

Exploring the Effects of Greenwashing Concern Between Intention and Behaviour in Sustainable Clothing Choice

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Abstract: The textile industry is expected to use 118 billion cubic meters of water for garment manufacturing worldwide by 2030, posing a serious environmental problem as it works to fulfil the increasing needs of humans while also making extensive use of scarce natural resources. As a result, humans must change how they buy clothes to make it more sustainable. Although humans' conduct when buying environmentally friendly apparel is generally understood, a thorough explanation of their purchase habits is lacking. We expanded the Theory of Reasoned Action by incorporating novel constructs derived from prior exploratory findings, such as greenwashing, and established constructs from prior literature, such as perceived environmental knowledge and environmental concerns, to address this gap and explore the factors influencing the purchase behaviour of sustainable clothing. The study shows that attitude toward eco-friendly apparel is the most important factor influencing buying intention. However, humans' worries about greenwashing have a detrimental impact on this connection. Our research indicates that the intention-behavior link is influenced by perceived environmental knowledge and environmental concerns.

Keywords: Behavioural Change; Human Intention-Behavior; Theory of Reasoned Action; Sustainable Clothing Choice; Environmentally Friendly Apparel; Greenwashing Concern; Contemporary Styles.

Received on: 27/07/2023, **Revised on:** 13/09/2023, **Accepted on:** 02/11/2023, **Published on:** 05/03/2024

Journal Homepage: <https://www.fmdbpub.com/user/journals/details/FTSHS>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69888/FTSHS.2024.000148>

Cite as: M. Abraham, and B. Aroman, "Exploring the Effects of Greenwashing Concern Between Intention and Behaviour in Sustainable Clothing Choice," *FMDB Transactions on Sustainable Humanities and Society.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1–9, 2024.

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1. Introduction

Over recent decades, the constant rise in consumption levels has prompted businesses to embrace technological advancements, enabling mass production while treating resources as seemingly inexhaustible. Traditional business models have primarily focused on maximizing profits by meeting growing demands, often overlooking the environmental implications of their actions. This is more evident in the clothing industry, where manufacturing has shifted to lower-cost countries with working conditions, resulting in a decline in the price and quality of garments [1]. This shift has also led to a shortened life cycle of clothing, responding to rapidly changing human preferences and contemporary styles.

The 'throwaway lifestyle' of today is driving a surge in demand for quick fashion, which in turn is increasing market supply and contributing to excessive obsolescence. As a result of this tendency, clothing loses its inherent worth, which encourages impulsive buying and the wasteful use of scarce resources [2]. The textile business significantly negatively influences the environment, affecting soil, groundwater, and air. By 2030, estimates of the worldwide environmental stressors include 148 million tonnes of textile waste, 118 billion cubic meters of water use, and about 2791 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions [6].

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The literature has explored the factors that promote and hinder sustainable clothing consumption as knowledge of the clothing industry's resource intensity and detrimental environmental effects develops [7]. However, the lack of a common definition for sustainable clothing has resulted in the interchangeable use of terms like eco-conscious, eco-friendly, ethical, green, and organic. Despite these variations, pro-environmental actions are emphasized at every stage of a garment's life cycle, from pre-purchase to post-purchase, covering acquisition, storage, usage, care, maintenance, and disposal. This consensus is found in the literature on conceptualizing sustainable clothing consumption behaviour [10].

Choosing clothing made of environmentally preferable, recycled, upcycled, or biodegradable fibers and produced under fair working conditions is a sustainable behaviour during the pre-purchase and purchase stages, according to research on minimizing the negative environmental impact at each stage Jacobs et al. [14]. Customers might share economies or purchase clothing from thrift stores as an alternative. Even though much research has been done on post-purchase environmental concerns and has suggested ways to extend clothing life through donation, recycling, and reuse, there is still a clear intention-behavior gap among humans when making sustainable clothing purchases [17].

When adopting sustainable habits, most humans still show a discrepancy between intention and conduct, even though several models for sustainable clothing consumption have been suggested [19]. According to preliminary research, many obstacles prevent people from making green purchases, such as a lack of awareness, a disregard for the environment, financial worries, a sensitivity to appearance and fashion trends, and high search prices [20]. However, the current body of research lacks a comprehensive framework incorporating these results to thoroughly analyze purchasing intentions for sustainable clothing and actual behaviour [21].

We expand our investigation by combining novel constructs from exploratory data with well-known constructs from literature, building upon the Theory of Reasoned Action [22]. This method adds to the body of knowledge by comprehensively analyzing known and unknown factors impacting humans' choices for sustainable apparel consumption [23]. Furthermore, our research illuminates the hitherto unrecognized dual discrepancy between intention and conduct when making purchases of sustainable apparel.

2. Discrepancy between intention and behaviour

Although intention can be a helpful predictor of behaviour, there is frequently a large discrepancy between what people intend to do and what they do. In sustainable purchasing, where customers express environmentally favourable goals but often struggle to convert them into eco-friendly actions Mukendi et al., [5], this gap between intention and behaviour is especially evident. Identifying different behavioural intention types and attributes is a major factor affecting the consistency between intentions and behaviour. Diverse moderators have been added in prior studies to help explain the gap between behaviour and intention. This is because intentions might differ in strength, motivation, or dimension, affecting how well they predict behaviour [24].

A few examples of variables that differ between people and affect how predictive their intentions are the degree to which they have been stable over time, past behaviours, self-schemas, and expected regret. These variables also act as moderators in the relationship between intention and behaviour [26]. A different line of inquiry distinguishes different intents that appear at different points in the intention-behavior interaction. As a result, Carrington et al. [18], two groups may contribute to the disparity between expected and observed behavioural patterns: those who have intentions but cannot carry them out and those who have no intentions but act on them. In order to address the latter group, situational elements that can overcome cognitive barriers to adopting new behaviours must be investigated. This leads to an investigation of intention formation.

Conversely, the latter group requires a study of cognitive alterations separate from those affecting intention formations. Because of this, social psychologists frequently distinguish between the process of forming intentions and carrying them out [29]. This distinction implies four successive action phases in the link between behaviour and intention. Challenges to the effective fulfilment of intents frequently surface in the two reaction stages, coinciding with the distinction between intentions and those that do not [30]. To overcome these challenges, intentions connected to each preactional stage are essential: People discuss wishes or desires in the first pre-decisional stage, weighing the practicality and desirability of pursuing an objective. This stage occurs if the wish is extremely desirable and realistic in forming a goal intention [32].

An efficient plan is created at the post-decisional but still practical stage, detailing attempts to start pertinent tasks [33]. This plan often called an implementation intention, binds the person to a path of action that is subject to particular situational or environmental requirements [34]. When these requirements are satisfied, the expected behaviour is carried out. Situational elements or environmental conditions can greatly impact the intention-behaviour link during the post-decisional phase, and they may even make it more difficult for an intended behaviour to be successfully realized [35].

A preliminary study by Hassan et al. [16], utilizing focus groups and interviews, revealed several possible barriers to adopting sustainable clothing consumption in the context of sustainable clothing. Customers initially tend to think that sustainable clothing lacks design and trends and does not fit into their ideal lifestyle. Compared to typical clothes, the aesthetics of sustainable fashion are sometimes seen as unattractive, as it does not satisfy wardrobe or aesthetic preferences. It is acknowledged that one of the biggest obstacles to the widespread acceptance of sustainable fashion design is the stigma and misconceptions surrounding it [37].

Furthermore, buyers believe that eco-friendly apparel costs too much compared to traditional options. Individual decisions and behaviour are significantly influenced by economic factors, particularly because restricted technological breakthroughs in the mass manufacturing of sustainable fashion contribute to its higher costs [38]. Therefore, in the post-decisional phase, individual differences in motivational quality may have a detrimental effect on the intensity of an individual's desire to adopt sustainable clothes, even if that individual expresses an initial intention to do so.

3. Perceived Environmental Knowledge

Apart from the well-known concepts found in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), several contextual factors consistent with the traditional TRA and TPB approaches have been identified in the literature as influencing people's purchase intentions toward sustainable clothing. Behavioural research has generally consistently shown a positive association between knowledge and actual behaviour, according to Leclercq-Machado et al. [15]. When these results are applied to the sustainability context, perceived environmental awareness is a key antecedent of behavioural intention, particularly regarding the intention to purchase sustainable items.

Through perceived environmental knowledge, an individual understands details, ideas, and connections to the natural world and its main ecosystems. It represents a person's awareness of environmental concerns and their comprehension of how human activity affects the environment [39]. According to exploratory research, humans who are more knowledgeable about the environment may be more likely to purchase eco-friendly apparel. In particular, those aware of environmental problems and their effects are more likely to feel that sustainable development is necessary and that they must protect the environment. Furthermore, individuals with greater environmental knowledge are better equipped to assess the environmental impact of conventional products, leading to a heightened purchase intention [40].

Perceived environmental knowledge is the information, concepts, and relationships a person understands about the natural world and its primary ecosystems. It represents a person's understanding of environmental issues and how human activity impacts the environment. A preliminary study suggests that environmentally conscious humans could be more inclined to buy eco-friendly clothing. Those aware of environmental issues and their consequences, in particular, are more likely to believe that protecting the environment is their responsibility and that sustainable development is essential (Figure 1).

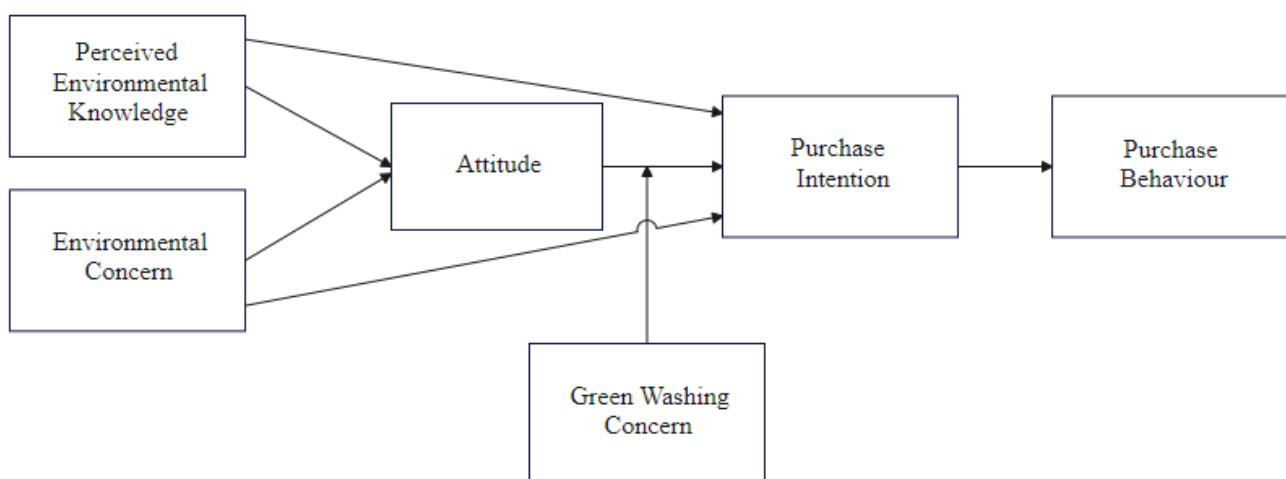


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

4. Environmental Concern

Environmental concern, also known as ecological effect, measures a person's anxiety level and emotional attachment to environmental problems, hazards, and environmental protection. It includes a person's participation in environmental conservation and a sense of duty. People previously considered environmental concern a one-dimensional term ranging from high to low. More sophisticated viewpoints recognise that environmental care includes self-interest, selfless concern for others, and concern for the environment.

Majeed et al. [4], Environmental worry has become a central topic in the green behavioural literature despite different conceptualizations. Empirical data consistently links environmental concern to sustainable product intention and actual purchasing behaviour. Furthermore, environmental concern explores a person's expressive evaluation of environmental problems. Previous studies have proposed that environmental concerns, in addition to environmental information, have a role in shaping an individual's attitude towards sustainable products, as an individual's attitude is composed of cognitive and emotional components that embody knowledge and beliefs.

5. Perceived Environmental Knowledge and relationship with attitude

The significance of environmental knowledge among textile product humans is on the rise, driven by the environmental pollution generated by the textile sector El Haffar et al. [11]. Humans now recognize that sustainable clothing can mitigate environmental harm through attitudes centred on reuse and reintegration. In this context, Jaiswal et al. [8] believe that possessing environmental knowledge is a prerequisite for developing attitudes and intentions to procure sustainable garments. It's crucial to note that environmental knowledge represents humans' awareness of environmental damage, influencing their attitudes, and is considered a cognitive factor in green product attitudes. For instance, individuals may hold positive attitudes towards environmental conservation, stating, "I believe fast fashion garments lack sustainable elements."

Conversely, a lack of environmental knowledge hinders individuals from expressing concern or conscious attitudes about environmental damage. Conversely, humans with environmental knowledge demonstrate heightened concerns for environmental protection and exhibit positive attitudes toward sustainable fashion. Substantial evidence indicates that environmental knowledge significantly shapes human attitudes regarding ecologically sustainable garments. Moreover, Sultana et al. [27] state that insufficient knowledge about places selling sustainable garments and a lack of information transmission about sustainable fashion hinder humans from adopting positive and conscious attitudes. Consequently, human attitudes and purchase intentions are positively influenced by environmental knowledge in the realm of fashion. Hence, enhancing humans' environmental knowledge concerning sustainable fashion is imperative.

6. Environmental Concern and relationship with attitude

Human attitudes towards items designed to protect the environment are positively influenced by environmental concerns, which makes them worthy of consideration when considering pro-environmental problems. It is important to emphasize that environmental concern acts as a bridge between attitudes and environmental knowledge. De Canio et al. [9], Traditionally viewed as a concept related to feelings about various ecological issues, has gained increasing importance for professionals and academics. It is now considered a vital environmental change and defence criterion, requiring improved political regulations. Environmental concern is a broad term that refers to various attitudes and views about the environment. It is growing in popularity among humans and is demonstrated by the acts of organizations that support the environment and those that oppose animal abuse, which promotes an environmentally conscious mindset.

Higher degrees of environmental concern motivate people to take action to safeguard the environment, especially by consuming more sustainable products, according to research, demonstrating the major influence of environmental concerns on human behaviour. Furthermore, research shows that environmental concerns directly impact how people see particular circumstances, including people having to live with the repercussions of their actions. Furthermore, substantial scores were obtained when measuring attitudes aligned with the environment.

Results revealed that environmental concern became more influential when combined with other factors like health and finances. Park & Lin [12], in a study evaluating human attitudes towards sustainability in fashion product purchases, observed that the number of humans supporting sustainable fashion products is steadily increasing. Humans are motivated by a desire to fulfil psychological needs through a sustainability-oriented attitude. Consequently, companies must be aware of and comprehend the evolving human attitude towards sustainability in fashion products to enhance competitiveness in both national and international markets.

7. Greenwashing concern

A company is said to be engaging in "greenwashing" if it makes false statements regarding the environmental effect of its operations and goods or uses dishonest green marketing techniques to improve its reputation and project an unduly positive public image. Torelli et al. [31], in order to avoid stakeholder backlash against their bad environmental performance, entities engaged in greenwashing frequently seek to withhold information about their negative environmental effect, provide information only in part, and even spread fake positive information. Greenwashing has drawn more attention recently due to its increasing social relevance. The possible impact of an organization's greenwashing efforts on customers' intents and actions linked to green purchasing, as seen through the lenses of the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, is still little understood. Customers' intention to make environmentally responsible purchases is proven to be adversely affected by their view of "greenwashing."

In a similar vein, it has been found that skepticism about green promises influences green purchasing intentions indirectly through elements like environmental awareness and concern. This aligns with past research that found a negative relationship between humans' mistrust of environmental claims and their willingness to make green purchases. Thus, a human's level of suspicion regarding an organization's deliberate concealment of unfavourable environmental information or deliberate dissemination of false positive information about its operations and goods may influence the TRA and TPB framework variables. As previously discussed, markers of a person's propensity to buy sustainable items include perceived environmental awareness and environmental care.

Because of ambiguous disclosure policies, customers feel they are not fully informed about an organization's environmental impact. As a result, buyers lack comprehensive knowledge of the true environmental effect of a product they are considering. They have misgivings that favourable statements can be exaggerated and that unfavourable environmental facts would go unreported. At the same time, customers may never be sure that Adamkiewicz et al. [13] find their misgivings about greenwashing. Because of this lack of clarity regarding legitimacy, we propose that rather than directly influencing purchase intention, a human's concerns about greenwashing will impact how much they value perceived environmental expertise and care.

8. Purchase Intention and Purchase Behaviour

Behavioural intentions have consistently emerged as immediate predictors of actual behaviours in various research domains, including entrepreneurial behaviour, health-related actions, online purchasing, and ethical decision-making. Academics primarily employed the understanding of the Theory of Reasoned Action and its later expansion, the Theory of Planned Conduct, to investigate the suggested connection between intention and conduct and the factors influencing these behavioural intents.

They identified discrepancies that demonstrated the poor predictive ability of an individual's attitude in predicting their actual behaviour, which led to the development of the TRA and TPB from previous attitude-behaviour models. This discrepancy opened the door for further models in the late 1960s, which combined these constructs with other variables to link attitude and conduct. To resolve the bivariate discrepancy, the TRA included two more constructs. Rausch & Kopplin [41] first recognized that supportive attitudes towards certain conduct would not always materialize into actions because of the lack of social pressure from important people or, on the other hand, the social pressure forbidding the behaviour.

In order to capture the social effect on conduct and complement attitude, which represents personal influences on behaviour, the subjective norm was established. Second, according to the TRA, conduct is influenced by attitude and subjective norms through a mediating cognitive link known as the intention to carry out the activity. Behavioural intention captures the driving forces behind a person's actions and expresses the amount of effort that person is prepared to put out.

Consequently, behavioural intention is considered the most immediate predictor of behaviour within the TRA, determined by both attitude and subjective norm. Normative beliefs influence behavioural beliefs and shape attitudes and subjective norms. Initially designed to predict volitional behaviour actions over which an individual has control or those not requiring specific skills, abilities, opportunities, or cooperation. The TRA was critiqued for creating an artificial dichotomy, as most behaviours fall between the entirely volitional and non-volitional categories. Addressing this concern, perceived behavioural control was introduced, leading to the development of the TPB.

Both the TRA and the TPB have been used and expanded in the area of sustainability to investigate pro-environmental behaviours, including recycling, consuming sustainably produced food, buying energy-efficient items, buying green cosmetics,

and making general green shopping decisions. Few research papers have examined the link between buying intention and purchase behaviour, despite some showing poor or negative results. Notably, a significant portion of the study examining the connection between purchasing intention and behaviour is related to sustainability. Ahmed et al. [25] show a positive correlation between the two variables and emphasize the need to manage knowledge sustainably and with consideration for the environment. They also emphasize the significance of promoting green products and increasing public awareness of environmental issues, moral standards, and carbon footprint.

Nonetheless, there is still a shortage of thorough research on the factors influencing humans' decisions to buy sustainable apparel. In order to better understand the phenomena of sustainable clothing consumption, we use the purchase intention, purchase behaviour, attitude, and subjective norm from the TRA and TPB as the fundamental framework for our model.

9. Discussion

Though research on sustainable apparel buying behaviour is still scarce, the body of extant literature has thoroughly examined green purchase conduct utilizing frameworks like the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of information by offering a thorough framework that pinpoints important preconditions for intent to buy sustainable apparel. It also aims to shed light on the discrepancy between buying intention and actual purchasing conduct in this setting. In order to do this, we expanded the TRA by adding novel elements from earlier exploratory results and well-known constructs from the green literature, such as perceived environmental knowledge and environmental concerns.

Although previous research on sustainable clothing Csiszer [3] frequently used exploratory approaches or looked at purchase intention and behaviour separately, our study is notable for being among the first to use an extended TRA model to fully explain purchase intention, actual purchase behaviour, and the intention-behaviour gap. TRA was substantially verified in sustainable clothes, except for the link between purchasing intention and subjective norm. Our findings are consistent with other research on green purchasing behaviour in general, which has revealed no evidence of the influence of subjective norms on purchase intention.

Interestingly, it was shown that worries about greenwashing influenced human decision-making at the intention-formation stage, dampening the association between attitude and intention to buy. On the other hand, our model considered the impression of greenwashing as an immediate antecedent of the desire to make green purchases, suggesting that green skepticism influences environmental knowledge and concerns. According to Szabo & Webster [36], we propose that greenwashing worries comprise a customer's suspicion of an organization's greenwashing practices. Because of incomplete information, customers may be unsure of the integrity of their suspicions. As a result, rather than directly influencing purchase intention, we assume and partially confirm that greenwashing concerns influence the link between purchase intention and its antecedents.

Additionally, we offer fresh perspectives by disclosing the knowledge that serves as a springboard for resolving the gap between these two factors that is often seen. According to our research, despite initial intention formation being effective, humans still link sustainable apparel with negative stereotypes, creating an unfashionable perception that prevents them from making the real buy. We also discovered evidence favoring the intention-behavior link for environmentally friendly clothes. This contradicts previous research results from the early 2000s, indicating buyers thought sustainable apparel was more expensive than traditional choices.

The knowledge gathered by investigating the variables impacting customers' intentions and actions regarding sustainable apparel has several useful ramifications. Strategies to improve customers' purchase intention and subsequent behaviour towards sustainable clothes can benefit a range of stakeholders, including the government and online retailers, as well as clothing makers and manufacturers.

From a management standpoint, addressing customers' worries about greenwashing and perceived aesthetic risk could be more fruitful. The moderating effects of greenwashing concerns have been documented, indicating that customers' inclination to purchase from a company is dramatically reduced when they have developing concerns about the company hiding its negative environmental impact or making misleading environmental claims. Specifically, greenwashing concerns influenced the impact of participants' attitudes towards sustainable clothing on their intention to purchase such items.

Implementing high transparency standards, obtaining reputable certifications, and publishing annual sustainability reports verified by independent auditors can help alleviate imperfect information, reducing humans' uncertainty regarding the

legitimacy of organizations' environmental claims. Government regulations imposing strict penalties for false information disclosure can further build trust.

Additionally, clothing retailers can empower humans by allowing them to trace a product's fabrication process, providing sufficient information for informed decision-making based on individual preferences. Customer reviews, enhanced with videos and images, offer a real-world perspective from previous buyers. Overcoming the stereotype of sustainable clothing being unfashionable requires shifting humans' perceptions Rahman & Koszewska [28]. Collaborating with influencers or celebrities who promote and wear environmentally friendly apparel can be a powerful strategy, acting as role models to nudge humans towards sustainable clothing consumption.

Additionally, as it was shown that a human's attitude towards sustainable clothing had the most influence on their intention to make a later purchase, efforts should be focused on changing this attitude. Customers' views are significantly shaped by their perceived environmental knowledge and worries, which are important cognitive and affective factors. Thus, public awareness initiatives that promote environmental concerns and increase society's environmental understanding can be crucial in making customers more conscious of environmental issues. The current study looked at apparel as an illustration of a sustainable product. To get a more comprehensive knowledge of the impacts of these categories, future research initiatives may investigate the roles of aesthetic, economic, and greenwashing concerns in various situations. More research may be necessary if economic risk has a negligible or context-dependent influence on the purchasing process. Economic risk may behave differently in online buying situations when prospective buyers have ready access to various alternative offers, price comparisons, and user reviews.

10. Conclusion

Furthermore, the study was carried out in Germany, and other nations may have a different perspective on economic threats. As previous studies have indicated variations in environmental concerns and knowledge across countries, exploring these aspects in different cultural contexts could provide valuable insights. Since the study did not specify a particular manufacturer or clothing company, constructs such as greenwashing concerns might have appeared abstract to respondents, potentially influencing the results. With its significant environmental effect, the textile firm necessitates a fundamental shift in mindset as sustainability becomes an increasingly pressing social concern. Our study provides insights into the major factors influencing humans' buying behaviour of sustainable clothing, which helps to solve the difficulty of identifying the reasons behind customers' purchases of sustainable apparel. Using recognized constructs from green literature and new constructs from exploratory data, we expanded the Theory of Reasoned Action to investigate the variables impacting humans' attitudes and actions regarding sustainable apparel. These constructs were examined for sustainable clothing, and the results of our study highlight the critical role that attitudes towards sustainable clothing play in influencing humans' intentions to make purchases.

Acknowledgement: We would like to thank the respondents who participated in our survey and shared their valuable insights on sustainable clothing choices. We also express our gratitude to our colleagues and institutions for their support throughout this research.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Funding Statement: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflicts of Interest Statement: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Ethics and Consent Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

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