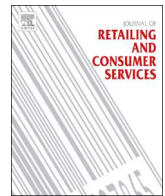




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Understanding ethical purchasing behavior: Validation of an enhanced stage model of ethical behavior



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ABSTRACT

This article uses a stage model of ethical decision-making to explain consumers' inclination toward ethical product alternatives. The current paper enhances the stage-model approach by considering egoistic purchasing motives and gender as moderating variables. The current study shows that the effect of negative affect on ethical purchasing intention is mediated by ethical judgement and moral obligation. Interestingly, the mediation effect is more pronounced for male respondents. Furthermore, egoistic purchasing motives moderate the effects of the stage-model components on ethical judgment as well as on ethical purchasing intention. These moderation effects are boosted or altered if gender is considered as moderator. Based on the empirical results and considering study limitations, the paper presents practical implications and avenues for future research.

1. Introduction

Pressing global issues such as climate change or unequal distribution of wealth (Kolk and Van Tulder, 2010) foster an ongoing debate about ethics and morality in the field of business. Ethical consumerism has gained relevance in the last two decades due to these societal and environmental issues. These developments are virulent in the retail sector as well, evidenced by the heated debate concerning sweatshops (Adams, 2002). Reports about toxic substances in, for example, fashion apparel inform customers and make them question their product choices (Jägel et al., 2012) and the resulting consequences of their purchase decisions for themselves and for others. An increasing number of consumers display a willingness to incorporate ethical considerations in their purchasing decisions, such as purchasing eco-labeled items or refraining from buying ethically questionable products (Bezençon and Blili, 2010). Consequently, retail sales of fair-trade products increased six-fold worldwide to 1.37 billion US \$ in recent years (Fairtrade International, 2016). The retail sale of organic food reached 80 billion US \$ in 2014 (Willer and Lernoud, 2016). Considering this ongoing trend, ethical consumerism has become a phenomenon that should not be neglected by retail management (Lavorata, 2014).

Retailers must withstand rapidly increasing societal pressure due to increased consumer awareness and demands from other stakeholders (e.g., nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)) and have begun to take actions to reduce their emission of greenhouse gases or engage in

recycling programs (Jones et al., 2005). Various studies indicated positive effects of corporate responsible behavior on firms' brand reputation, employer image, access to investors (Cacioppe et al., 2008) and competitive positioning (Chang, 2011). As a result, ethical and socially responsible products have become established in a variety of retail settings, from small specialty stores to large supermarket chains; many retailers have begun to sell ethical products under private labels (Willer and Lernoud, 2016). Therefore, retailers can be considered as "gatekeepers between consumers and eco-friendly products" (Guyader et al., 2017, p. 319) and represent important actors in the ethical consumption arena.

Against this background, the purpose of the present study is to analyze consumers' ethical purchasing behavior. The study results will add to retailing and consumer services research and provide managers with decision-making insights. In order to accomplish this goal, the current paper builds on research of stage models of ethical decision-making (e.g., Rest, 1986 or Jones, 1991). The current study strives at identifying which of the stage-model components determine whether consumers switch to an ethically responsible company. In addition, the current study considers egoistic purchasing motives in order to see whether ethical purchasing behavior is more selfish or altruistic. Finally, we take gender into account to identify differences in ethical decision-making between men and women.

The study contributes to research in a number of ways: Research on ethical consumption generally concentrates on aspects of developmental effectiveness, business ethics and marketing strategy (Nicholls,

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2002). However, research has also been undertaken to explain ethical consumer behavior. For instance, researchers have analyzed the gap between consumers' favorable attitude toward ethical products and their actual purchasing behavior (e.g., Carrington et al., 2014; Moser, 2016) or whether and why consumers are willing to pay a surcharge for ethical products (e.g., De Pelsmaker et al., 2005; Tully and Winer, 2014). Other studies focus on the antecedents of ethical consumer behavior such as motivational, attitudinal, or cognitive drivers of consumption (e.g., Chatzidakis et al., 2016; Culiberg, 2014; Freestone and McGoldrick, 2008; Goddard et al., 2013; and Passyn and Sujun, 2006). First, this paper extends previous research by applying these a stage model of ethical decision-making to the research context of ethical consumption. The stage-model approach has rarely been applied to the ethical consumption context. Furthermore, a limited number of studies considers emotions and emotion-related constructs as determinants of ethical consumer behavior (e.g., Antonetti and Maklan, 2014; Arli et al., 2015; Lindenmeier et al., 2017). Thus and as a second contribution to research, the current study considers negative affect as a driver of ethical consumer behavior in the stage-model framework. Extending the work of Yadav (2016) and as a third contribution, we also differentiate between altruistic and egoistic consumer motivation. By considering egoistic purchase motives, we introduce a new moderator to the stage model of ethical decision-making. Fourth, in contrast to previous studies, the paper considers a broader conceptualization of the ethical evaluation of business practices.

Gender differences have been investigated in the context of ethical decision-making (e.g., Deshpande, 1997). Some studies such as those of Bateman and Valentine (2010) or Lund (2008) reveal that women's behavior is more ethical than the behavior of men. Other papers find no significant effect of gender on ethical behavior in a business context (e.g., Franke et al., 1997 or McCabe et al., 2006). Further research resulted in inconsistent gender-specific results (e.g., Dawson, 1997). Older research even found that males show a more ethical behavior (Holstein, 1976). Hence it is unsurprising that several authors state that the results of gender-specific research are inconclusive and require further investigation (e.g., Roxas and Stoneback, 2004; Lund, 2008; and Vermeir and Van Kenhove, 2008). Therefore and fifth, this study explores gender-related effects.

The subsequent section elaborates on the theoretical background of the study. Thereafter, the paper describes the study design and the measurement approaches used. Then, the paper validates the hypotheses using a path modeling approach. Based on the study results and limitations, the current paper discusses practical implications and avenues for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Ethical consumption

Pecoraro and Uusitalo (2014) describe ethical consumption as a behavioral pattern that challenges consumers to reconsider their everyday consumption choices from a moral point of view. 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”. Shaw et al. (2016) consider ethical consumption as a manifestation of caring, responsibility and felt obligation. Ethical consumption involves the consumers' willingness to pay a surcharge on sustainable products (Tsarenko et al., 2013).

Products that are sourced, made and distributed in consideration of human rights, sustainability, environmental and animal friendliness or labor conditions are classified as ethically tenable. In consumer and retail contexts, the terms ethical, conscious, pro-environmental, green consumption or slow consumption are often used synonymously. Green or pro-environmental consumption also relates consumerism to its effects on the environment (Gleim et al., 2013). Another pattern of ethical consumption is organic food consumption, which is often associated with consumers' health-consciousness (Rana and Paul, 2017).

2.2. Stage models of ethical behavior

Rest (1986) developed a sequential model of ethical decision-making, that considers moral awareness, moral judgment, moral intent, and moral action in a sequential order. Jones' (1991) model approach additionally considers issue-contingent characteristics such as the magnitude of consequences of behavior. Jones (1991) subsumes these situation-dependent factors under the term of moral intensity. In a recent paper, Schwartz (2016) provides an advanced stage model of ethical decision-making. These model approaches have been validated in different contexts such as privacy violations and security breaches in an information technology context (Haines and Leonard, 2007a, 2007b), pushy salesperson behavior (Haines et al., 2008), or green consumer behavior (Zou and Chan, 2019).

The stage model consists of four components; recognition of moral issues is the first model component. The current study considers the negative-affect construct to represent individuals' recognition of the moral issue. According to Watson et al. (1988), affect can have a positive or negative valence (i.e., pleasant vs. unpleasant). This study solely considers negatively valenced affect because we focus on unethical corporate conduct. Pham (1992) states that arousal is a determinant of advertising stimuli awareness and thus we consider negative affect as a proxy for Rest's (1986) recognition-of-ethical-issue construct. According to (Chang, 2011), impulsive behavioral patterns involve a strong affective activation (e.g., induced by drastic imagery). Bougie et al. (2003) found that anger, as an affective response to service failure, predicts switching behavior. Lindenmeier (2008) revealed that ad-induced arousal positively affects helping behavior. Therefore, the current study considers negative affect as a trigger of ethical consumption behavior.

Ethical judgment is the second component of the stage model, based on consumers' moral values (Lindenmeier et al., 2012). 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). Based on an adapted version of the multi-dimensional ethics scale (Reidenbach and Robin, 1990), the current study considers relativism, teleology, and the deontological dimensions of moral equity and contractualism to be the basis of ethical judgment. According to Reidenbach and Robin (1990), contractualism pertains to a contract between the members of society that should not be violated. Relativistic philosophies reject universal moral norms and allow for situational ethical judgment. Relativists weigh circumstances over ethical principles and their moral judgment more strongly depends upon the nature of the situation (Karande et al., 2002). 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 accounting for how a purchase decision could contribute to overall wellbeing or happiness (Barnett et al., 2005). In contrast to this ethical philosophy, teleologists evaluate the ethics of their actions on consequences and outcomes (Barnett et al., 2005; Bateman and Valentine, 2010). Barnett et al. (2005) illustrate deontological and the teleological judgment using the example of products manufactured using child labor. According to the teleological paradigm, the purchase of such products is ethical as long as it does more good than harm (Andersch et al., 2018). Considering the deontological paradigm, purchasing such products is ethically wrong and should be refused.

The third component of the four-stage model, moral obligation, is defined as “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). When a consumer is confronted with an ethically questionable situation and makes a moral judgment upon it, she/he assesses whether moral norms are violated. If consumers perceive a disconfirmation of moral norms, the individuals will sense a behavioral drive or moral obligation to intervene. This motivation to help others (e.g., apparel workers in third-world and developing countries) 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. (2005) and Doran (2009) note a positive effect of self-transcendence needs on consumers' willingness to engage in ethical consumption. Hence, moral obligation reflects altruistic values; a categorization that applies when the individual cannot expect any direct benefits from the planned behavior (Schwartz, 1977; Yadav, 2016). Moral obligation can be regarded as an attitude reflecting the consumers' felt responsibility to change their present behavior because of the given circumstances (Haines et al., 2008). Because attitudes closely relate to the formation of behavioral intentions, we assume that a moral obligation to help others has a direct and positive effect on consumers' inclination to purchase ethical products.

Schwartz (2016) hypothesizes that, after recognizing a moral issue, people evaluate the situation and develop a moral obligation based on the resulting ethical judgment, which influences their inclination towards ethical behavior. Ethical purchasing intention is the fourth model component. The proposed chain of causation assumes a sequential relationship between the constructs (see Fig. 1); thus, the mediation hypothesis H₁ is as follows:

H₁. Ethical judgement and moral obligation (moral obligation) mediate (mediate) the positive effect of negative affect (ethical judgment) on ethical consumer behavior.

2.3. Egoistic purchasing motives as moderating variable

As mentioned above, ethical consumption can be classified as a prosocial behavior. Contrary to pure altruistic behavior, prosocial behavior is a type of impure altruism (Zlatev and Miller, 2016). This means that altruistic, other-focused motives and egoistic, self-focused motives drive helping behavior. Hence, egoistic motives may explain the consumption of ethical products (e.g., organic food). For example, consumers buy these products because they do not contain unhealthy or dangerous ingredients. This is substantiated by Ghazali et al. (2017), who showed that product safety values positively affect consumers' attitude towards organic buying behavior.

Situational and individual moderators may impact the causal relationships proposed by the stage model of ethical decision-making, according to Schwartz (2016) and Treviño et al. (2014). Hence, we assume that egoistic purchase motives are an individual moderating variable that accelerates the effects of other components of the stage model. The literature implies that – in addition to rational and self-oriented values – there is increased tendency to include other-oriented values in the consumption equation. When making a consumption decision, consumers consider values that serve both themselves and others (Doran, 2009; Nicholls, 2002). This may result in a motivational conflict situation in which the consumers must decide between satisfying their moral needs and obligations or pursuing egoistic motives. Although the motives may appear to be in opposition, the conflict can be resolved by pursuing ethical behavior. For example, fair-trade consumption may be associated with enhanced working conditions in producer countries (Auger et al., 2007) as well as with a healthier lifestyle (Cairns et al., 2013). Therefore, the underlying self- and other-focused motives should create a stronger

effect when combined then when considered separately. Authors such as Yadav (2016) suggest that self- and other-oriented concerns can coexist in an individual. Therefore, both self-concern and concern for others may have behavioral relevance. Yadav (2016) investigates such a two-fold motivational structure in the context of organic food consumption. Whereas orientation towards environmental issues is classified as an altruistic value, health concerns are subsumed under the notion of egoistic motives. Both serve as decisive drivers for organic food consumption, showing that seemingly opposing values can trigger the same behavior (ibid.). Hence, we hypothesize that egoistic motives have a positive moderating effect on the effects of model components on ethical purchasing intentions. Thus, hypothesis H₂ is as follows:

H₂. Egoistic purchase motives reinforce the effect of negative affect, ethical judgment, and moral obligation on the model components and ethical purchasing intention.

2.4. Gender as a moderating variable

Gerson and Peiss (1985, p. 327) define gender as “a set of socially constructed relationships which are produced and reproduced through people's actions”. Lerner (1986) describes gender as a set of cultural roles and norms that form the basis for traditional gender roles such as domestically-oriented women and income-earning men (Eagly, 1987). Gender may affect decision-making processes (Palan, 2001) and business research regarding gender-specific behavioral differences and differences in ethical decision-making covers a vast spectrum. However, the findings are inconclusive and further research in this field is necessary (Bateman and Valentine, 2010).

Based on gender roles, gender stereotypes developed as cognitive structures and assumptions about certain characteristics that are supposed to be typically male or female (Kite et al., 2008). Gilligan (1982) investigated gender-based differences in moral orientations. In this context, women appeared to be more engaged with caring, empathy, compassion and cooperative motives due to their traditional role as mothers and wives whereas males are socialized to focus on justice, fairness and rights. Based on the gender socialization theory, females show a more pronounced ethical commitment and ethical sensibility (Yankelovich, 1972; You et al., 2011) due to these differing moral orientations. The same holds true for the inclination toward prosocial behavior (Peterson et al., 2001) and intensity of feelings of guilt in guilt-inducing consumption settings (Kayal et al., 2017). Moreover, females are supposed to show distinctive negative reactions to unethical behavioral and environmental cues, resulting in a stronger willingness to draw consequences, adjust their behavior accordingly (Wood and Eagly, 2012), and blame companies in the case of corporate ethical misconduct (Laufer and Gillespie, 2004). Following Bateman and Valentine (2010), who indicate a higher ethicality for women due to role-based and moral-based values, hypothesis H_{3A} is as follows:

H_{3A}. Negative affect induced by corporate misconduct, unfavorable ethical judgment, moral obligation and ethical purchasing intention is more pronounced for female consumers than for male consumers.

Based on socialization processes, several studies suggest more pronounced empathy by women (cf. Schieman and Van Gundy, 2000; Gault and Sabini, 2000). In line with this notion, women favor harmony and equality (Lee et al., 2016). Conversely, task-oriented social role models lead to lower involvement for others' emotional concerns among males (De Vries, 1996). Bradley and Lang (1999) as well as Bradley et al. (2001) reveal that women displayed more extreme reactions in terms of fear and defensive motives to aversive pictures and words. Based on the negative-state-relief-model (Cialdini et al., 1973), Grabe and Kamhawi (2006) state that women tend to avoid possibly threatening stimuli whereas men are more likely to confront threats. Switching to more ethical products can be considered a possibility for women to appease their conscience and avoid negative feelings. Based

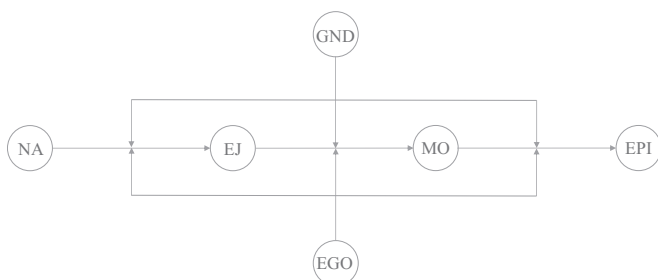
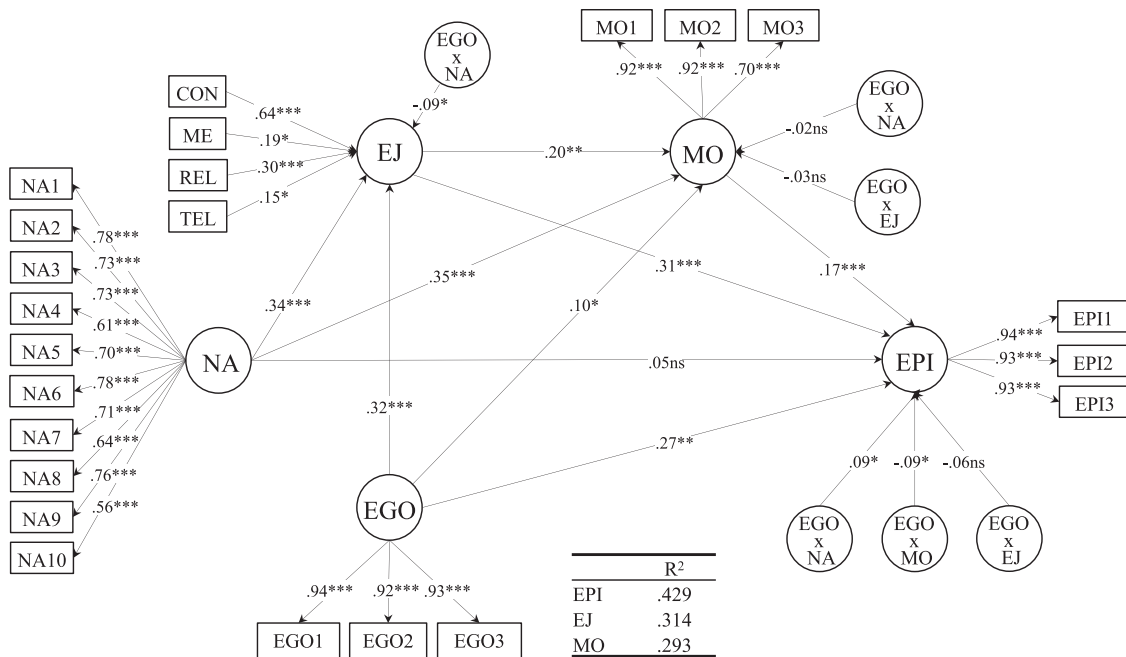


Fig. 1. Conceptual model (Simplified representation).



P values were calculated based on 5.000 bootstrap runs.

Fig. 2. PLS results.

on these findings, hypothesis H_{3B} is as follows:

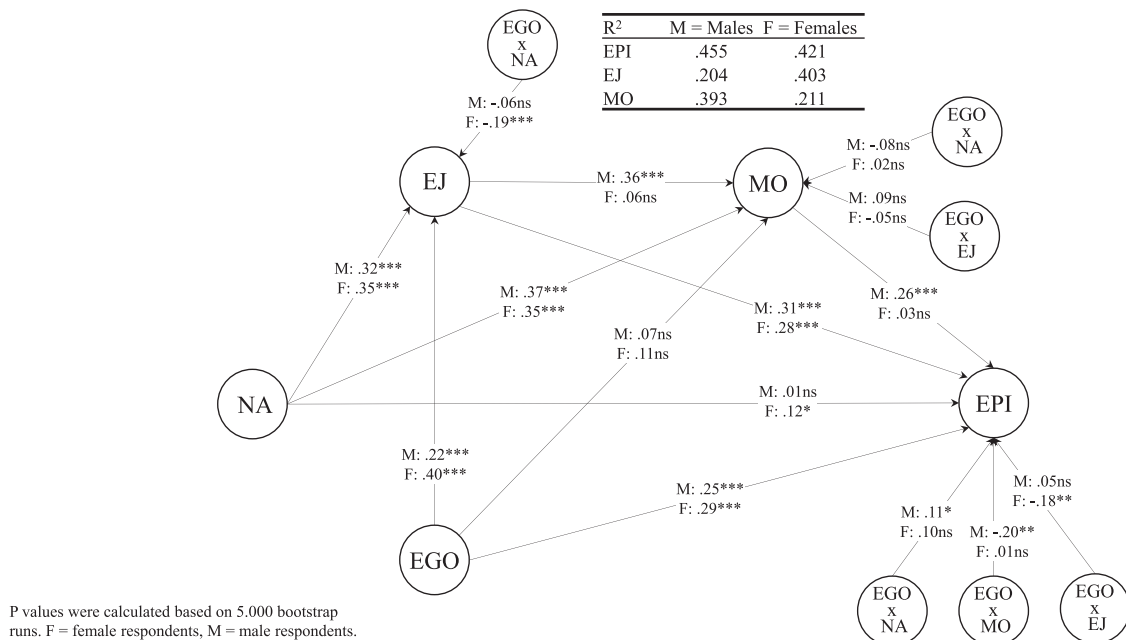
H_{3B}. Negative affect has a stronger direct effect on females’ ethical purchasing intention than on males’ ethical purchasing intention.

Based on the selectivity hypothesis (see Meyers-Levy and Loken, 2015), consumer research studies reveal gender differences in information processing. For instance, Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2015) show that men are often less engaged in information processing and accordingly assess fair laboratory claims less deeply based on pre-made schemes. In addition, research by Eisenberg et al. (2001) indicates that males’ behavior is less emotionally driven and thus it is likely that their ethical purchasing decisions are more strongly based on cognitive

processes. Furthermore, Lindenmeier (2008) study reveals that a higher level of motivation is necessary to induce willingness to engage in prosocial behavior by male consumers. Considering this finding, the current study assumes that males’ intention to purchase ethical products is driven by ethical evaluation and moral obligation, which are cognitive constructs. Thus, hypothesis H_{3C} is as follows:

H_{3C}. The indirect effect of negative affect along the “ethical judgment”–“moral obligation” chain of causation is stronger for male consumers.

Fig. 3 depicts a simplified representation of the relationships considered in this study’s conceptual model. This overview shows the



P values were calculated based on 5.000 bootstrap runs. F = female respondents, M = male respondents.

Fig. 3. Multi-group analysis results.

sequential order of the current paper's stage-model constructs (i.e., negative affect (NA) → ethical judgment (EJ) → moral obligation (MO) → ethical purchasing intention (EPI)), which represents the mediational hypothesis H₁. In addition, Fig. 1 shows egoistic purchasing motives (EGO) (i.e., hypothesis H₂) and gender (GND) (i.e., hypotheses H_{3a}, H_{3b}, and H_{3c}) as moderators of the stage models' mediational relationships.

3. Study design and measurement

3.1. The “Detox Catwalk” campaign

NGOs such as Greenpeace have long criticized the use of toxic chemicals in the production of clothing. These chemicals contaminate the environment in the textile-producing countries of the Third World and harm workers and those who come into direct contact with the chemicals. The starting point for the current study was the Greenpeace “Detox Catwalk” campaign. Several large fashion companies voluntarily agreed to waive the use of highly toxic chemicals in the production of garments. In an interim report, it was shown that not all these companies adhered to their commitment. Thus, Greenpeace differentiates between the following categories of companies: companies that lead their industry with credible deadlines and specific measures of practical implementation of a toxic-free future (“Leaders”), companies that do not wish to enter into any “Detox Catwalk” commitment (“Laggards”), and companies that voluntarily agreed to detox but have not kept their word, hiding inefficient measures behind false promises and commitments (“Greenwashers”).

3.2. Study design

The German adult population comprises the basic population of the current study. The current study applies a quota sampling procedure and considers age and gender as the quota criteria. Student research assistants distributed and recollected self-administered paper-and-pencil questionnaires in Southwestern Germany. The student research assistants selected the interviewees considering the specified quota criteria (i.e., gender and age). This sampling procedure yielded 281 usable responses. The respondents' average age was 43.26 years. 51.60% of the interviews were female, 32.38% had higher education entrance qualification, and 28.47% had a university or college diploma. Thus, the data fits the distribution of these variables in the German population.

All interviewees received information on the use of poisonous chemicals in the fabrication of garments and on the detrimental impact on consumers in Germany, the workpeople, and the environment in the manufacturing countries. Moreover, preliminary information indicated that Greenpeace classifies a well-known German sports equipment manufacturer as a “Greenwasher” company. The interviewees were asked to reflect whether switching from this brand to a “Leader” company would be a viable option. The respondents were asked to reply

to the questionnaire honestly and were informed that their answers will be treated confidentially. Therefore, they should be less inclined to provide socially desirable answers.

3.3. Measurement

Most of the variables depicted in Fig. 1 represent reflective constructs. We measured the constructs on 7-point Likert scales except for negative affect, which used a 5-point scale (see Appendix A). The egoistic purchasing motive (i.e., perceived health risk related to wearing contaminated apparel) and moral obligation were measured based on self-developed scales. The intention to switch to a more ethical product alternative was measured using common behavioral intention question items with an introductory note to restrict the respondents' evoked set to an ethical and non-ethical product alternative, thereby excluding other product alternatives. The two consider companies rank among the three most popular sportswear brands in Germany (VuMA, n.d.). Moreover, the third of the three most popular sportswear companies in Germany is also categorized as a Greenwasher brand. In sum, we believe that the decision scenario is realistic and that the switching costs are not too high. To assess the interviewees' ethical judgment of the criticized business practice, we applied an extended version of Reidenbach and Robin's (1990) multidimensional ethics scale, which considers teleological ethical judgment. We conceptualized ethical judgment as a hierarchical-component construct that consists of a superordinate, higher-order construct and two or more lower-order constructs (see Hair et al., 2017). In the present study, the reflective lower-order constructs of moral equity, relativism, contractualism, and teleology are condensed into the formative superordinate construct of ethical judgment. We applied a two-step-approach to operationalize our measurement approach (Hair et al., 2017): In a first step, we calculated the latent variable scores of the lower-order constructs. In a second step, we used these latent variable scores as formative indicators of the higher-order construct.

To examine the item reliability, we computed indicator loadings for all reflectively measured items. The results show that they commonly exceed 0.70. Three items of the negative affect construct exhibit indicator loadings less than 0.70 but are significant at $p < .01$. (see Fig. 1). Moreover, the average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) are equal to or above the critical thresholds of 0.50 and 0.60 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988 or Hair et al., 2017), respectively, which confirms the reflective constructs' convergent validity and internal consistency (see Table 1). The Fornell-Larcker criterion indicates discriminant validity (see Table 2).

To assess the measurement quality of the formative higher-order construct of ethical judgment, we examined the values and significance of the outer weights (Hair et al., 2017). This assessment revealed that contractualism has the largest importance (0.64; $p < .01$) when compared to moral equity (0.19; $p < .10$), relativism (0.30; $p < .01$), and teleology (0.15; $p < .10$). All formative indicators have a significant effect on the higher-order construct. Regarding the formative

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and assessment of measurement model.

	Mean (Total Sample)	Mean (Males)	Mean (Females)	SD	Average variance extracted	Composite reliability
Ethical judgment	–	–	–	–	–	–
■ Contractualism	5.67	5.39	5.94	1.44	0.78	0.88
■ Moral equity	6.42	6.27	6.56	0.86	0.65	0.88
■ Relativism	5.58	5.37	5.78	1.45	0.92	0.96
■ Teleology	3.58	3.27	3.87	1.54	0.69	0.87
Egoistic purchasing motive	3.79	3.28	4.27	1.77	0.87	0.95
Moral obligation	5.56	5.30	5.80	1.15	0.73	0.89
Negative affect	2.65	2.39	2.88	0.88	0.50	0.91
Ethical purchasing intention	5.18	4.88	5.45	1.66	0.88	0.96

Mean values, SD, AVE and CR cannot be calculated for formative constructs. All mean values of the model constructs are significantly different across the gender groups.

Table 2
Fornell-Larcker criterion.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Ethical judgment (EJ)	–				
(2) Egoistic motive (EGO)	0.46	0.93			
(3) Moral obligation (MO)	0.42	0.35	0.85		
(4) Negative affect (NA)	0.47	0.45	0.48	0.70	
(5) Ethical Purchasing Intention (EPI)	0.56	0.51	0.42	0.41	0.94

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

relationship between the lower-order constructs and the superordinate ethical judgment construct, the lower-order constructs' variance inflation factors (VIF) values < 2.0 indicate that there are no collinearity issues (Hair et al., 2011). This shows that our reflective-formative higher-order measurement approach performs well.

4. Study results

4.1. Validation of Hypotheses H₁ and H₂

We used partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) and SmartPLS 3.0 software (Ringle et al., 2015) to estimate our model. Contrary to covariance-based SEM modeling approaches (e.g., SPSS AMOS or LISREL), PLS-SEM is especially useful when using formative measures and testing complex structural models (Hair et al., 2017). Furthermore, moderation analyses, mediation analyses (i.e., indirect effects' bootstrap confidence intervals) and multi-group analyses (MGA) can be conducted using PLS-SEM. This study uses a mean-replacement approach due to the low number of missing values (< 1.0%). Moreover, this study uses a conservative no-sign-changes bootstrapping procedure based on 5,000 bootstrap runs.

Fig. 1 presents the results of the PLS estimation procedure. The R² of the ethical purchasing intention (see Fig. 1) indicates a satisfactory to good model fit. Negative affect has significant effects on ethical judgment and moral obligation. Conversely, the direct effect of negative affect on ethical purchasing intention is not significant. The mediation analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of negative affect on ethical purchasing intention (indirect effect = 0.18, p < .01) and thus hypothesis H₁ is confirmed. Ethical judgment has significant and positive direct effects on moral obligation and ethical purchasing intention. Moreover, in line with hypothesis H₁, the indirect effect of ethical judgment on ethical purchasing intention is significant (indirect effect = 0.03, p < .10).

Egoistic purchasing motivation has significant effects on ethical judgment and ethical purchasing intention. The analysis reveals a less strong and significant effect on moral obligation. Furthermore, PLS-SEM analysis reveals three significant moderation effects of the egoistic motive. Interpretation of the moderation effects is obvious in this case because all the main effects have a positive sign and all variables are standardized. First, contrary to hypothesis H₂, the egoistic motive mitigates the effect of negative affect on ethical judgment. Second, in opposition with Hypothesis H₂, the egoistic motive diminishes the effect of moral obligation on purchase intent. Third, in line with hypothesis H₂, the egoistic motive magnifies the effect of negative affect on ethical purchasing intention.

4.2. Validation of Hypotheses H_{3A-C}

We conducted a multi-group analysis (MGA) with gender as the dichotomous grouping variable to validate hypotheses H_{3A-C}. Before conducting the MGA, we assessed the measurement invariance between male and female interviewees by applying a three-step measurement invariance of composite models (MICOM) procedure (Henseler et al., 2016). In step 1, we assume configural invariance by design because the

same model setup, data treatment and algorithm were applied for both model estimations. The second and third steps of the MICOM procedure are based on a permutation approach and we confirm compositional invariance for all latent constructs except moral obligation. The permutation approach reveals no differences in the mean values or the variance of most of the constructs. The mean value (variance) of boycott intention (ethical judgment) differs across the gender subgroups. In sum, measurement invariance can be assumed and the MGA analysis can be conducted (Henseler et al., 2016).

First, in line with hypothesis H_{3A}, all constructs' mean values are significantly different between male and female interviewees. Second, Fig. 2 depicts the results of the MGA analysis. Regarding females, ethical judgment does not significantly affect moral obligation. In addition, moral obligation has no significant effect on females' purchase intention. In line with hypothesis H_{3C}, these results suggest that moral obligation is solely relevant for males' formation of ethical purchasing inclination. The significant difference in the R² value of moral obligation (p < .01) across the two gender groups confirms this. Third, as the gender-specific paths reveal, ethical judgment and moral obligation only partially mediate the effects of negative affect on females' ethical purchasing intention. This finding confirms hypothesis H_{3B}. Fourth, the study reveals gender-specific differences in the moderation effect of the egoistic motive. The moderation effect of the egoistic motive on the effect of negative affect (ethical judgment) on ethical judgment (purchase intention) is solely significant for females. The moderation effect of egoistic motives on the effect of negative affect on ethical purchasing intention is significant for male respondents only.

Table 3 reveals a stronger effect of an egoistic motive on females' ethical judgment. In line with the significant direct effect, the effect of negative affect on behavioral intention is significantly stronger for females. Furthermore, in line with hypothesis H_{3C}, there is a stronger effect of ethical judgment (moral obligation) on moral obligation (ethical purchasing intention) for males. In addition, the MGA showed significantly higher indirect effects of negative affect and ethical judgment. In sum, in line with hypothesis H_{3C}, the chain of causation proposed by authors such as Rest (1986) appears to be more relevant for males' ethical decision-making.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Discussion of study results

The results of the current study are in line with the predictions of stage models of ethical behavior. The effect of negative affect on consumers' inclination to switch to an ethical purchasing alternative is mediated by ethical judgement and felt moral obligation to help. Notably, this finding is particularly valid for male consumers. Moreover and confirm to other recent research (e.g., Christensen and Woodland, 2018), the PLS-SEM results reveal contractualistic ethical judgment as the major driver of consumers' overall moral evaluation of corporate misconduct. The consumers apparently believe that companies must meet the obligations of an unwritten societal contract. Perceived violations of that societal contract resulted in strong unfavorable ethical judgment among the interviewees.

The results of the MGA approach identify gender as a moderating variable and thus contribute to research on the effect of gender on ethical decision-making processes. Consistent with the literature, the differences in latent constructs' mean values reveal a more pronounced attitude to morality among women. In addition, women are more strongly motivated to switch brands. Lastly, the empirical results reveal a direct effect of negative affect on switching intentions for women, indicating more affect-driven consumption behavior compared with male respondents. Referring to the negative-state-relief-hypothesis proposed by Cialdini et al. (1987), prosocial or ethical behavior can be considered a means to diminish felt negative affect. Confirming to the

Table 3
Results of the multi-group analysis (MGA) – gender differences in direct and indirect effects.

	Direct effects		Indirect effects	
	Difference Males-Females	p Value	Difference Males-Females	p Value
Egoistic Motive → Ethical Purchasing Intention	0.043	0.643	0.010	0.556
Egoistic Motive → Ethical Judgement	0.178	0.945		
Egoistic Motive → Moral Obligation	0.048	0.660	0.055	0.131
Ethical Judgement → Ethical Purchasing Intention	0.030	0.408	0.092	0.007
Ethical Judgement → Moral Obligation	0.299	0.019		
Moral Obligation → Ethical Purchasing Intention	0.227	0.024		
Negative Affect → Ethical Purchasing Intention	0.117	0.913	0.116	0.056
Negative Affect → Ethical Judgement	0.029	0.609		
Negative Affect → Moral Obligation	0.018	0.450	0.094	0.055

Differences and p values are estimated based on 5.000 bootstrap runs. p values below 0.10 and above 0.90 represent significant differences in direct and indirect effects. The coefficients of the “EGO x MO” and “EGO x EJ”-interactions on EPI as well as the coefficient of the “EGO x NA”-interaction on EJ are significantly different, too.

negative-state-relief-hypothesis, Bennett (2009) shows that impulsive donation serves as a self-gift that rewards the donor with satisfaction, a brighter mood, and an improved self-perception. As another example, Yue et al. (2017) show that negative emotions felt by frontline service employees can motivate helping behavior. In line with these previous studies, the observed impulse to spontaneously switch to the ethical product alternative may be due to the female consumers’ drive towards an instant need to be relieved from felt negative affect.

The current study reveals egoistic purchase motives as another moderating variable that should be considered in the stage model of ethical decision-making. The accelerating effect of egoistic motives on the relationship between negative affect and behavioral intention is in line with the hypothesis because a switch to a more ethical product represents an approach goal for both behavioral drivers. Concurring with our research findings, Michel et al. (2016) found that a motivational construct reinforced the mediational effect of negative effect on deviant employee behavior. Furthermore, egoistic motives mitigate the effect of moral obligation (negative affect) on purchasing intention (ethical judgment). Health-protection motives can be classified as safety needs according to Maslow’s (1943) theory of human motivation. The motive to help others relates to social or self-transcendence needs, which are higher stages in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) hypothesizes that lower-level needs must be satisfied before higher-level needs become decisive for individual behavior. Therefore, due to their ranking in the hierarchy of needs, unsatisfied lower-level egoistic purchasing motives (i.e., protection of one’s health) attenuate the effect of higher-level altruistic motivational processes. The study finding corresponds to Hultman et al. (2015) who show that materialism as a lower-level need may obstruct ethical consumption. Likewise, Doran (2009) show that individuals who adhere to security values such as family security, longing for safety and health concerns are less inclined to consume fair-trade products.

5.2. Practical implications

The study results indicate that gender affects the ethical consumption decision-making process. Thus, the present paper suggests a double-tracked targeting approach for socially responsible retailers and producers of ethical products. To increase switching intentions among female consumers, marketing efforts for ethical products should be focused on inducing negative affect. To boost male consumers’ switching intentions, the potential negative effects of consuming unethical products should be highlighted to evoke awareness of social responsibility and heighten unfavorable ethical judgment and moral obligation (Haines et al., 2008). According to the study results it is not instrumental to activate egoistic motives because the found moderating effects for male and female respondents cancel out egoistic motives’ direct effects on ethical purchasing intentions.

Non-profit organizations that advocate for switching to ethical companies could collaborate with producers of sustainable products and promote their products as ethical substitutes. Hereby, they could attempt to target female consumers by enhancing negative affect with communication stimuli that contain drastic imagery. For male consumers, they should focus on their felt moral obligation toward, for instance, third-world workers. Moreover, they could attempt to influence consumers’ ethical judgment about corporate misconduct by activating contractualistic norms.

Retailers and manufacturers being accused of greenwashing should attempt to mitigate egoistic purchasing motives (e.g., through favorable producer stories or by disclosing safety and health standards applied to their textile processing). Moreover, alleged greenwasher companies should attempt to lessen unfavorable ethical judgments by emphasizing relativistic norms. For instance, they could highlight that the ethical standards and norms and values differ between industrialized and developing countries. Moreover, they should attempt to reduce consumers’ felt moral obligation. In this context, they could relieve consumers from feelings of responsibility by admitting in public that they shoulder the responsibility for the work conditions in the overseas production sites.

5.3. Study limitations

The study results must be interpreted with consideration of its limitations. Regarding external validity, the harmful effects of apparel production on workers and consumers represent a specific instance of alleged unethical behavior and it is unclear whether the study results can be transferred to other cases. Other types of egoistic consumer motives (e.g., utilitarian and prestige motives) could be relevant to different instances of corporate misbehavior. The current study considered a sample of German consumers and the transferability of study results to other countries or cultures might be limited. Considering the measurement invariance issues of the moral obligation construct, the gender-specific differences must be interpreted with caution. The interviewees’ responses may have been distorted due to a social desirability bias; the current study does not explicitly control for this behavioral bias. Moreover, the study considers behavioral intention as a dependent variable. However, authors such as Moser (2016) have shown that the attitude-behavior gap is immanent in ethical consumption (e.g., pro-environmentally consumption). Finally, the current study considers switching to a socially responsible company as an ethical decision option. However, totally refraining from consuming represents another decision option (see e.g., Klein et al., 2004). Therefore, respondents who wanted to boycott the Greenwasher company but have no intention to buy products from the Leader company may felt hard to answer the question items.

5.4. Future research

The present study opens several avenues for future research. First, future research could consider different product categories (e.g., food products) or instances of allegedly unethical corporate behavior (e.g., animal cruelty). Second, future research could enhance the conceptual framework by considering more complex emotional constructs (e.g., guilt and anger). Responsible consumption has progressed to become a lifestyle (Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004) and consumers that are concerned about their health and their dependents' health and environmental effects (i.e., the LOHAS segment) influence the food market as well as non-food merchandise. Thus, future studies could validate the model approach across the LOHAS and non-LOHAS segments. Fourth, future research could examine ethical judgments that consider further ethical ideologies. Based on the work of Barnett et al. (2005) and Karande et al. (2002), future research could examine how alleged

unethical business practices are judged from the perspective of virtue ethics or ethical egoism and idealistic skepticism. Fifth, future research could consider other types of ethical behavior and, in particular, totally refraining from consuming products of unethical companies represent an important decision option. Finally, future studies could consider actual purchasing behavior as a dependent variable. This could be accomplished by merging survey data and retail scanner data.

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Appendix A

see: Table A1

Table A1
Question items.

<i>Negative affect</i>	
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.
NA2	... distressed.
NA3	... angry.
NA4	... guilty.
NA5	... scared.
NA6	... aggressive.
NA7	... irritated.
NA8	... ashamed.
NA9	... confused.
NA10	... disturbed.
<i>Ethical judgment</i>	
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.
ME2	... just/unjust.
ME3	... acceptable/not acceptable in this case.
ME4	... morally right/wrong.
REL1	... acceptable/not acceptable for people who are important to me.
REL2	... acceptable/not acceptable for my family members.
CON1	... does not violate/violates an unspoken contract.
CON2	... does not violate/violates an unspoken promise.
TEL1	... results/does not result in a good price-performance ratio for consumers in Germany.
TEL2	... leads to the greatest/lowest customer benefits in Germany.
TEL3	... is efficient/inefficient from the German customers' perspective.
<i>Egoistic motive</i>	
EGO1	In my opinion, the health risk of wearing [well-known German sportswear brand] apparel is high!
EGO2	... the likelihood of suffering an allergic reaction from wearing [well-known German sportswear brand] apparel is high!
EGO3	Wearing [well-known German sportswear brand] apparel can increase the likelihood of long-term health impairment!
<i>Moral obligation</i>	
MO1	I think I should help people from third world countries – I am far better off than them.
MO2	I have a responsibility to do all I can to help people from third world countries.
MO3	It is a good thing to help people from third world countries.
<i>Ethical Purchasing intention</i>	
Imagine that you want to buy new sportswear and that products from either the Greenwasher Firm A [well-known German sportswear brand] or the Leader Firm B [another well-known German sportswear brand] are worth considering.	
EPI1	In this case I would boycott the Greenwasher Firm A which is using toxic chemicals in its fabrication process and rather buy a product of the Leader Firm B instead, which is using less toxic chemicals.
EPI2	The next time I want to buy sportswear I would think about boycotting the Greenwasher Firm A which is using toxic chemicals in its fabrication process and buy products of the Leader Firm B instead, which is using less toxic chemicals.
EPI3	The next time I want to buy sportswear I probably will boycott the Greenwasher Firm A which is using toxic chemicals in its fabrication process and buy products of the Leader Firm B.

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