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Explaining the Value-Behavior Gap in Fast Fashion: The Role of Social Norms and Social Media among Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

Amid growing concerns about sustainable consumption, fast fashion continues to thrive among Generation Z, reflecting a persistent value–behavior gap between ethical concerns and actual purchasing behavior. Prior studies often treat ethical constructs as a single dimension and rarely integrate moral cognition, psychological tension, and socio-digital forces within a unified framework. As a result, the mechanisms explaining why ethical concerns fail to translate into behavioral restraint remain insufficiently understood. To address this gap, the researchers develop and test an integrative model that distinguishes ethical awareness from ethical consumption literacy and incorporates cognitive dissonance, social norms, and active social media use. The researchers collect data from 337 Generation Z respondents in Jabodetabek and analyze them using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings show that ethical awareness does not constrain behavior but positively influences fast fashion consumption, indicating an ethical paradox. Ethical consumption literacy significantly reduces consumption, demonstrating its role as an operational capability that translates ethical considerations into action. Although ethical consumption literacy increases cognitive dissonance, dissonance does not significantly influence behavior nor mediate the relationships. Furthermore, active social media use weakens the protective effect of ethical consumption literacy, highlighting the role of digitally mediated social influence. This study contributes by distinguishing ethical awareness from ethical consumption literacy, challenging the mediating role of cognitive dissonance as a behavioral mechanism in highly normalized consumption contexts, and identifying digital engagement as a boundary condition of ethical behavior. These findings suggest that sustainability interventions should move beyond awareness toward literacy-building and norm-oriented strategies.

Keywords: fast fashion consumption, ethical consumption literacy, social norms, social media use, Generation Z

INTRODUCTION

The global fashion industry has been reshaped by fast fashion, a business model built on accelerated design-to-retail cycles, rapid trend rotation, and relatively affordable pricing. This model has expanded across emerging markets, including Indonesia, where the entry of international retailers and the growth of digital commerce have strengthened demand for fashion products and shortened consumption cycles (Guercini & Runfola, 2021). In Indonesia's urban markets, fashion has become a high-frequency consumption category, particularly among younger consumers who are deeply embedded in digital ecosystems and trend-driven social environments.

Despite its commercial appeal, fast fashion is widely linked to sustainability challenges. The industry has been associated with intensive resource use, substantial textile waste, and problematic labor conditions across global supply chains (Bailey et al., 2025). These externalities intensify an ongoing tension in consumer research. Many individuals report

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increasing ethical concerns about environmental and social impacts, yet continued purchasing of fast fashion persists. This phenomenon is commonly discussed as a value-behavior gap or attitude-behavior gap, where moral awareness and pro-sustainability attitudes do not consistently translate into reduced consumption or more responsible purchasing patterns (Hussain & Dar, 2021; Mathew & Spinelli, 2025). Accordingly, prior studies have not consistently explained why heightened ethical concern does not translate into reduced fast fashion consumption, particularly in contexts where social and digital influences are highly salient. This limitation indicates that existing explanations of the value-behavior gap remain incomplete and context-insensitive.

Generation Z represents a critical segment for examining this tension. As digital natives, Gen Z consumers are highly exposed to fashion content through social media and influencer-driven marketing, and they often use consumption to signal identity, belonging, and social status. Prior research has suggested that ethically charged consumption contexts can trigger cognitive dissonance, a psychological discomfort arising from inconsistency between beliefs and behavior (Festinger, 1957). From a theoretical perspective, cognitive dissonance is more likely to emerge when individuals are consciously aware of inconsistencies between their values and actions. Ethical awareness increases the salience of moral standards and enhances individuals' ability to recognize the ethical implications of their consumption behavior. As a result, when ethically aware consumers engage in fast fashion consumption, the perceived inconsistency between their moral beliefs and their actual behavior becomes more pronounced, thereby increasing the likelihood of experiencing cognitive dissonance. From a cognitive dissonance theory perspective, individuals are motivated to reduce this discomfort through cognitive adjustment, justification, or behavioral change, depending on contextual pressures and perceived control. This perspective aligns with the theory of planned behavior by Ajzen (1991), which posits that behavior is shaped not only by attitudes but also by social norms and perceived behavioral control, suggesting that ethical concerns alone may be insufficient to drive behavioral change in socially and digitally embedded contexts. In theory, dissonance can motivate attitude change, justification, or behavioral correction. However, prior studies have not consistently explained whether such dissonance leads to reduced consumption or merely to rationalization strategies in high-pressure consumption contexts such as fast fashion. However, empirical evidence remains mixed regarding whether dissonance meaningfully reduces consumption when social approval, affordability, and trend pressures are salient, conditions that are common in fast fashion markets (Celik & Ekici, 2025; Dewi et al., 2024).

A key reason for these mixed findings may lie in the distinction between ethical awareness and more action-oriented competencies. Ethical awareness generally reflects recognition of moral issues and concern for consequences. However, awareness may remain declarative and symbolic when consumers face strong situational drivers such as price promotions, convenience, and normalized trend consumption. However, emerging empirical evidence suggests that ethical awareness may coexist with continued consumption, indicating a potential ethical paradox in which moral recognition does not necessarily translate into behavioral restraint. In contrast, ethical consumption literacy emphasizes consumers' ability to interpret sustainability information, evaluate marketing claims, and apply ethical reasoning in concrete purchase decisions. From a digital consumer behavior perspective, which emphasizes the role of digitally mediated environments in shaping preferences, decision-making, and consumption patterns, such literacy becomes increasingly critical as consumers navigate complex and persuasive online environments. Conceptually, literacy may represent an operational capability that supports translation of values into action, potentially reducing fast fashion consumption even when moral awareness alone is insufficient (Wilbourn et al., 2024). This lack of conceptual differentiation may obscure the mechanisms through which ethical considerations influence behavior, leading to inconsistent empirical findings.

Beyond individual-level cognition, consumption decisions are also shaped by socially embedded forces. Social norms, both descriptive norms (what people typically do) and injunctive norms (what people approve), provide behavioral guidance and shape perceived acceptability of consumption practices (Helferich et al., 2023). Drawing on social influence theory, individuals tend to align their behavior with perceived group expectations to gain social acceptance and avoid social sanctions. In collectivistic settings, normative influence can be particularly strong because social approval and conformity are more central in everyday decision-making. Accordingly, fast fashion consumption may be driven less by internal moral conflict and more by social expectations to remain fashionable, relevant, and aligned with peer group standards (Balabanis et al., 2024; Banytė et al., 2023). From a theoretical perspective, social norms not only directly influence behavior but also shape how individuals interpret and act on their personal values. In contexts with strong normative pressure, individuals may prioritize social approval over internal moral considerations, weakening the influence of ethical awareness on actual behavior. Conversely, when normative pressure is weaker, individuals are more likely to rely on their internal ethical standards, allowing ethical awareness to exert a stronger influence on consumption decisions. This interaction mechanism suggests that the effect of ethical awareness on fast fashion consumption behavior is contingent upon the strength of social norms. This moderating role also aligns with the theory of planned behavior by Ajzen (1991), in which subjective norms can reinforce or

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weaken the translation of individual attitudes into behavior.

Digital environments may further intensify these social pressures. Active social media use, such as engaging with fashion content, following trends, and interacting with influencer narratives, can amplify consumption tendencies by reinforcing aspirational lifestyles and normalizing frequent purchasing. Social media is not only an information channel. It can become a mechanism for identity formation and social comparison, where fashion acquisition is positioned as a route to recognition and belonging (Dinh & Lee, 2024; Valkenburg et al., 2021). Importantly, such digital influence may also undermine ethical considerations by supplying justifications (e.g., "everyone does it"), accelerating trend turnover, and prioritizing visual appeal over reflective evaluation. In this way, social media may weaken the protective effect of ethical consumption literacy, especially when trend content dominates consumers' attention (Jillani et al., 2025; Sun & Xing, 2022).

Although prior research has examined ethical concern, social influence, and digital engagement in sustainable consumption, several critical gaps remain. First, prior studies have not clearly distinguished ethical awareness from ethical consumption literacy as conceptually and functionally different constructs, limiting explanations of the persistence of the value-behavior gap. Second, prior studies have not integrated cognitive dissonance theory within a broader social and digital context, resulting in underdeveloped explanations of whether dissonance leads to behavioral change or merely cognitive justification. Third, prior studies have not adequately captured the role of social norms and digital environments simultaneously, particularly in emerging and collectivistic markets such as Indonesia, where social conformity and social media penetration are both high. These gaps are theoretically significant because they obscure the mechanisms linking ethical cognition to behavior, and practically problematic as they limit the effectiveness of sustainability interventions in digitally mediated consumption environments.

To address these gaps, the researchers develop and empirically test an integrative framework, as shown in Figure 1. It explains fast fashion consumption among Generation Z respondents residing in the Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi (Jabodetabek) area. The model is conceptually grounded in cognitive dissonance theory, social influence theory, and digital consumer behavior perspectives, enabling a more comprehensive explanation of consumption behavior in contemporary digital contexts. The model positions ethical awareness and ethical consumption literacy as predictors, cognitive dissonance as a mediating mechanism, and social norms and active social media use as contextual forces that may shape consumption directly and/or alter the strength of ethical effects. This approach extends existing sustainable consumption research by examining moral cognition, psychological tension, and social-digital influence within one explanatory structure.

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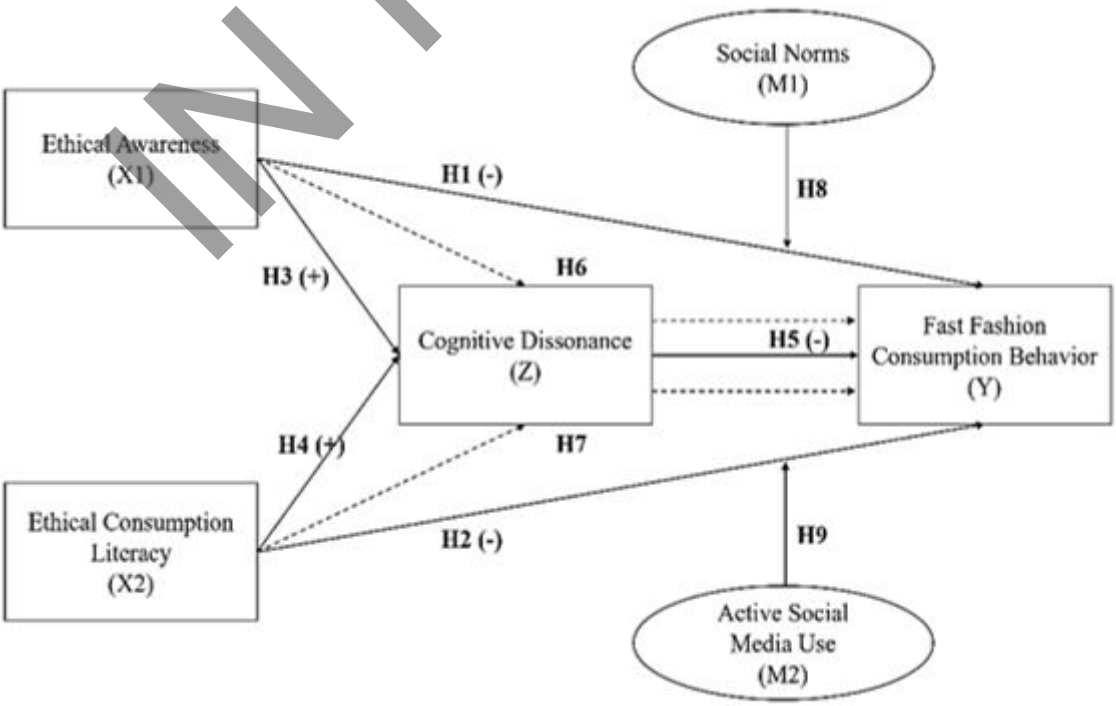


Figure 1. Research Framework

Accordingly, the research investigates the following research questions: (1) How does ethical awareness influence fast fashion consumption behavior among Generation Z? (2) How does ethical consumption literacy influence fast fashion consumption behavior? (3) To what extent does ethical awareness generate cognitive dissonance in the context of fast fashion consumption? (4) To what extent does ethical consumption literacy generate cognitive dissonance? (5) Does cognitive dissonance significantly influence fast fashion consumption behavior? (6) Does cognitive dissonance mediate the relationship between ethical awareness and fast fashion consumption behavior? (7) Does cognitive dissonance mediate the relationship between ethical consumption literacy and fast fashion consumption behavior? (8) Do social norms moderate the relationship between ethical awareness and fast fashion consumption behavior? (9) Does active social media use moderate the relationship between ethical consumption literacy and fast fashion consumption behavior? Based on the theoretical framing and prior empirical insights, the research proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Ethical awareness negatively influences fast fashion consumption behavior,

H2: Ethical consumption literacy negatively influences fast fashion consumption behavior,

H3: Ethical awareness positively influences cognitive dissonance,

H4: Ethical consumption literacy positively influences cognitive dissonance,

H5: Cognitive dissonance negatively influences fast fashion consumption behavior,

H6: Cognitive dissonance mediates the relationship between ethical awareness and fast fashion consumption behavior,

H7: Cognitive dissonance mediates the relationship between ethical consumption literacy and fast fashion consumption behavior,

H8: Social norms moderate the relationship between ethical awareness and fast fashion consumption behavior,

H9: Active social media use moderates the relationship between ethical consumption literacy and fast fashion consumption behavior.

By distinguishing declarative ethical awareness from operational ethical consumption literacy and embedding these constructs within a socio-digital influence environment, the research aims to refine the theoretical explanation of persistent value-behavior gaps among Generation Z consumers and provide implications for sustainability interventions that move beyond awareness campaigns toward literacy-building and norm-shaping strategies. Furthermore, the research contributes to the sustainable consumption literature by integrating moral cognition, psychological tension, and socio-digital contextual forces into a unified analytical framework. This integrative perspective allows a deeper understanding of why ethical concerns do not always translate into responsible consumption behavior, particularly in digitally mediated markets where social influence and trend dynamics are highly salient.

METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative explanatory design to examine the structural relationships among ethical awareness, ethical consumption literacy, cognitive dissonance, social norms, active social media use, and fast fashion consumption behavior among Generation Z. A quantitative approach enables systematic measurement of latent constructs and theory-driven hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2022). Such an approach is particularly suitable for examining complex behavioral models in which multiple psychological and social constructs interact simultaneously. By operationalizing each construct into measurable indicators, quantitative analysis enables empirical assessment of theoretical relationships and provides statistical evidence on the strength and direction of associations among variables.

The target population consists of individuals aged 18–28 years residing in Jabodetabek, who actively use social media and have purchased fast fashion products within the past six months. The generational age boundaries applied in this research follow the classification framework presented in Dwidienawati et al. (2025). Purposive sampling is employed to ensure respondents meet predefined demographic and behavioral criteria relevant to the research objectives (Ahmed, 2024). After screening for incomplete responses and extreme outliers, 337 valid questionnaires are retained. With multiple direct and interaction predictors pointing to the most complex endogenous construct, the minimum required sample size to detect a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) at a 95% confidence level and 80% statistical power is approximately 103 observations (Hair et al., 2022). The final sample substantially exceeds this requirement, indicating adequate statistical power and stable parameter estimation.

Data are collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. All constructs are measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). To minimize Common Method Bias (CMB), respondents are assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and items are adapted from established scales with contextual refinement. In addition, Harman's single-factor test is conducted. A single factor does not account for the majority of the variance, indicating that CMB is unlikely to be a serious concern. Furthermore, collinearity assessment using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values is performed, with all values below the recommended threshold of

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3.3, confirming the absence of significant CMB (Lim, 2024; Podsakoff et al., 2024).

Data analysis follows a two-stage Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach (Hair et al., 2022). PLS-SEM is selected over Covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) for several reasons. First, the research prioritizes predicting and explaining variance in fast fashion consumption behavior rather than strictly confirming theory. Second, the proposed model includes multiple mediation and moderation effects, making PLS-SEM more suitable due to its flexibility in handling complex models. Third, PLS-SEM is robust for relatively non-normal data and does not impose strict distributional assumptions, which is advantageous for survey-based behavioral research.

In the first stage, the measurement model is evaluated by assessing Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) for internal consistency (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), outer loadings (> 0.70), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (> 0.50) to establish convergent validity (Hair et al., 2022). Discriminant validity is assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings to ensure empirical distinctiveness among constructs (Hair et al., 2022; Rasoolimanesh, 2022).

In the second stage, the structural model is evaluated using bootstrapping at a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$) to obtain standardized path coefficients (β), t-values, and p-values. Model predictive power is assessed through R^2 values. Mediation effects are examined via indirect effect testing, while moderation effects are analyzed using interaction terms between relevant constructs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 337 respondents have met the screening criteria and have been retained for analysis. Female respondents dominate the sample (219) compared with 118 males, and most are aged 22–25 years. Most participants hold a bachelor's degree, and their occupational backgrounds span public and private employees, students, entrepreneurs, and professionals. The income profile is largely middle class, primarily within the IDR 5.000.000–10.000.000 range, and fast fashion expenditure represents approximately 2%–20% of monthly income, indicating that such purchases are routine rather than incidental. Respondents are geographically concentrated across Jakarta and its surrounding cities. Overall, the sample reflects an educated, economically active, and environmentally aware urban Generation Z cohort, providing a relevant foundation for examining the psychological, social, and moral determinants of fast fashion consumption behavior.

Consistent with the two-stage PLS-SEM procedure, the measurement model is first evaluated to establish indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity prior to hypothesis testing. Indicator reliability was assessed by examining outer loadings. Evaluating the measurement model at this stage is essential to ensure that each latent construct is represented by indicators that accurately capture the theoretical concept being measured. A rigorous assessment of reliability and validity helps to confirm that the measurement instrument produces consistent and conceptually meaningful results, thereby strengthening the credibility of the subsequent structural model analysis. Table 1 (see Appendices) summarizes the reliability and validity assessment results, showing that all constructs achieve acceptable levels of Cronbach's alpha, CR, and AVE.

A loading threshold of 0.70 is applied for reflective constructs. Most indicators exceed this criterion. Two items under active social media use (ASU2 and ASU3) do not meet the recommended threshold. Therefore, they are removed to improve measurement quality. Following this refinement, all retained indicators load above 0.70, confirming adequate item reliability. This ensures that each indicator meaningfully represents its underlying construct.

Internal consistency is evaluated using CA and CR. All constructs exceed the recommended benchmark of 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability. Cognitive dissonance shows strong reliability (CA = 0.947; CR = 0.955), similar to fast fashion consumption behavior (CA = 0.969; CR = 0.973). Ethical awareness (CA = 0.919; CR = 0.935) and ethical consumption literacy (CA = 0.923; CR = 0.937) also show high internal consistency. Social norms record a CA of 0.963 and a CR of 0.971, while active social media use achieves a CA of 0.838 and a CR of 0.901. Across all constructs, CR values are consistently higher than CA, which is expected in PLS-SEM applications and indicates satisfactory internal reliability.

Convergent validity is examined through AVE, with a threshold of 0.50. All constructs exceed this requirement. AVE results show 0.673 for ethical awareness, 0.650 for ethical consumption literacy, 0.728 for cognitive dissonance, 0.870 for social norms, 0.752 for active social media use, and 0.802 for fast fashion consumption behavior. These results confirm that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators, thereby establishing satisfactory convergent validity.

Discriminant validity is assessed using the cross-loading analysis. Cross-loading analysis further demonstrates that each indicator loads highest on its assigned construct compared to all other constructs. Table 2 (see Appendices) presents the detailed results of the cross-loading analysis. No substantial cross-loading issues are detected. Together, these findings confirm adequate discriminant validity. Overall, the measurement model satisfies established reliability and validity criteria, supporting progression to structural model assessment.

Following confirmation that the measurement model has met the required validity and reliability standards, the structural model is analyzed to evaluate the proposed hypotheses. The model's predictive

IN PRESS

strength is examined through the coefficient of determination (R^2) for each endogenous construct. The findings show that cognitive dissonance has an R^2 of 0.410, indicating that ethical awareness and ethical consumption literacy together explain 41% of the variance in cognitive dissonance. Meanwhile, fast fashion consumption behavior yields an R^2 of 0.847, showing that the predictors in the model account for 84.7% of the variation in consumption behavior. This level of explanatory power can be considered substantial in behavioral research contexts.

In Table 3 (see Appendices), based on H1, ethical awareness significantly and positively influences fast fashion consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.153$, $t = 2.131$, $p = 0.033$), contradicting the hypothesized negative relationship. Conceptually, ethical awareness reflects an individual's ability to recognize moral issues and evaluate the social and environmental consequences of consumption decisions, as articulated by Rest (1986). Prior research in marketing ethics has suggested that higher awareness should discourage engagement with products linked to environmental degradation or labor exploitation (Ogiemwonyi & Jan, 2023). Empirical evidence has also indicated its potential to reduce fast fashion purchase intention (Hussain & Dar, 2021; Schiaroli et al., 2024). This finding contradicts the dominant assumption in prior literature that ethical awareness functions as a deterrent to unsustainable consumption, suggesting a need to re-evaluate its theoretical role. The present findings reveal that awareness does not operate as a behavioral constraint. Instead, it coexists with continued consumption. One possible explanation is that ethical awareness operates at a symbolic or identity level rather than driving behavioral change, particularly in digitally embedded environments where moral positioning can coexist with consumption practices. This pattern is consistent with cross-cultural studies showing that moral cognition may be overridden by price sensitivity, trend orientation, and social pressures (Hussain & Dar, 2021; Mathew & Spinelli, 2025), and aligns with the behavioral reasoning embedded in the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), where attitudes do not automatically translate into behavior when contextual influences are dominant. This finding contributes theoretically by reinforcing the value-behavior gap literature and demonstrating that moral awareness may coexist with, rather than constrain, high-frequency consumption. Among digitally embedded Generation Z consumers, ethical awareness often functions symbolically by reinforcing identity narratives centered on moral concern. However, it does not necessarily translate into changes in purchasing routines that are strongly influenced by price sensitivity and social reinforcement. Therefore, H1 is rejected. Although the relationship is statistically significant, its positive direction contradicts the hypothesized negative direction.

Referring to H2, ethical consumption literacy is found to significantly and negatively affect fast fashion consumption behavior ($\beta = -0.206$, $t = 3.441$, $p = 0.001$), thereby supporting the proposed hypothesis. Conceptually, ethical consumption literacy reflects an individual's capacity to understand, evaluate, and apply ethical and sustainability principles in purchasing decisions. Unlike ethical awareness, this finding reinforces theoretical arguments that actionable knowledge and evaluative capability are critical in translating ethical values into behavior (Schiaroli et al., 2024; Wilbourn et al., 2024). Moreover, literacy enhances consumers' ability to evaluate marketing claims critically, detect greenwashing strategies, and resist persuasive promotional tactics, particularly within digitally mediated environments (Cuong, 2024; Dinh & Lee, 2024). The significant negative coefficient observed in this research confirms that literacy operates as an applied cognitive competence rather than merely a moral orientation. Consistent with previous findings by Buladi Çubukcu (2025), consumers possessing stronger evaluative skills and contextual knowledge demonstrate lower tendencies toward impulsive and unsustainable fast fashion purchases. This result not only aligns with prior studies but also extends the literature by demonstrating that literacy remains behaviorally effective even within socially and digitally reinforced consumption contexts. Thus, unlike ethical awareness, ethical consumption literacy functions as a protective factor that translates ethical principles into concrete behavioral restraint. Hence, the empirical evidence supports H2. H2 is accepted.

According to H3, ethical awareness does not significantly influence cognitive dissonance ($\beta = -0.039$, $t = 0.481$, $p = 0.630$), indicating that the hypothesized positive relationship is not supported. Drawing on cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), inconsistency between values and behavior should generate psychological discomfort that motivates corrective action. Prior research has suggested that consumers with strong ethical awareness may experience guilt or internal tension when purchasing products associated with social or environmental harm (Jamwal & Mishra, 2023; Ogiemwonyi & Jan, 2023). However, this finding contrasts with theoretical expectations, suggesting that ethical awareness alone is insufficient to trigger psychological discomfort. A plausible explanation is that in highly normalized fast fashion consumption environments, individuals may neutralize potential tension through repeated exposure and social acceptance, thereby weakening the activation of dissonance. In highly normalized consumption environments, individuals may neutralize potential tension through rationalization strategies (Celik & Ekici, 2025). This indicates a boundary condition of cognitive dissonance theory, where dissonance is less likely to emerge when behavior is socially legitimized and widely practiced. On this basis, H3 is rejected.

In contrast, H4 is supported, as ethical consumption literacy exerts a strong and positive influence on cognitive dissonance ($\beta = 0.673$, $t = 8.121$, $p < 0.001$), representing the largest standardized coefficient among the antecedents. Consistent with the conceptualization of ethical literacy as the ability

IN PRESS

to critically evaluate the moral consequences of consumption, deeper and more applied knowledge appears to heighten sensitivity to value-behavior inconsistency. This finding provides stronger theoretical support for the argument that dissonance is more likely to be activated by evaluative cognitive capability rather than mere awareness. As a result, they are more likely to recognize inconsistencies between their ethical principles and their actual purchasing behavior. This extends prior literature by highlighting that cognitive dissonance is contingent upon the depth of ethical reasoning rather than the presence of ethical concern alone. This result provides empirical support for H4. H4 is accepted.

Nevertheless, H5 is not supported, as cognitive dissonance does not significantly influence fast fashion consumption behavior ($\beta = -0.053$, $t = 1.920$, $p = 0.055$). Although the effect approaches significance, it does not meet the conventional threshold. This finding contradicts the core proposition of cognitive dissonance theory, which assumes that psychological discomfort leads to behavioral correction. Instead of modifying their purchasing patterns, consumers may rely on cognitive justification strategies that allow them to maintain existing consumption habits while minimizing internal discomfort. This pattern is consistent with prior research (Rosely & Ali, 2023), showing that consumers often resolve dissonance through impulsive or compensatory consumption rather than behavioral restraint. Such strategies may include downplaying the environmental impact of individual purchases, attributing responsibility to brands or industry practices, or convincing themselves that occasional fast fashion consumption is relatively harmless. This indicates that dissonance may function as a cognitive coping mechanism rather than a behavioral driver in fast fashion contexts. Consequently, the persistence of fast fashion purchasing despite experienced dissonance illustrates the complexity of ethical consumption dynamics, particularly in contexts where affordability, rapidly changing trends, and strong digital influences shape consumer preferences and normalize frequent fashion consumption. Consequently, the empirical evidence is insufficient to support H5. The hypothesis is rejected.

Furthermore, mediation analysis reveals that H6 and H7 are not supported. Ethical awareness does not indirectly influence consumption behavior through cognitive dissonance ($\beta = 0.002$, $t = 0.400$, $p = 0.689$), and the indirect effect of ethical consumption literacy via dissonance is also not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.036$, $t = 1.784$, $p = 0.075$). These results challenge the assumption that dissonance universally functions as a psychological bridge linking moral cognition to behavioral outcomes (Festinger, 1957). In highly normalized and socially reinforced consumption environments, cognitive dissonance may be resolved through justification strategies rather than behavioral correction, indicating important boundary conditions for dissonance theory in contemporary digital marketplaces (Celik & Ekici, 2025; Rosely & Ali, 2023). These findings further challenge the conventional assumption that cognitive dissonance acts as a mediating mechanism between ethical cognition and behavior. They suggest that alternative pathways, such as social influence or habitual consumption, may play a more dominant role than internal psychological tension (Ajzen, 1991; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Helferich et al., 2023). Instead, while ethical literacy increases perceived moral inconsistency, such tension does not necessarily translate into reduced fast fashion consumption, indicating boundary conditions for the mediating role of cognitive dissonance in contemporary consumer environments (Celik & Ekici, 2025). Accordingly, H6 is rejected because the proposed indirect effect is not statistically significant. Likewise, H7 is rejected because its proposed indirect effect does not reach statistical significance.

Based on H8, the interaction between ethical awareness and social norms does not significantly predict fast fashion consumption behavior ($\beta = -0.057$, $t = 1.009$, $p = 0.313$), indicating that the proposed moderating effect is not supported. Theoretically, social norms function as internalized behavioral guidelines derived from one's social environment, shaping emotional responses and behavioral choices (Helferich et al., 2023). As conceptualized, norms operate through descriptive components (what most people do) and injunctive components (what is socially approved) (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). Prior studies have suggested that in collectivistic contexts, social norms may strengthen or weaken the translation of personal ethical values into actual consumption behavior (Balabanis et al., 2024; Banytė et al., 2023). Accordingly, it is hypothesized that norms will condition the effect of ethical awareness on fast fashion consumption. This finding diverges from prior research, suggesting that social norms do not necessarily amplify the effect of ethical awareness in this context. However, the insignificant interaction term indicates that ethical awareness and social norms do not operate interactively but exert independent influences. A possible explanation is that ethical awareness and social norms operate as parallel rather than contingent mechanisms, where each exerts a direct but non-interactive influence on behavior. This finding implies that even within socially embedded environments, moral recognition does not become more behaviorally consequential under stronger normative pressures. In other words, while social norms may directly shape consumption behavior, they do not strengthen or weaken the behavioral impact of ethical awareness, indicating a decoupling between personal moral cognition and socially driven behavior. These results do not provide empirical support for H8. H8 is rejected.

Finally, H9 demonstrates that active social media use significantly moderates the relationship between ethical consumption literacy and consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.080$, $t = 2.185$, $p = 0.029$). Given the negative main effect of ethical consumption literacy, this positive interaction indicates a weakening of

IN PRESS

its behavioral constraint in highly active digital environments. Active social media use reflects the extent to which individuals engage in digital activities such as sharing content, following trends, and interacting with fashion-related posts (Valkenburg et al., 2021). This finding extends prior research by highlighting the conditional nature of ethical consumption in digital environments, where exposure to persuasive and trend-driven content can weaken the behavioral impact of ethical competence. Prior research has suggested that social media environments can reinforce or undermine ethical consumption depending on the dominant narratives within digital spaces (Jillani et al., 2025; Sun & Xing, 2022). Consistent with digital consumer culture perspectives, social media functions not merely as an informational platform but as a symbolic and normative arena where rapid trend adoption is legitimized and socially rewarded (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). This finding also contrasts with studies that position digital literacy as sufficient to resist persuasive influence (Qadri et al., 2025), suggesting instead that high engagement environments may override cognitive control mechanisms. It suggests that digital environments act as behavioral amplifiers that reshape decision-making processes beyond individual cognitive control, reinforcing consumption norms even among ethically literate consumers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Hu et al., 2025). Consequently, even consumers with high ethical literacy may experience reduced behavioral restraint when embedded in highly active social media ecosystems, highlighting the conditional nature of ethical decision-making in digitally saturated contexts. This significant interaction provides empirical support for H9. H9 is accepted.

Overall, the structural findings reveal a differentiated pattern. Ethical consumption literacy emerges as the most consistent internal determinant of reduced fast fashion consumption, whereas ethical awareness demonstrates a limited and paradoxical role. Cognitive dissonance does not operate as a statistically significant mediating mechanism. Furthermore, social norms do not significantly moderate the relationship between ethical awareness and fast fashion consumption behavior, whereas active social media use has a statistically significant but relatively modest moderating effect on the relationship between ethical consumption literacy and fast fashion consumption behavior. More importantly, these findings contribute theoretically by showing that the value-behavior gap is structurally embedded in social and digital environments, rather than driven solely by individual moral limitations. This shifts the analytical perspective from individual cognition toward a more context-driven explanation of consumption behavior, integrating psychological, social, and digital dimensions into a unified framework.

CONCLUSION

The research investigates fast fashion consumption behavior among Generation Z by integrating ethical awareness, ethical consumption literacy, cognitive dissonance, social norms, and active social media use within a unified framework. The findings reveal that ethical awareness does not function as a behavioral constraint. Instead, it shows a positive association with consumption, indicating that moral recognition may operate symbolically rather than behaviorally. In contrast, ethical consumption literacy significantly reduces fast fashion consumption, highlighting its role as a key mechanism that translates ethical considerations into actionable decisions.

Furthermore, ethical consumption literacy increases cognitive dissonance, yet dissonance does not significantly influence behavior or mediate the relationship between ethical cognition and fast fashion consumption behavior. It suggests that consumers tend to resolve psychological tension through cognitive justification rather than behavioral change. Although social norms do not moderate the relationship between ethical awareness and behavior, they emerge as the strongest direct predictor of fast fashion consumption behavior, indicating that normative pressures exert a dominant influence over individual ethical considerations. Meanwhile, active social media use weakens the negative effect of ethical consumption literacy on fast fashion consumption behavior, underscoring the role of digital environments in shaping consumption behavior. Overall, these findings indicate that the value-behavior gap is not solely driven by individual ethical limitations but is structurally influenced by social and digital contexts.

Theoretically, the research contributes by distinguishing ethical awareness from ethical consumption literacy and demonstrating their divergent behavioral effects. It also refines the role of cognitive dissonance by showing that it does not function as a mediating mechanism in highly normalized consumption contexts. Practically, the findings suggest that sustainability initiatives should move beyond awareness campaigns toward strengthening consumers' evaluative capabilities through ethical consumption literacy. In addition, interventions should consider the influence of digital environments by promoting sustainable consumption narratives and norms within social media platforms.

The research has several limitations. Purposive sampling and the focus on respondents in the Jabodetabek area may limit generalizability. Additionally, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to capture behavioral dynamics over time. Future research is encouraged to adopt longitudinal or experimental designs and to explore additional mechanisms, such as self-identity, lifestyle, or habitual consumption, to further explain the persistence of unsustainable consumption behavior.

IN PRESS

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Co-developed the research topic, conceptual framework, and formulated the research hypotheses, D. J. N.; Designed the questionnaire and conducted survey data collecting among Generation Z respondents, D. J. N.; Identified and compiled relevant literature and references, and managed citations using Mendeley, D. J. N.; Processed and analyzed the data using PLS-SEM to test the proposed model and hypotheses, D. J. N.; Drafted the manuscript, including result, discussion, and references, and revised it based on reviewer feedback, D. J. N.; Coordinated manuscript submission to the publisher and ensured compliance with journal guidelines and revisions, D. J. N.; Developed the research framework, formulated hypotheses, and designed the analytical approach using PLS-SEM, A. R. E.; Collected primary data through an online survey targeting Generation Z respondents in the Jabodetabek area, A. R. E.; Designed and developed the full questionnaire instrument, including construct operationalization and measurement items, A. R. E.; Drafted, structured, and revised the manuscript, including interpretation of results and discussion, A. R. E.; Ensured alignment between theoretical constructs and questionnaire design to maintain measurement validity, A. R. E.; Contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, P. C.; Conducted survey data collection among Generation Z respondents, P. C.; Contributed to writing the literature review section of the manuscript, P. C.; Provided overall guidance and critical input in shaping the research design and conceptual framework, R. M. S.; Reviewed and provided substantial revisions to improve the quality and clarity of the manuscript, R. M. S.; and Supervised the research process and ensure the study met academic and publication standards, R. M. S.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting the findings of this study were collected through structured survey questionnaires from Generation Z respondents in the Jabodetabek area and contained sensitive individual-level information on attitudes, perceptions, and consumption behavior. In accordance with ethical approval and informed consent, respondents were assured of confidentiality and that their data would be used solely for academic purposes. Therefore, to protect privacy and comply with ethical research standards, the raw dataset cannot be made publicly available or shared in an open repository, although aggregated results and analytical outputs are presented in the article, and further data inquiries may be directed to the corresponding author.

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APPENDICES

Table 1 The Result of Reliability and Validity Measurement

No	Construct and Items		Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha (CA)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
1.	Ethical Awareness			0.919	0.935	0.673
	EA1.	I care about the impact of the fast fashion industry on the environment and natural resources.	0.829			
	EA2.	I support using clothing made from environmentally friendly or recycled materials.	0.867			
	EA3.	I am willing to reuse or repair clothes so they do not end up getting thrown away too quickly.	0.797			
	EA4.	Fast fashion production and promotion should be done in a way that does not damage the environment.	0.795			
	EA5.	I believe that individual actions, such as choosing sustainable clothing, can protect the environment.	0.820			
	EA6.	Reducing disposable clothing use can reduce fashion waste.	0.822			
	EA7.	Environmental awareness can drive more ethical purchasing decisions in fashion.	0.809			
2.	Ethical Consumption Literacy			0.923	0.937	0.650
	ECL1.	I understand that choosing modest clothing can reduce environmental damage.	0.809			
	ECL2.	I understand that fast fashion clothing can generate textile waste that is harmful to the environment.	0.840			
	ECL3.	When possible, I choose to purchase fast fashion products packaged with environmentally friendly materials.	0.818			
	ECL4.	I make every effort to purchase fast fashion products from brands I consider responsible for their consumers.	0.793			
	ECL5.	I understand that fast fashion brands that lack social responsibility can negatively impact their workers.	0.814			
	ECL6.	I am aware that some fast fashion brands use cheap and inhumane labor.	0.807			
	ECL7.	I understand that eco-friendly fashion products are typically more expensive because the ethical production process is more complex than non-eco-friendly products.	0.820			
	ECL8.	I have paid more for fast fashion products from brands I consider to have positive values or image, even though there are cheaper options.	0.745			
3.	Cognitive Dissonance			0.947	0.955	0.728
	CD1.	After buying fast fashion clothing, I feel uncomfortable.	0.838			
	CD2.	After buying fast fashion clothing, I feel upset.	0.840			
	CD3.	I doubt whether I really need the fast fashion clothing.	0.855			
	CD4.	I wonder if I make the right choice when purchasing fast fashion products.	0.891			
	CD5.	I wonder whether I am doing the right thing when purchasing fast fashion clothing.	0.873			
	CD6.	After buying fast fashion clothing, I wonder if I have been deceived.	0.853			
	CD7.	After buying fast fashion clothing, I wonder whether the brand misleads me through its information or advertising.	0.850			
	CD8.	After buying fast fashion clothing, I feel unsure whether the purchase is truly beneficial for me.	0.824			

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4	Social Norms			0.963	0.971	0.870
	SN1.	Most of my family members buy fast fashion clothing.	0.917			
	SN2.	Most of my close friends, whom I consider important, also buy fast fashion clothing.	0.929			
	SN3.	Family members whose opinions are important to me will support my decision to buy fast fashion clothing.	0.937			
	SN4.	My close friends, who are important to me, will support my decision to buy fast fashion clothing.	0.944			
	SN5.	Society in general will support my decision to buy fast fashion clothing.	0.936			
5	Active Social Media Use			0.838	0.901	0.752
	ASU1.	Social media is my primary source for finding out about the latest trends and collections from fast fashion brands.	0.811			
	ASU2.	I frequently see promotional content, reviews, or influencer posts about fast fashion products on social media.	0.619*			
	ASU3.	I see influencers on social media promoting fast fashion products or certain clothing styles.	0.659*			
	ASU4.	I follow fast fashion accounts, brands, or influencers on social media.	0.841			
	ASU5.	I use social media to find style inspiration from fast fashion brands.	0.883			
6	Fast Fashion Consumption Behavior			0.969	0.973	0.802
	FCB1.	I am interested in fast fashion clothing.	0.892			
	FCB2.	I feel that fast fashion clothing suits my style and personality.	0.912			
	FCB3.	I think buying fast fashion clothing is a practical and profitable decision.	0.923			
	FCB4.	I often search for information about fast fashion products on social media.	0.898			
	FCB5.	I am ready to buy new fast fashion clothing when there is an interesting trend.	0.914			
	FCB6.	I try to keep up with new trends by regularly purchasing fast fashion clothing.	0.882			
	FCB7.	I plan to continue wearing fast fashion clothing despite being aware of its environmental impact.	0.816			
	FCB8.	I consider myself a fast fashion consumer.	0.900			
	FCB9.	I frequently buy fast fashion clothing, especially when there are promotions or new trends.	0.919			

Note: * means excluded from the research.

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Table 2 Results of Discriminant Validity (Cross-Loading)

Indicator	CD	EA	ECL	ASU	SN	FCB
CD1	0.838	0.404	0.521	-0.142	-0.319	-0.352
CD2	0.840	0.363	0.454	-0.002	-0.168	-0.201
CD3	0.855	0.452	0.554	-0.091	-0.329	-0.385
CD4	0.891	0.471	0.577	-0.112	-0.331	-0.389
CD5	0.873	0.487	0.598	-0.134	-0.302	-0.357
CD6	0.853	0.463	0.525	-0.042	-0.166	-0.202
CD7	0.850	0.470	0.528	-0.010	-0.179	-0.196
CD8	0.824	0.523	0.583	-0.073	-0.238	-0.256
EA1	0.432	0.829	0.719	-0.210	-0.312	-0.341
EA2	0.485	0.867	0.736	-0.155	-0.259	-0.258
EA3	0.422	0.797	0.651	-0.085	-0.125	-0.139
EA4	0.418	0.795	0.686	-0.134	-0.232	-0.241
EA5	0.403	0.820	0.666	-0.029	-0.221	-0.212
EA6	0.460	0.822	0.713	-0.122	-0.210	-0.224
EA7	0.445	0.809	0.711	-0.122	-0.287	-0.287
ECL1	0.495	0.707	0.809	-0.157	-0.402	-0.423
ECL2	0.519	0.705	0.840	-0.168	-0.330	-0.347
ECL3	0.490	0.734	0.818	-0.217	-0.376	-0.395
ECL4	0.491	0.761	0.793	-0.178	-0.303	-0.331
ECL5	0.510	0.717	0.814	-0.203	-0.351	-0.379
ECL6	0.569	0.627	0.807	-0.117	-0.292	-0.356
ECL7	0.549	0.675	0.820	-0.162	-0.381	-0.434
ECL8	0.498	0.580	0.745	-0.211	-0.417	-0.442
ASU1	-0.029	-0.097	-0.149	0.818	0.309	0.332
ASU4	-0.082	-0.088	-0.135	0.857	0.347	0.397
ASU5	-0.115	-0.189	-0.256	0.923	0.506	0.558
SN1	-0.256	-0.263	-0.379	0.395	0.917	0.801
SN2	-0.294	-0.254	-0.393	0.424	0.929	0.849
SN3	-0.278	-0.265	-0.419	0.465	0.937	0.853
SN4	-0.316	-0.307	-0.459	0.434	0.944	0.875
SN5	-0.277	-0.266	-0.414	0.445	0.936	0.836
FCB1	-0.373	-0.261	-0.438	0.432	0.844	0.892
FCB2	-0.325	-0.214	-0.397	0.484	0.838	0.912
FCB3	-0.312	-0.230	-0.413	0.461	0.845	0.923
FCB4	-0.327	-0.256	-0.427	0.485	0.847	0.898
FCB5	-0.332	-0.275	-0.446	0.479	0.825	0.914
FCB6	-0.256	-0.286	-0.422	0.465	0.779	0.882
FCB7	-0.301	-0.355	-0.466	0.403	0.727	0.816
FCB8	-0.293	-0.263	-0.428	0.441	0.777	0.900
FCB9	-0.311	-0.302	-0.470	0.489	0.797	0.919

Note: Ethical Awareness (EA), Ethical Consumption Literacy (ECL), Cognitive Dissonance (CD), Social Norms (SN), Active Social Media Use (ASU), and Fast Fashion Consumption Behavior (FCB).

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Table 3 Hypothesis Testing Results

Relationship		Path Coefficient (β)	T-Value	P-Value	Result	Decision
H1	Ethical Awareness → Fast Fashion Consumption Behavior	0.153	2.131	0.033	Positive, Significant	Not Supported
H2	Ethical Consumption Literacy → Fast Fashion Consumption Behavior	-0.206	3.441	0.001	Negative, Significant	Supported
H3	Ethical Awareness → Cognitive Dissonance	-0.039	0.481	0.630	Negative, Not Significant	Not Supported
H4	Ethical Consumption Literacy → Cognitive Dissonance	0.673	8.121	0.000	Positive, Significant	Supported
H5	Cognitive Dissonance → Fast Fashion Consumption Behavior	-0.053	1.920	0.055	Negative, Not Significant	Not supported
H6	Ethical Awareness → Cognitive Dissonance → Fast Fashion Consumption Behavior (Mediation Effect)	0.002	0.400	0.689	Positive, Not Significant	Not supported
H7	Ethical Consumption Literacy → Cognitive Dissonance → Fast Fashion Consumption Behavior (Mediation Effect)	-0.036	1.784	0.075	Negative, Not Significant	Not supported
H8	Social Norms × Ethical Awareness → Fast Fashion Consumption Behavior	-0.057	1.009	0.313	Negative, Not Significant	Not supported
H9	Active Social Media Use × Ethical Consumption Literacy → Fast Fashion Consumption Behavior	0.080	2.185	0.029	Positive, Significant	Supported

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