

Eco-Clothing, Consumer Identity and Ideology

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of eco-fashion consumption and consumer purchase decisions while constructing one's self with external symbols, such as appearance, clothing and fashion items. This study approaches sustainable clothing from a grounding in design research and the meanings of material culture. The study uses sociology and social psychology; hence, the meaning of appearance and especially clothing and fashion is understood in a social context. This paper also takes an interdisciplinary approach to eco-clothes as cultural and design objects in a social and sustainable development context, objects that intertwine consumers' ethical attitudes and values and how they construct a concept of 'self' using external symbols. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd and ERP Environment.

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Introduction

THIS STUDY MAKES A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION ON ETHICAL CLOTHING AND ECO-FASHION, AND IT ESPECIALLY addresses the attitude–behaviour gap in ethical consumption in the clothing field. The paper focuses on consumer attitudes and values, individual thought processes, and identity formation and construction of self processes using external symbols in a sustainable development context.

As we are primarily interested in understanding the nature of contemporary consumer culture, clothing consumption and consumer purchase decisions, one way to approach this is to examine the commitment of the ethical consumer in the clothing field. This paper thus views eco-clothing consumption through the lens of individuality and personality factors such as ethical commitment. The purpose of this paper is to investigate, both theoretically and empirically, how recent eco-fashion corresponds to a consumer's values and his/her ethical commitment.

This study thus seeks to address the following questions: what the internal drivers are when a consumer makes his/her ethical purchase decision in the apparel field; why an attitude–behaviour gap exists in eco-fashion purchasing decisions and how eco-clothing intertwines with consumers' identity and ideology.

In seeking to answer these questions, the aim is to provide an understanding of the contradiction in ethical consumption in the clothing field and the ethical attitude–behaviour gap in the apparel field in contemporary society. This paper is a small contribution towards filling this gap in our knowledge in the eco-clothing field. It argues that, despite recent studies in the area of eco-fashion, producers and designers still lack knowledge of what the consumer desires and values in the eco-fashion field. Hence we present a hypothesis that the present trends

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in eco-fashion and ethical clothing appeal to only a limited number of consumers and their concept of aesthetics, and this may be one reason for the existing attitude–behaviour gap in the eco-fashion field.

The following presents a description of the background discussion to which the research contributes. The paper begins with an overview of the recent research in consumer ethical purchasing decisions in the eco-fashion field. The next theme further expands the issue of clothing consumption and how it is a fundamental element in our construction of self and identity formation in a postmodern world and in the social context. The discussion moves on to the theme of change in postmodern society and also change in our identity and needs: hence the continuous change process in our appearance and apparel. The paper makes use of the results of an online survey made in Finland in spring 2009 on consumers' attitudes towards sustainable clothes and eco-fashion, and the analytical section of the paper reflects a theoretical interpretation of the survey results.

We come to the conclusion that an ethical commitment in clothing purchasing and ethical values form a significant driver towards purchasing eco-clothes. Consumers who are 'ethical hardliners' prioritize a strong personal ideology as a value in their purchasing decisions. If the consumer has a strong ethical commitment this becomes even more important a value in clothing than one's own identity or aesthetic values. The 'ethical hardliners' however are a minority group and remain a niche. Nonetheless, for all consumers quality and aesthetic aspects in clothing are highly important when purchasing clothes and fashion, including eco-clothes.

In the concluding discussion we also argue that manufacturers need to find new ways to see consumer commitment, wishes, needs, values, desires and emotions as a key starting point for the design process in the eco-fashion field. Producers should facilitate new ways to conduct design processes together with consumers in order to meet customers' needs and in this way deepen product attachment. This in turn adds value to the product, creating longer product lifespans and hence better products, and slowing the cycles of fashion.

Ethical Purchasing Decisions

Consumers in the developed world are well aware of the environmental impact of present industrial production and the impact of present consumption behaviour. Regarding sustainable development, consumer choices and the importance of environmental aspects in consumers' everyday purchasing decisions should be the centre of attention (Jalas, 2004). Yet consumer choices are somewhat irrational and not always well connected to values. A consumer fulfils deep inner motivations and unconscious needs by consuming. Consumption includes two kinds of function when answering to a person's needs, targets and values: the consumer can try to achieve individual or collective benefit by consuming. Ethical products manifest individual motives or collective benefit for the person buying. Individual benefit involves issues such as price, quality, saving of time and purchase convenience (Moisander, 1991).

Consumers' attitudes towards ethical consumption are positive; nonetheless, actualization of ethical interest into ethical purchasing decisions is more complex. The moral norm-activation theory of altruism by Schwartz (1973) defines a precondition in activating personal norms into action. In Schwartz's theory the assumption is that environmental quality is a collective good, which activates consumers to act in a pro-environmental way. On the basis of this theory the following hypothesis can be formulated: by acquiring information about the life cycles of different products and their environmental impact, consumers will wisely select products with less environmental load. This approach to sustainability also emphasizes the consumer's responsibility and hypothesizes that the number of ethical products will increase in the markets simply by sharing more information. Hitherto this hypothesis has not come true in practice.

The ethical consumer and his/her motivations have been studied widely. According to Clavin and Lewis (2005), a consumer who takes ethical issues into consideration behaves according to his/her ethical values, and he/she realizes these values in consumption behaviour even if the behaviour does not reflect well on him/her. This kind of consumer has committed himself/herself to a social value base. The consumer's ethical awareness is high, and he/she knows which enterprises function ethically. Ethical decision-making relates to the consumer's social orientation, ideals and ideology. According to Freestone and McGoldrick (2007), social motivators are a stronger lever for ethical behaviour than personal ones. Ethical consumption can create an individual, symbolic feeling of advantage that links to a certain lifestyle or expression of personal identity and other social values (Moisander, 1991).

Carrigan and Attala (2001) argue that despite consumers caring about the ethical behaviour of companies this care does not translate into consumption choices that favour ethical companies and punish unethical enterprises. They also highlighted that consumers do not want to make ethical choices if this necessitates inconvenience to them. Ethical purchasing will take place only if there are no costs to the consumer in terms of higher price, loss of quality or discomfort in shopping. The same situation can also be seen in the global clothing business: consumers are interested in eco-fashion but they do not want ethical purchasing to cause inconvenience, such as through higher prices or uncomfortable materials (Joergens, 2006).

Behind the need to purchase there are, besides the actual need, other deeper reasons such as the need to be associated with some social status, constructing identity through product symbols and brands, or desire for certain lifestyles. Lifestyle as a theoretical concept means the totality of a person's social practices, and the routines incorporated into habits, as well as the story that he/she tells about them. A person thereby states reasons for himself/herself and others about his/her actions and routines. Each small decision a person makes every day builds routines and creates a lifestyle. Yet routines are open to changes because of the character of mobility in self-identity, something that will be discussed further later in this paper. When a person realizes that his/her thinking is contradictory to his/her own everyday choices, practices, habits and routines through some new perspective and these old habits do not bend to his/her new inner picture of himself/herself, for example as a ethical consumer, he/she will change his/her practices. A person tries to harmonize his/her self-image, and the goal is an undamaged self-identity and a balanced life story. While acting ethically, the consumer knows that he/she acts morally correctly and in this way he/she approaches an ideal ethical world (Giddens, 1991; Spaargaren and van Vliet, 2000; Oksanen, 2002).

Moisander and Pesonen (2002) argue that green consumers and consumerism represent a certain lifestyle or desire to be a certain kind of person. This representation is actualized through a certain way of thinking and acting. They also describe the moral dimensions in green consumerism as being like an 'aesthetic of existence'; thus, there is an ongoing process of questioning and reinventing the self. Hence the moral and aesthetic criteria of green consumerism are not stable and they are in complex interplay.

New information and experiences thereby develop and challenge the consumer's discourse awareness. Hobson (2003) argues that this discourse awareness changes into practical knowledge that the consumer uses in everyday routines. Jackson (2008) argues that the consumer has to constantly balance between individual needs and social benefit. This is evident in the contradiction in ethical consumption. At the same time the consumer wants to fulfil his/her present desires as well as future needs.

As already mentioned, ethical consumption and ethical purchase decisions are complex systems. Haanpää (2007) defines in her dissertation that green consumption consists of three kinds of constituent element: contextual factors (such as economic, cultural and social resources, normative factors), individual factors (such as economics and socio-demographic factors, situational factors, routines and habits, and choice) and personality factors (such as values, beliefs, worldviews, attitudes, needs and intentions). Connolly (2008) moreover argues that theories of reflexive modernization provide an approach to understanding how sustainable consumption is tied into broader social and cultural change, and through this lens the researcher has a better possibility to analyse the role of green consumption in consumers' lives and its relevance to self-identity.

Eco-Fashion

Eco-fashion can be defined as clothing that is designed for long lifetime use; it is produced in an ethical production system, perhaps even locally; it causes little or no environmental impact and it makes use of eco-labelled or recycled materials (see, e.g., Joergens, 2006; Fletcher, 2008). Sustainable issues in clothing production are very complex because the supply chain in the clothing industry is fragmented, complicated and global. The manufacturing processes are less transparent than in food production, for example. Hence sustainability and ethicality in eco-clothing are evaluated only through a limited and very narrow lens, for example the use of an environmentally friendly material or production method (Fletcher, 2008; Beard, 2008).

Consumers need to be viewed as responsible actors in fashion. Purchasing at the beginning of the 21st century can be seen as a reaction against the late 1990s trends of mass consumption and must-have goods (such as brand bags). The public discussion about the use of child labour and 'sweatshops' in clothing manufacturing has also

raised the question of ethics in the clothing business. At present there is a deep contradiction between the need to fulfil consumer needs quickly or in a more sustainable way in the clothing industry (Beard, 2008; Solomon and Rabolt, 2004).

Much of the research focus on ethical fashion and sustainable clothes has centred on the subject of ethical manufacturing or consumer interest in ethical clothing (see, e.g., Legoeul, 2006). Nonetheless, ethical markets have expanded only very slowly in the clothing field and markets are still full of low-cost, low-quality clothes made in Asian countries in unethical processes. Why does this increasing ethical consumer interest not actualize in purchasing behaviour? There does indeed exist an attitude-behaviour gap in consumers' ethical interest and purchasing behaviour in the clothing field (see, e.g., Salomon and Rabolt, 2004).

Joergens (2006) argues that the consumer does not actually have a real opportunity to choose ethical clothing, because almost all garments are produced in cheap Asian countries, prices are not comparable in ethical clothing, and the design and appearance of eco-clothing are unfashionable and unattractive or do not suit the consumer's wardrobe needs or his/her personal style. Beard (2008) argues that it is not enough that the clothes are only produced ethically: they also have to be fashionable and suit the consumer's aesthetic needs. Otherwise, eco-clothes remain a niche market since they do not reflect the broad scope of consumers' lifestyles. Environmental aspects have to be combined with good design and fashion to produce more desirable eco-clothing.

Solomon and Rabolt (2004) argue that, in the clothing industry, fashion and trends lead consumer choices. When purchasing clothes consumers do not think about sustainability. Price and style are more dominant factors when they buy fashionable items. In fashion, the desire to renew one's appearance according to changing fashions and identities is in contradiction with sustainable consumption.

McCracken (1988) states that clothing belongs to a category of 'high involvement' goods the consumers purchase in order to take possession of a small part of the style of life to which they aspire. Consumption behaviour is linked to the need to participate, and products represent a bridge towards the desired lifestyle. As soon as the consumer possesses this desired object, however, he/she will transfer anticipation to another object: one individual product cannot fulfil the consumer need to achieve a certain lifestyle. In order to deal with the dissonance between the 'real' and the 'ideal', individuals use a fundamental model of displacement of meaning. Consumer goods can be seen as bridges or access to something meaningful. Nonetheless, access to the 'ideal' with the help of one garment is very limited, and the consumer remains emotionally unsatisfied.

As a result, markets are full of low-cost clothing which tempts the consumer into unsustainable behaviour despite the consumer's inner ethical values, as can be seen in the following quote from the author's inquiry.

We should return in our consuming behaviour back to the time, to the stage where we bought a little, but expensive and good. Now cheap products hinder us from realizing this ideal.

It is most difficult to be opposed to an effective production and marketing system that constantly produces new, easily fulfilled needs and temptations with a reasonable price.

Despite the amount of research attention given to eco-fashion in recent years, the buyer side of the exchange process remains under-researched: hence we need better understanding of different consumer groups' attitudes, values and needs in order to design and produce more attractive ethical fashion directed to different consumers' needs and aesthetic expectations. Clothing and fashion consumption converge strongly with construction of self and one's own individuality, in order to express deeply one's own personality, such as ethical values and aesthetic preference. Through our individual appearance we all seek the acceptance of others, as, e.g., Kaiser (1990) has highlighted. This issue is discussed further in the following section.

Construction of Self Through Clothing and Fashion

According to Kaiser (1990), fashion is a symbolic production. As a concept it differs from clothing, which is material production and something that fulfils our physical needs for protection and functionality. Fashion merges us with our emotional needs; it expresses our inner individual personality by external marks and symbols, brands and status items. Fashion is also a dynamic social process that creates cultural meanings and interaction.

According to Max-Neef (1992), psychological human needs include affection, understanding, participation, creation, recreation, identity and freedom. Fashion enables *inter alia* identity building, participation in social groups and class, and individuality and differentiation from others. Clothing and fashion also stand for creativity and beauty. According to Raunio (1995), clothing has a strong impact on emotions, and apparel can thus give stimulation, energy or feel-good messages to the wearer. Kaiser (1990) argues that clothes can be seen as a fundamental part of our communication in social interaction.

Biological, aesthetic and social levels as well as cultural standards of clothing interact while the consumer constructs his/her identity through clothing choices, and he/she expresses a self-construction process through appearance, *inter alia* with clothing. According to Roach and Eicher (1973), climate and the concept of beauty influence the dress people wear in all societies. Consumers select apparel that approximates the aesthetic ideal of their own society. Cultural standards are linked to the consumer desire for social acceptance. Expressions such as 'appropriate', 'proper' and 'in good taste' express approval of the apparel. Personal characteristics and preferences, that is to say, one's own individuality, also strongly affect consumer clothing choices. Tischler (2004) argues that consumers are strongly connected to social mores, which have a moral connotation and are based on the central values of the culture. Acceptance of mores is considered mandatory. Rules on dress necessitate appropriate professional appearance such as a jacket and tie for a man. The following extract from the author's inquiry further illustrates the meaning of clothes and proper social code. When asked whether future eco-fashion could look different from today, one male respondent answered the following:

I have tested it: in my workplace I make progress only when I am dressed in the code of my profession – that means wearing a tie.

Uniqueness, individuality, constant change and materialistic values are at the centre of our society, and they deeply affect the consumer's concept of self and his/her own identity formation. Uotila (1995) argues that clothes are not only objects: they are also acts. Hence we have to reflect on garments in social interaction processes, and the need to gain approval from others in a social context is essential in individual clothing choices. The ongoing construction process of self through external feedback and through one's own self-reflection therefore necessitates a constant building and rebuilding of one's own identity. Fashion as a creation process can also be seen as an act, a 'fashion act', where the consumer modifies fashion styles and rules to create a deeper individuality in the object: hence the garment better expresses his/her own identity, values, emotions, who the consumer is or wants to be.

According to Kaiser (1990), while making clothing purchase decisions, the consumer undergoes a silent dialogue between the 'I' and the 'me'. The 'I' discovers, feels and interprets the garment as it occurs, subjectively. 'Me' evaluates the style option as the implications for the self and thinks about how others may respond to the new look. 'I' is the creative side, 'me' is evaluating and judging, and together they comprise the self.

Joergens (2006) argues that, in ethical purchasing, it is easier to purchase for example organic food than ethical fashion. Food directly affects one's own health, and hence the choice reflects a benefit to the consumer self, whereas when purchasing clothes an unethical choice does not affect the consumer's own health so directly. Consumers show more ethical commitment when the purchase has a direct positive influence on their own health and wellbeing. The ethical purchasing decision in the eco-clothing field is therefore complicated, and other actors than an ethical value-base, such as beauty, fashion, trends, emotions, desires and social acceptance, significantly affect purchases in the fashion field.

Ongoing Change Process in Postmodern Society and Identity

According to Bauman (1996), the postmodern era is seen as a period of individualism, changing values, freedom of consumer choices, changing lifestyles and new social movements. Society is constantly going through a change process, and this change is also transferred into the cultural meanings of artefacts. McCracken (1988) argues that designers and producers therefore gather this meaning change process up and achieve its transfer to consumer goods. Bauman (1996) describes the present constantly changing society as a 'liquid society', which has implicit

constant fluidity and uncertainty as well as effects on a consumer's constant self-critique. Hence the consumer has an ongoing need to renew his/her appearance and clothing according to a mobile self. This leads to consumer insecurity while he/she has to evaluate the purchase decision on the basis of social acceptance, between the externalities of fashion apparel and ethical values of consumption.

Therefore, clothing and especially fashion are in constant change; change is unavoidable. This transition can also be seen in identity construction with external symbols and in the aesthetic concept of clothing. The consumer has to consciously or unconsciously check what is culturally valid and how he/she can maintain an appealing self-type within the limits of what is culturally acceptable (Roach and Eicher, 1973).

A structural model of self is derived from the cognitive perspective and suggests that self-image involves structured thought processes that are likely to be relatively stable until they no longer function adequately or apply to one's life. When these structured thought processes change, then the change occurs at a cognitive or mental level. Some change in clothing style may also result. Comments such as the following may be typical responses about the self that fit a structural model: my dress is me. It (clothing) fits my character (Sontag and Schalter, 1982, cited by Kaiser, 1990, p. 148).

The concept of the self is thereby a process. Clothes must express one's own self: the consumer wants to feel 'this garment expresses my inner mood and identity, me'. Clothes are closest to our body and they are therefore very intimate; at the same time it seems that they are also closest to our inner self and values, which we can express or hide with clothes.

These statements of who we are or are not (or no longer are), are likely to coexist with ambiguous identity spaces that are 'under construction' (Kaiser, 1995, p. 43).

Kaiser (1995) also argues that this identity construction process can include environmental sensitivity. Producers and consumers are seeking new ways to link materials and processes to environmental awareness, and this process is still emerging. While weighing up ethical clothing purchase decisions the consumer is all the time balancing between inner values: 'me' works as a guide to environmental concerns and the 'I' addresses needs for vanity, beauty and newness.

Slater (1997) highlights that in the postmodern era relations between consumption, communication and meaning have changed, and this creates new flexibility in status and identity. The structure of status and structure of meaning thus become unstable, flexible and negotiable. He also highlights that

[g]oods can always signify social identity, but in the fluid processes of a post-traditional society, identity seems to be more a function of consumption than the other, traditional, way round (p. 30).

Giddens (1991) writes about the increasing process of individualization. Throughout our social life circumstances change, and thus the concept of a constantly rebuilding reflexive self, as such the narrative of self-identity, has to be rebuilt.

The mobile self in a liquid society therefore needs an ongoing construction of self, and this change process of self and identity is full of desires, temptations and consumables. Therefore, the change in clothing, styles and fashion is unavoidable, and manufacturers and effective marketing systems maintain this change process in contemporary society.

Clothing, Identity and Ideology: the Survey

In this section we shall present the results of a small consumer survey. The survey was carried out as an online survey in spring 2009 in Finland. A total of 246 respondents participated in the survey. Although the sample can be judged as small, the aim was to produce a relevant range of contexts that would enable us to study consumers' interest in eco-clothing, their ethical purchase decisions, and values, needs and expectations in the eco-fashion

field. The survey is thus not extensive regarding Finnish consumers, but it nevertheless offers some guidelines on consumer interest and ethical commitment in the clothing field.

The majority of the respondents were students, 40.4%, and the second largest group consisted of civil servants, 29%. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 65 while the majority of respondents were under 35 years old (80%). Only 8.2% of respondents were male: hence the result is dominated by a female standpoint. Perhaps this data gathering limits the meaning of the results. However, it is important to be aware that this study only provides a very general picture of consumers' eco-clothing interest.

Lea-Greenwood (1999) argues that it is difficult to study consumer attitudes regarding ethicality, as consumers tend to give more positive answers than their actual consumption and purchasing behaviour reveals. Consumers give socially desirable or 'correct' answers rather than truthful ones. Even then, the results in this study indicate a rational approach to the respondent's own attitude and behaviour in consumption. When asked about ethicality, product safety and the environmental impact aspects of textiles and clothing while purchasing, 49.2% reported thinking about these aspects often and 16.7% always. When asked about their real textile and clothing purchasing decisions and how often consumers have actualized ethical thinking in clothing purchasing decisions at some level, 56.1% of these respondents have done so (always 8.9%, often 47.2%).

A division was made regarding respondents' personal ethical commitment in eco-clothing purchasing decisions, and the following results were analysed according to this commitment (see Table 1). Thus we bring into the analysis one component of identity, environmental commitment, especially in the clothing field, and explore other answers through this lens. As illustrated earlier in this paper, individuality and personality factors are one lens, one possibility, through which to study green consumption (Haanpää, 2007). In the next section these aspects are explored empirically.

Thøgersen (1999) states that there is a general assumption that cost monopolizes the interest and attention of consumers, and this assumption is not always correct. In this study, on average 84.1% of respondents said that price affects their clothing purchase decisions, but all consumers value strongly the following aspects in clothing: fit, quality, colour, compatibility with existing clothes and a real need for new clothes.

There is a wide divergence of opinions on issues such as the need to renew one's appearance with clothing and the importance of eco-materials in clothing purchasing decisions (see Table 2). Hence we can argue that, when consumers' ethical commitment is high, the more weight they put on issues such as eco-materials and the less important is the need to renew their appearance. If we accept the idea that 'ethical hardliners' know themselves better, they know their taste, values and who they are, hence they have made an ethical commitment, and this value base guides their clothing decisions more than that of average consumers. The same ethical base for purchasing decisions can be seen in the importance of domestic design and production, as can be seen in 'made in Finland' answers. A total of 90.9% of 'ethical hardliners' value the 'made in Finland' aspect in clothing, while only 33.4% of the 'not interested' group value this as an important aspect in clothing purchasing decisions.

This ethical commitment argument also garners support from the question of what clothes mean to you. Ethical values can be seen in these results, where the meaning of one's own ideology can be strongly seen in the answers of 'ethical hardliners' (see Table 3). One's own identity and how it is expressed through clothing is very important

Attitude, ethical interest, purchasing behaviour	never [%]	seldom [%]	can't say [%]	often [%]	always [%]
ethical interest in general	4.1	3.7	1.2	28.3	62.7
everyday ethical consuming behaviour	2.4	14.7	4.9	57.1	20.8
ethical interest in textiles and clothing	1.6	24.4	8.1	49.2	16.7
real ethical purchasing decision in textiles and clothing	2.4	28.9	12.6	47.2	8.9
division made according to real ethical purchasing decision in textiles and clothing	not interested	do what I can		conscientious consumer	ethical hardliner

Table 1. Consumers' interest in ethical consumption

	Not interested	Do what I can	Conscientious consumer	Ethical hardliner
What affects your clothing purchasing decision the most?	fit real need quality colour durability compatibility with existing clothes [100%]	fit [100%] price [98.6%] colour [92.9%] suitability for water washing [91.5%] real need compatibility with existing clothes [88.7%] quality [87.3%] easy care multi-functionality [81.7%] durability [73.3%] need to renew appearance [69%] design [67.6%] reparability [49.3%] made in Finland [31%] brand [23.9%] fashion following [21.2%] advertisements [16.9%]	fit [98.3%] real need [96.6%] quality [94.8%] colour [91.3%] suitability for water washing [89.7%] durability [89.6%] compatibility with existing clothes [88.8%] multi-functionality [88%] design [79.2%] price [78.4%] easy care [77.6%] reparability [74.1%] eco-materials [68.1%] made in Finland [64.3%] need to renew appearance [62.9%] production in neighbouring area [43.5%] brand [29.3%] designer [26.8%] expendable from use [25.9%] fashion following [17.2%] media [12.9%] advertisements [7.8%]	quality [100%] durability colour fit real need eco-materials [95.5%] made in Finland [90.9%] suitability for water washing compatibility with existing clothes [86.4%] design [81%] multi-functionality [77.3%] production in neighbouring area [77.2%] reparability [68.2%] easy care [63.6%] price [59.1%] need to renew appearance [36.4%] brand designer expendable from use [31.8%] fashion following [13.6%] media [9.5%] advertisements [9.1%]

Table 2. What affects the clothing purchasing decision the most

	Not interested	Do what I can	Conscientious consumer	Ethical hardliner
What clothes mean to you	shelter protection [100%]	practicality [95.7%]	own identity [94.7%]	practicality [95.5%]
	own identity [83.4%]	beauty [95.6%]	practicality [92.3%]	own ideology [90.9%]
	practicality	shelter [91.3%]	beauty [90.5%]	own identity [86.3%]
	beauty			
	creativity [83.3%]			
	social status	own identity [88.4%]	shelter [89.6%]	beauty [77.3%]
	vanity [50%]			creativity [77.3%]
	approval	creativity [72.5%]	creativity [81%]	shelter [77.2%]
	direction in my life (construction of self)			
	own ideology [33.4%]			
	fashion [33.3%]	protection approval [59.4%]	own ideology [66.4%]	direction in my life (construction of self) [59.1%]
	control	direction in my life (construction of self) [47.8%]	direction in my life (construction of self) [58.2%]	protection [45.5%]
	occupational appearance [16.7%]	fashion [40.5%]	protection [51.3%]	approval [18.2%]
		vanity [31.8%]	approval [44.8%]	social status [18.1%]
		own ideology [29%]	fashion [34.5%]	fashion [18.1%]
	occupational appearance [27.5%]	vanity [28.5%]	vanity [13.6%]	
	social status [23.2%]	occupational appearance [20.7%]	control [13.6%]	
	control [17.6%]	control [15.5%]	occupational appearance [9.1%]	
Something else?		social status [14.7%]		
	– consolidating own role	– self-expression	– self-expression	
	– affecting others	– story	– joy, fun	
	– good feeling, pick-me-up	– good feeling		
	– self-expression	– memory		
	– comfort			
	– dissimilarity			

Table 3. Meaning of clothing

for all consumers; however, 'ethical hardliners' want to show their own ideology in their appearance. Therefore, when asked whether clothes mean your own ideology, e.g. green values, the answers of 'ethical hardliners' show that one's own ideology is even more important than one's own identity for this consumer group. A strong personal ideology is thus a prioritized value in purchasing decisions. It is an even more important value in clothing than one's own identity or beauty and creativity aspects, that is, aesthetic values, if the consumer has a strong ethical value base. Brooker (1976) argues that consumers who commit themselves strongly to socially conscious consumer behaviour also appreciate high self-actualization (cited by Newholm and Shaw, 2007). A strong and stable ethical value base gives the consumer a stronger and, we argue, less mobile self-identity. Hence the 'ethical hardliner' knows who he/she is and what kinds of clothes express his/her inner values. He/she knows what suits him/her, according to Kaiser (1990): what cloth he/she is cut from.

According to Roach and Eicher (1973), when a consumer makes a conscious clothing selection and interprets fashion styles, he/she feels that he/she in this way has achieved individuality. This can also be seen in ethical consumption and clothing. In this enquiry some respondents wish future fashion to be made with good quality, meaning long-time use of clothes, but they also see the opportunity to use the material again to create unique clothes by redesigning the garment to produce their own unique look. The question 'should future eco-clothing be somehow unique and individual?' also earned support in this study. Consumers respect beauty and creativity as a meaning of clothing in all consumer groups, as can be seen in Table 3. Beauty and creative elements in clothing can be interpreted as fashion acts, as illustrated earlier in this paper, and also as acts where the consumer tries to reach a desired lifestyle or desired personality that fits to his/her inner self and values.

According to Schwartz (1992), hedonism is one strong human value: its motivational goal is pleasure and self-indulgence. These are also strong actors in clothing choices. As hypothesized from the earlier conceptual discussion, clothing expresses our inner mood to others, but clothing also reflects a good mood, inspiration and a concept of beauty back to the self. As some respondents mentioned in the enquiry, clothing means self-expression, a good feeling, joy and fun (see Table 3). Hence through clothing choices a person can consolidate his/her inner self, his/her own identity, also at an emotional level, not only in social interactions. Schwartz (1992) argues that stimulation and self-direction are important values in a person's acts. Doran (2009) has established in her study of Fairtrade consumption that loyal ethical consumers rank self-direction higher than other consumer groups. In this study 33.4% of 'not interested' consumers value self-direction as a meaning in clothing while 59.1% of the 'ethical hardliners' value this aspect. Moreover, as can be interpreted from Table 3, for 'ethical hardliners', beauty and creation are as important aspects in the meaning of clothing as for all the other consumers. The social and emotional levels of the meaning of clothing, as illustrated earlier, can all be found in these answers. Nonetheless, there is not a large divergence in these answers regarding consumer ethical commitment.

Do consumers want to declare eco-aesthetics and eco-values with their clothes? When asked whether eco-clothing should be the same in appearance and aesthetics as all other clothes (cannot be distinguished from other clothes in style, design, material, colour etc.), 70% of all respondents in general agreed with this statement. Table 4 presents the results to the question 'Can eco-clothes state eco-values in appearance?'. According to consumers' ethical commitment, 'ethical hardliners' are more willing to obviously show their inner ethical values through apparel. A total of 45.5% of respondents from the group 'ethical hardliners' want clothes to express obvious eco-values or eco-aesthetics. An ethical commitment is also visible in the results of this question: 'Are you ready to buy a garment made from recycled material, even if the quality is not as good as in products made from virgin material?'. A total of 81.9% of 'ethical hardliners' were willing to purchase recycled products, whereas only 16.7% of 'not interested' respondents were ready to do so.

Can clothes state eco-values in appearance?	Not interested [% agree]	Do what I can [% agree]	Conscientious consumer [% agree]	Ethical hardliner [% agree]
	16.7	27.7	30.7	45.5

Table 4. Can clothing state eco-values in appearance (eco-aesthetics)?

How much more would you be ready to pay for eco-clothes?	Respondents [%]
nothing	3.7
1–4% more	12.6
5–9% more	19.9
10–14% more	29.7
15–19% more	14.2
20–24% more	10.6
more than 25%	9.3

Table 5. Consumers' readiness to pay more for eco-clothing

Clearly, as was illustrated earlier, clothing has to interconnect strongly to a person's own self-image and identity, and eco-clothing is no exception. Yet the majority of current ethical clothing has been mainly of a certain style of design. Hemp and other obviously recognizably eco-materials create a certain style of eco-aesthetics in clothing that does not appeal to the majority of consumers. Redesign has also been a strong trend in recent years, and in the redesign trend the origin of the recycled clothing material has been obvious. If the consumer has chosen redesigned clothing made in this style, he/she wants to show environmental values with his/her clothing. At the very least it is not a negative aspect to show that your clothes are made from recycled materials: it can even be top fashion.

As van Nes and Cramer (2005) have argued in their study of influencing product lifespans, what consumers

... basically want is a well-functioning and up-to-date product that meets their altering needs. The dynamic nature of this desire requires a similar approach: the development of dynamic and flexible products (p. 297).

In this study consumers were asked to give their wishes regarding future eco-fashion, and the strongest support went to the statement that clothes should be long-lasting, durable and made with high quality. Style, colour, fit and quality are more dominant factors than ethicality when purchasing clothes in general. The eco-aspect can only add value to the product when the product is otherwise attractive, and thus the eco-aspects give the final reason to buy the garment. The ethical and eco-issues seem to be drivers only to ethical committed consumers, the 'ethical hardliners', who are still only a niche in clothing markets, as mentioned. Berchicci and Bodewes (2005) have highlighted that successful green products must not only meet environmental demands, but they also must fulfil market requirements. They further suggest that environmental concerns should be translated into product design; this means understanding consumer preferences, which may even result in radical sustainable design innovations.

Carrigan and Attalla (2001) argue that ethical purchasing will take place only if there are no costs to the consumer in terms of higher price, loss of quality or discomfort in shopping. In this survey the same tendency can be seen: all consumers want high quality and durable clothes. Consumers also wish to buy eco-clothes in hypermarkets (37.9%) or special shops (24.7%). Other options such as the internet, fairs or flea markets did not attract strong interest. There was a general wish that eco-clothes would not cost any extra; nonetheless, nearly all consumers were ready to pay more for eco-clothes (see Table 5).

Discussion and Conclusions

According to Raymond (2003), customers will be more active and influential in markets in the future. However, markets in general are going to be fragmented and not following any logical patterns. In the future, there will not be an average customer who follows the trends but instead several small groups of customers who behave irrationally, emotionally and chaotically. Radical consumer groups might lead the markets in more complex developments also in the eco-clothing field.

Future consumers can also be selectively ethical in clothing markets. Hence it is most important for manufacturers to identify which ethical factors are important to each customer group. Carrigan and Attalla (2001) have argued that

... perhaps in time new generations of consumers will not only think more ethically, but also act more ethically, and while product value, price and quality will always be key consumer issues, future consumers may also consider good ethics to be equally crucial (p. 577).

According to the results of this survey, we have come to the conclusion that an ethical commitment and ethical values are a strong driver towards purchasing eco-clothes, eco-materials, recycled clothing and ethically made garments. A strong personal ideology is a prioritized value in purchasing decisions for 'ethical hardliners', even more important in clothing than one's own identity or aesthetic values. The 'ethical hardliners' however represent only a niche market. Nonetheless, for all consumers quality and aesthetics are highly important when purchasing clothes and fashion, even eco-clothes. In fashion the main driver for change is the consumers' desires, not guilt.

This paper concludes that manufacturers, designers and retailers do not truly know what consumers want and expect from eco-fashion, and hence the present trends in eco-fashion and ethical clothing appeal only to a limited number of consumers and their aesthetics. This might therefore be one reason for the existing attitude-behaviour gap in the eco-fashion field. In addition, the ever-increasing amount of cheap and fashionable clothing manufacturing in Asian countries tempts consumers into unsustainable consuming behaviour in the clothing field despite their ethical interest and inner values. As one of the respondents commented, the availability of cheap clothes confuses consumers' rational behaviour, preventing them from buying more expensive clothes and investing in better quality and sustainability.

In this survey 94.6% of respondents were ready to buy better quality, durable, repairable, more expensive clothes in the future and use them for longer to decrease their own environmental impact. Hence the fashion industry should not only pursue low costs in the manufacturing process and a cheap end price of the product. The production side needs to treat the consumer with higher respect in the future and see him/her as one of the stakeholders. Thus consumers should engage in the design process to accomplish eco-fashion that better reflects consumers' different needs and desires. On the other hand, designers have to find new ways to ensure that consumer commitment, wishes, needs, values, desires, aesthetic concept and emotions become a key starting point for eco-clothing design. At the end of such a design process it is thus possible to deepen consumers' product attachment and at the same time add value to the product through sustainability. This will create better products with longer product lifetimes that better fulfil customers' needs at functional, emotional and identity construction levels, thereby slowing the current rapid cycles of fashion.

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