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# Guest editorial: Ethical consumption – a global agenda

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The discussion on “ethical consumption” has received significant research attention in the past few decades as individuals become more aware about the impact of their consumption choices on the environment. For instance, consumers tend to purchase products made from sustainable materials and/or produced using renewable energy resources to reduce their carbon footprint. Many consumers are also prioritizing purchasing products that are made by companies that have a positive record pertaining to social and environmental responsibility. *Ethical consumption* can be defined as the behaviour performed by individuals or organizations who are conscious of environmental and societal issues (Bray *et al.*, 2011; Newholm and Shaw, 2007). It also refers to purchase decisions made based on moral and ethical considerations rather than solely on price or convenience (Quoquab *et al.*, 2020). This can include considerations such as the environmental impact of a product, the treatment of workers involved in its production and the socio-political implications of supporting a particular brand or industry (Mohammad *et al.*, 2021).

The global crisis, environmental hazards, social problems and economic downturn are on the rise. In response to these problems, many have turned to ethical consumerism to address global issues by changing their consumption patterns. Ethical considerations such as environmental sustainability, social responsibility and fair labor practices influence consumers’ daily purchasing choices, decision-making processes and post-consumption behaviour (Quoquab and Sukari, 2017). This trend is driven by consumers’ desire to make a positive impact on society and the environment through their purchasing decisions (Toussaint *et al.*, 2021). Not only consumers but organizations also have been taking an active part in societal issues for ethical concerns. For example, many companies have adopted sustainable business practices, such as reducing their carbon footprint, using renewable energy resources and minimizing waste (Khan *et al.*, 2019). They are also implementing fair labour practices, ensuring safe working conditions and supporting social causes (Epstein and Buhovac, 2014).

There have been many issues that made global headlines pertaining to lack of fair-trade practices (Low and Davenport, 2007), dangerous working condition and practices (Carrington *et al.*, 2016), use of child labour in developing countries (Winstanley *et al.*, 2002), global warming and climate change (Chua *et al.*, 2020), depletion of natural resources (Quoquab *et al.*, 2022), high production of toxic and process foods (Quoquab *et al.*, 2020), plastic waste in the sea and landfill (Saleh Omar *et al.*, 2019) and the like. Moreover, due to war, poverty, pandemic and overpopulation, many people became jobless, homeless and financially unsecured. As a consequence, they cannot afford to feed themselves and their families properly, whereas some others lead a care-free luxurious life and waste a significant amount of resources. To address such ethical issues, the notion of “ethical consumption” has emerged, which is based on the idea that consumers have a responsibility to consider the social, environmental and economic impact of their purchasing decisions. This agenda is directly linked with the 12th sustainable development goal which is “Responsible Consumption and Production”.

Now-a-days, consumers are more aware about their decision-making process and the choices that they make in regard to purchase behaviour (Quoquab and Mohammad, 2019).



If not all, many individuals consider ethical aspects like fair-trade, organic and green food, no-single use plastic in their purchase. For the same reason, ethics and morals are now integrated in organizations' strategies through the concept of corporate social responsibility, which associates social issues and environmental concerns to the economical goal of organizations. In this instance, the concepts like corporate social responsibility (Öberseder *et al.*, 2011), waste management (Rasool *et al.*, 2021), frugality (Sadom *et al.*, 2020, 2021), zero-plastic bag campaign (Quoquab and Mohammad, 2020a, 2020b; Saleh Omar *et al.*, 2019), mindful consumption (Mohammad *et al.*, 2021), sustainable consumption (Quoquab *et al.*, 2019) organizational citizenship behaviour for environment (Paille and Boiral, 2013), green HR practices (Paille *et al.*, 2013), awareness of food waste (Rasool *et al.*, 2021) and food waste reduction (Thi *et al.*, 2015) emerged. Nevertheless, cross-cultural studies that identify, comprehend and compare the differences in consumers' beliefs with respect to the process of forming ethical behaviour in different societies is lacking (William, 2019). Thus, this special issue attempts to fill these gaps in the existing literature by exploring, highlighting, explaining and debating these issues in different cultures and societies.

William (2019) argued that consumers' judgement of ethical behaviour is dynamic and changes over time and across cultures. Therefore, what can create a sustainable change in the behavioural pattern of the individuals and/or organizations, and what can drive the ethical consumption mindset or facilitate the process, need to be explored from different cultural perspectives. This is in line with the ethical behaviour model (Weber and Gillespie, 1998), which indicates that individuals' values, beliefs, moral development and norms vary across cultures and significantly affect individuals' attitudes and behaviour. In addition, Farh *et al.* (1997) and Mohammad *et al.* (2016) argued that differences in terms of individuals' cultural values can affect their beliefs and behaviour. Similarly, Liu and Segev (2017) argued that consumers' pro-environmental behaviours vary across cultures. For example, culture forms our relationship with the environment, the extent of environmental concerns and pro-environmental attitudes, and our actions/reactions to weather changes (Hofstede, 1980; Nash *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, specific culture might encourage or discourage ethical/sustainable consumption behaviour (Chwialkowska *et al.*, 2020). For example, in some cultures, frugality and simplicity are highly valued, and people may prioritize buying durable and long-lasting products rather than constantly replacing them with new ones. In other cultures, communal and cooperative values may be emphasized, leading people to prioritize purchasing products that are produced sustainably and by workers who are treated fairly. Cultural values can also influence the types of products that people consider to be ethical. For example, in some cultures, vegetarianism may be viewed as a more ethical and environmentally friendly dietary choice, while in other cultures, the consumption of meat may be viewed as an essential part of a healthy diet. Overall, cultural perspectives play a significant role in shaping ethical consumption, and understanding these perspectives can help individuals and organizations make more informed and culturally sensitive decisions about their purchasing choices.

Although there is an ongoing debate on ethical consumption (Kushwah *et al.*, 2019), understanding the problems that are connected to individuals' diverse lifestyle and the ways that are rooted in respect to the environment remains in dearth. Therefore, further investigation on understanding the reasons, causes and outcomes of ethical consumption in different context and different cultural setting is required (Hoelscher and Chatzidakis, 2020; William, 2019). Ethical consumption is an important issue that has implications for individuals, communities and the environment. By investigating the causes and outcomes of ethical consumption in different contexts and cultural settings, researchers can develop a

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better understanding of this complex issue and identify strategies for promoting more sustainable and ethical forms of consumption.

### **Specific topics addressed in the special issue**

This special issue highlights different aspects of ethical consumption from a cross-cultural perspective. It serves as a landmark by highlighting different aspects of ethical consumption. It certainly will broaden and enhance the understanding of the latest trends about the phenomenon.

The paper by Ngoc Bao Nguyen, Mai Thi Tuyet Nguyen and Minh Binh Nguyen explored how inconspicuous luxury consumption is being practiced in an Asian culture like Vietnam. Moreover, the ethical motivations that drive Vietnamese consumers to engage in consuming inconspicuous luxury fashion products are also investigated. In doing so, they conducted two rounds of in-depth interviews with 42 Vietnamese consumers using the snowball sampling technique. The output of this paper indicates that inconspicuous luxury consumption is on the rise in Vietnam. In addition, the findings of this study suggest that ethical considerations play a crucial role in motivating Vietnamese consumers to engage in inconspicuous luxury consumption. Together with typical motivations such as differentiation seeking, aesthetics seeking and status seeking, consumers buy inconspicuous luxury products to adhere to internalized norms and moral principles.

Ayşen Coşkun, Michael Polonsky and Andrea Vocino, in their study, aim to investigate the antecedents of consumers' pro-environmental purchase intentions based on a range of motivating (i.e. attitudes, *locus* of control) and inhibiting factors (i.e. apathy and myopia) for a low-involvement product. To accomplish this objective, an online survey method was used to collect data from 679 Turkish consumers and structural equation modelling was used to test the hypothetical model. Their research contributes to the pertinent literature by examining the role of inhibiting factors behind purchasing low-involvement goods. Practically, this study is expected to help marketers and policymakers to understand consumer psychological mechanisms when encouraging and promoting pro-environmental behaviour in the context of low-involvement purchases.

Li Ding and Caifen Jiang studied the effects of Generation Z customers' perceived collective efficacy and self-efficacy towards food waste reduction on their food waste reduction intentions in restaurants. Moreover, the mediating role of customers' self-efficacy in conveying their perceived collective efficacy to the food waste reduction intentions is also investigated. In addition, to explore the moderating roles of Generation Z restaurant customers' interdependent self-construal and independent self-construal. The snowball sampling approach was used to collect the data from 214 participants from Generation Z restaurant customers and partial least squares structural equation modelling was used to examine the hypotheses. This study found that Generation Z restaurant customers' perceived collective efficacy and self-efficacy towards food waste reduction positively related to their food waste reduction intentions. This study provides valuable practical implications for restaurant practitioners to understand Generation Z customers' ethical consumption patterns. It is suggested that, they should allocate resources to food waste management programmes to increase market competitiveness and drive higher customer food waste reduction intention to improve sustainability.

In their study, Muhammad Rafiq, Omkar Dastane and Rizwan Mushtaq mapped the literature about waste management in the business and management domain. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis procedure was used to extract 609 publications from the Scopus database from 1985 to 2022. After that, bibliometric analysis was used to evaluate publication performance, identify key stakeholders,

investigate major clusters, recognise the evolution of themes and offer a research agenda for the future based on bibliometric reflection. The output of this study highlights the most prolific stakeholders, key clusters and evolving themes in the field. The motor themes, niche themes, basic themes and emerging themes of the field were identified, and future research agenda is proposed based on such identification. The findings of this research are expected to assist policymakers in identifying waste management/reduction priority regions and developing policy guidelines for a more sustainable waste practise.

In a nutshell, this special issue attempts to address the above-mentioned issues and can be used as a general reference for researchers, in courses on, sustainable development, sustainable practices, responsible consumption and production, cross-cultural studies and ethical marketing practices. The issue provides an excellent overview from different cultural aspects for anyone interested in ethical consumption practices and will serve as a valuable guide to human psychology and consumer behaviour.

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