefficients and differences in path coefficients.

	Path coefficient (Gender = Male)	Path coefficient (Gender = Female)	Difference in path coefficients
NA → SW	$.01^{ns}$	**.12***	$.12^{ns}$
NA → EJ	**.29*** **	**.32*** **	$.03^{ns}$
NA → HR	**.45*** **	**.38*** **	$.07^{ns}$
NA → MO	**.37*** **	**.38*** **	$.01^{ns}$
HR → SW	**.26*** **	**.27*** **	$.02^{ns}$
HR → EJ	**.22** **	**.41*** **	$.19^{ns}$
EJ → MO	**.37*** **	$.10^{ns}$	**.26** **
EJ → SW	**.28*** **	**.35*** **	$.06^{ns}$
MO → SW	**.30*** **	$.05^{ns}$	**.25** **

Notes: * $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. NA = Negative affect, EJ=Ethical judgment, HR = Health risk, MO = Moral obligation, SW = Switch. Significance levels are based on 1.000 bootstrapping runs.

Figure 2
Overview over the gender-specific study results.

Female respondents



Male respondents

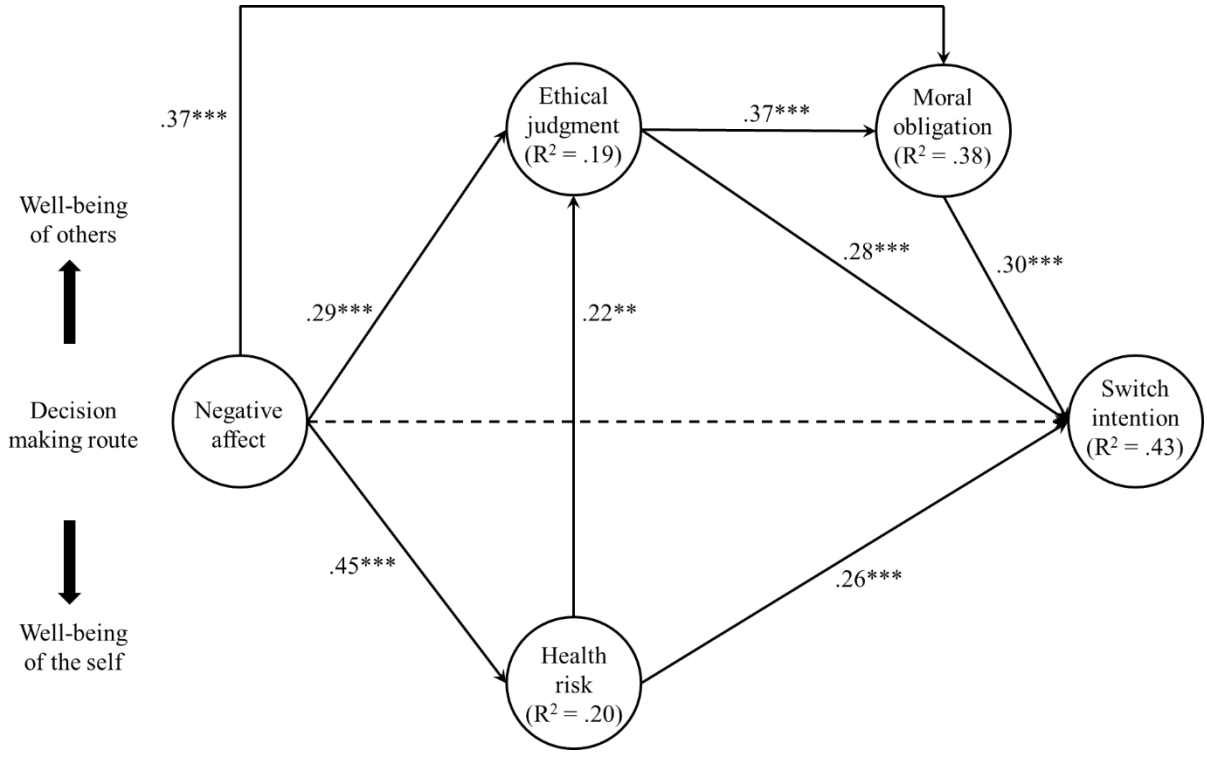


Table 6
Direct effect and indirect effects of negative affect on behavioral intention.

	Female respondents				Male Respondents				All respondents			
	Effect	Boot SE	BootLLCI (95 %)	BootULCI (95 %)	Effect	Boot SE	BootLLCI (95 %)	BootULCI (95 %)	Effect	Boot SE	BootLLCI (95 %)	BootULCI (95 %)
Direct effect	.0974	.0757	–.0522	.2470	.0031	.0902	–.1753	.1816	.0566	.0573	–.0563	.1695
Total indirect effect	.2864	.0542	.1808	.3989	.3813	.0640	.2659	.5182	.3554	.0396	.2872	.4435
Indirect effects												
NA → HR → SW	. 1016	.0333	.0492	.1817	.1135	.0438	.0450	.2200	.1226	.0282	.0685	.1744
NA → HR → EJ → SW	.0515	.0203	.0213	.1053	.0284	.0148	.0080	.0706	.0486	.0128	.0270	.0791
NA → HR → MO → SW	.0020	.0055	–.0022	.0222	.0119	.0132	–.0063	.0521	.0065	.0064	–.0019	.0252
NA → HR → EJ → MO → SW	.0004	.0014	–.0011	.0059	.0092	.0057	.0023	.0299	.0049	.0026	.0013	.0123
NA → EJ → SW	.1117	.0396	.0433	.1937	.0905	.0370	.0332	.1836	.1094	.0265	.0624	.1714
NA → EJ → MO → SW	.0010	.0033	–.0026	.0117	.0292	.0157	.0085	.0765	.0110	.0064	.0025	.0292
NA → MO → SW	.0181	.0266	–.0263	.0837	.0986	.0382	.0344	.1863	.0525	.0240	.0145	.1154

Notes: Bootstrapping confidence intervals are based on 1.000 bootstrapping runs. Ethical judgment is considered as reflective-formative higher-order construct with moral equity, relativism, contractualism and teleology as lower-order constructs.

Appendix A
Question items

Negative affect	
Please rate how you are feeling when you hear about the conditions in the factories of a well-known German sportswear brand in the Third World.	
I am …	
NA1	… frightened. (.72***)
NA2	… distressed. (.73***)
NA3	… angry. (.75***)
NA4	… guilty. (.64***)
NA5	… scared. (.69***)
NA6	… aggressive. (.78***)
NA7	… irritated. (.79***)
NA8	… ashamed. (.73***)
NA9	… confused. (.62***)
NA10	… disturbed. (.57***)
Ethical judgment	
In my opinion, the use of poisonous chemicals in the fabrication of [well-known German sportswear brand] products in the Third World is:	
ME1	… fair/unfair. (.80***)
ME2	… just/unjust. (.81***)
ME3	… acceptable/not acceptable in this case. (.90***)
ME4	… morally right/wrong. (.70***)
RE1	… acceptable/not acceptable for people who are important to me. (.95***)
RE2	… acceptable/not acceptable for my family members. (.96***)
CON1	… does not not violate/violates an unspoken contract. (.90***)
CON2	… does not violate/violates an unspoken promise. (.87***)
TEL1	… results/does not result in a good price-performance ratio for consumers in Germany. (.81***)
TEL2	… leads to the greatest/lowest customer benefits in Germany. (.86***)
TEL3	… is efficient/inefficient from the German customers' perspective. (.83***)
Health risk	
HR1	In my opinion, the health risk of wearing [well-known German sportswear brand] apparel is high! (.94***)
HR2	In my opinion, the likelihood of suffering an allergic reaction from wearing [well-known German sportswear brand] apparel is high! (.92***)
HR3	Wearing [well-known German sportswear brand] apparel can increase the likelihood of long-term health impairment! (.93***)
Moral obligation	
MO1	I think I should help people from third world countries – I am far better off than them. (.91***)
MO2	I have a responsibility to do all I can to help people from third world countries. (.92***)
MO3	It is a good thing to help people from third world countries. (.72***)
Behavioral intent	
Imagine that you want to buy new sportswear and that products from either Firm A or Firm B are worth considering.	
BI1	In this case I would boycott Firm A which is using toxic chemicals in its fabrication process and rather buy a product of Firm B instead, which is using less toxic chemicals. (.93***)
BI2	The next time I want to buy sportswear I would think about boycotting Firm A which is using toxic chemicals in its fabrication process and buy products of Firm B instead which is using less toxic chemicals. (.93***)
BI3	The next time I want to buy sportswear I probably will boycott Firm A which is using toxic chemicals in its fabrication process and buy products of Firm B. (.95***)

Appendix B
Gender-specific mean differences

	Gender	Mean	SD	Significance of mean difference (F-test)
NA	Male	2.39	0.81	$p < .01$
	Female	2.88	0.88	
	Total	2.65	0.88	
ME	Male	6.27	0.97	$p < .05$
	Female	6.56	0.71	
	Total	6.42	0.86	
REL	Male	5.37	1.49	$p < .05$
	Female	5.78	1.39	
	Total	5.58	1.45	
CON	Male	5.39	1.56	$p < .01$
	Female	5.94	1.26	
	Total	5.67	1.44	
TEL	Male	3.27	1.39	$p < .01$
	Female	3.87	1.61	
	Total	3.58	1.54	
HR	Male	3.28	1.71	$p < .01$
	Female	4.27	1.69	
	Total	3.79	1.77	
MO	Male	5.30	1.16	$p < .01$
	Female	5.80	1.09	
	Total	5.56	1.15	
BI	Male	4.88	1.71	$p < .01$
	Female	5.45	1.57	
	Total	5.18	1.66	

Notes: BI = Behavioral intention, CON = Contractualism, MO = Moral obligation, ME = Moral equity, NA = Negative affect, HR = Perceived health risk, REL = Relativism, TEL = Teleology.

Author information

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