



e-ISSN: 2550-1569

Available online at  
<https://myjms.mohe.gov.my/index.php/IJSMS>

International Journal of Service Management and Sustainability  
10(1) 2025, 87 – 105.

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**International  
Journal of Service  
Management and  
Sustainability  
(IJSMSust)**

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# Driving Sustainability in Fashion: Examining Apparel Purchasing Behaviour in an Emerging Market

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 19 January 2025

Revised 1 March 2025

Accepted 11 March 2025

Online first

Published 31 March 2025

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### Keywords:

Sustainability

Green Purchasing Behaviour

PLS-SEM

Green Purchase Intention

Stimulus-Organism-Behavior-

Consequence (SOBC) theory

DOI:10.24191/ijms.v10i1.24217

### Citation in APA:

Ravichandran, J., Leong, C., Lim, T., Bibiana, C. Y. L., & Fung, C. (2025). Driving sustainability in fashion: examining apparel purchasing behaviour in an emerging market *International Journal of Service Management and Sustainability*, 10(1), 87 – 105.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors determining the green purchasing behaviour of sustainable apparel products. This study employed Stimulus–Organism–Behaviour–Consequences (SOBC) theory, in which green product attributes (stimulus), perceived effectiveness (organism), green labelling satisfaction (organism) and green purchase intention (behaviour) were used to predict green purchasing behaviour (consequences). A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from the selected respondents. A total of 358 sets of questionnaires were analysed using partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings revealed that green product attributes predicted perceived effectiveness and green labelling satisfaction. Both perceived effectiveness and green labelling satisfaction were predictors for green purchase intention. Green purchase behaviour was determined by green purchase intention. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of purchasing behaviour in the green context and recommends business strategies for practitioners.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The rise in environmental consciousness has engendered a favorable transformation in consumer perspectives regarding environmentally sustainable products (Alzghoul et al., 2024). The clothing and apparel industry generated approximately 18.6 million tons of apparel waste in 2020, with most of it being discarded in landfills (Fibre2Fashion, 2020). Green consumers are starting to care more about protecting their lives and means of livelihood (Costa et al., 2021). Certain consumers go as far as examining raw materials, brand suppliers, and seek transparency and ethical compliance in the supply chain (Fazrin et al., 2023). Environmental issues are more prevalent in developed nations, while the level of environmental concern in most developing countries is still in its early stages (Al Mamun et al., 2020). Governments across the region have introduced policies to address these issues. For example, China's Green Development Guidelines promote circular economy practices (Zhao et al., 2022), while India's Extended Producer Responsibility regulations require manufacturers to manage textile waste (Paramanik & Mahanty, 2023). These policies align with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by encouraging sustainable resource use. Severe climate change significantly impacts on the Earth's natural state, giving rise to serious challenges for human existence and necessitating modifications to traditional lifestyles (Arli et al., 2018; Ravindra et al., 2023).

Given the increasing pressure and global attention on socially responsible conduct, sustainability has transitioned from an option to a critical priority and a fundamental strategic approach. Practitioners and policymakers have recognised the significance of shifting towards the production and adoption of ecologically sustainable products within the apparel industry (Haq & Alam, 2023; McNeill & Venter, 2019). These environmentally sustainable products, referred to as green products, encompass clothing and fashion items produced with careful considerations of environmental, social, and economic factors (Su et al., 2019). The concept of "sustainable apparel products" pertains to textile goods that integrate social, environmental, and fair-trade principles while ensuring sweatshop-free working conditions and minimising harm to both the environment and workers (Bielawska & Grebosz-Krawczyk, 2021; Bakış & Kitapçı, 2023). These products are alternatively referred to as "organic," "sustainable," "green" (Varshneya et al., 2017), or "eco-friendly fashion products" (Obaidullah, 2024).

In emerging markets such as Malaysia, the issue of environmental awareness has gained significant prominence. It necessitates a comprehensive investigation into consumer behaviour. Malaysia's apparel and textile industry, valued at US\$44 billion, generates a daily output of 2 million kilogrammes of textile waste. The Malaysian government has recently implemented various initiatives to encourage the adoption of environmentally sustainable practices among consumers and industries (Ali et al., 2020). According to Hasbullah et al. (2022), the global market insight and information group TNS conducted an online survey showing that approximately 35% of Malaysian respondents indicated that "green" promotions by companies influence purchasing decisions. Nevertheless, an intention-behaviour gap suggests that consumers' environmental concerns and manufacturers' sustainable apparel promotions have not fully translated to purchasing decisions (McNeill & Venter, 2019). This disparity is linked to lower consumer acceptance of sustainable clothing (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021), and prompting scholars have called for further empirical research to identify solutions (Diddi et al., 2019).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promote responsible production and consumption by improving consumption patterns and resource management (Al Mamun et al., 2020). The apparel and textile industry has great potential to lead to environmental preservation due to its scale and economic importance. However, the sustainable apparel industry is still in its early stages and represents less than 10% of the worldwide clothing market (Jacobs et al., 2018). The academic community has also recognized the contradictory situation where sustainable apparel is gaining popularity, yet the actual purchasing behaviour remains slow. Scholars focus on identifying the factors impacting green consumer behaviour due to the discrepancy between attitudes and actions (Rama et al., 2024; Weiderhold & Martinex, 2018).

From the lens of generational consumer behaviour, Abrar et al. (2021) found that environmentally conscious Generation Y consumers are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products. Many businesses target this group due to their purchasing power (Lim et al., 2016). Generation Y has much substantial disposable income (Lim et al., 2015; Peiris & Herath, 2023) as this demographic exhibits relatively high spending power (Muda et al., 2016). Additionally, each generation demonstrates distinctive characteristics in terms of lifestyle and purchasing attitude (Ting et al., 2018).

To close the gap, the current study responds to this research need by examining the determinants of green apparel purchasing power. Understanding the motivations behind personal purchases of environmentally friendly apparel can yield valuable information about the buying habits of sustainability-focused retail customers. Additionally, this understanding could shed light on factors affecting the gap between positive attitudes towards sustainable clothing and actual purchasing behaviour. It is important to conduct more research to better understand the factors shaping consumer purchasing decisions in this sector. For example, while studies have explored the connection between satisfaction and labelling as influences on general green purchasing behaviour (Aitken et al., 2020), there remains a lack of research specifically examining these concepts within the sustainable apparel context.

Most currently available research concentrates on developed countries, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom (Albloushy & Hiller Connell, 2019). Conversely, limited studies have explored sustainable apparel consumption in developing countries. Mohd Suki and Mohd Suki (2019) emphasised the importance of further research to elucidate unresolved questions. The lack of extensive research on sustainable garment purchasing in non-Western settings has created a knowledge gap regarding the various factors influencing customers' green apparel purchasing intentions in developing countries (Laheri et al., 2024).

Malaysia was chosen for the study because of its growing reputation for green technology and environmental consciousness (Isa et al., 2021). According to Thyroff and Kilbourne (2017), Malaysian consumers are ecologically conscious due to their informed perspective on environmental issues. They exhibit many pro-environmental and ethical consumption behaviours, suggesting that this context offers valuable insights (Tong et al., 2023).

The current study addresses the research gap from a theoretical perspective by proposing a new model based on the Stimuli-Organism-Behavioural Response-Consequence (SOBC) model (Davis & Luthans, 1980). This study aims to identify factors influencing consumers' green purchasing behaviour towards sustainable apparel based on the SOBC model. In addition, this study aids marketers in gaining a deeper understanding of the green market potential and consumers' propensity to engage in green purchasing behaviours.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Stimulus-Organism-Behaviour-Consequences (SOBC) Theory**

The current study proposed an SOBC-based research model. The paradigm, suggested by Davis and Luthans (1980) and based on Social Learning Theory, advances the Stimulus-Organism-Response or SOR (Kim et al., 2020) and Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence (ABC; Surratt et al., 1969) models. The SOBC framework enables the examination of environmental–cognitive–behavioural events. The SOBC model states that environmental factors (S) affect people's or organisms' internal states (O), which determine their behavioural reactions (B) and contingent consequences (C) (Panda, 2024). SOBC extends the SOR model by including consequences of past behavioural actions (C) to represent the reciprocal nature of environmental events (Davis & Luthans, 1980). Davis and Luthans (1980) argued that ignoring the reciprocal nature of ecological events would limit behavioural explanations by ignoring the interaction effect between the environment, individuals, and behaviour, which social learning theorists emphasise.

Talwar et al. (2021) examined organic food purchasing behaviour using the SOBC paradigm, while Tan et al. (2023) examined consumers' engagement with new media. This study believes SOBC is a suitable theoretical lens for this research because it has been used in other pro-environmental contexts and can account for more influences on behaviour and its consequences. SOBC theory is applied to marketing, with behavioural intentions as "behaviour" and behavioural outcomes as "consequence" (Dhir et al., 2021a). Thus, SOBC is a valuable model for assessing consumer behaviour. The theoretical foundation strengthens the research model.

## 2.2 Green Product Attribute

The stimuli associated with green product attributes encompass environmental marketing activities designed to implement marketing strategies that advance and safeguard ecological well-being. Adopting green product attributes enables businesses to ensure their success by engaging in product innovation, pricing, retailing, and promotion activities to meet consumer demands and minimise environmental adverse effects (Hao et al., 2019). Marketers have consistently endeavoured to offer a blend of product characteristics that can augment the perceived value of their offerings (Hanaysha et al., 2021). Consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by the perceived value they receive from products, and the attributes of the products play a role in delivering this value and satisfaction (Wang et al., 2018). These attributes significantly shape their intentions to purchase (Kim & Kang, 2018). Leong et al. (2024) stated that before consuming a product, consumers evaluate the product attributes such as the colour, price, and size. Past literature has examined the apparel industry's product attributes, including the store atmosphere, physical facilities, merchandise and salesperson characteristics (Hasan, 2018). Such attributes affect the purchasing intention during the decision-making process.

Based on the SOBC model, diverse factors have been employed to act as organisms (O), which they later involve in the psychological process and lead to a response. For instance, the state of enjoyment or flow experience has been used to act as the organism to explore consumer buying behaviour (Huo et al., 2023). Zhang and Phang (2024) also used perceived hedonic value as an organism to predict customer attachment toward luxury fashion. For the current study, perceived effectiveness and green labelling satisfaction have been employed to predict organisms that reflect the consequences. Both predictors are highlighted as powerful tools to represent significant psychological assets (Dai and Guo, 2024; Ferreira, 2019).

Owlia and Aspinwall (1998) argued that perceived effectiveness (PE) is a significant psychological asset. It is anticipated that individuals exhibiting elevated levels of positive affect will respond effectively when confronted with information on environmental degradation and strategies for its mitigation. Chakraborty et al. (2022) suggested that PE is a closely related to the concept of Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) as proposed in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen (1991). Positive psychology, commonly known as PE, is a concept that encompasses the belief in one's ability to exert a positive influence on the outcomes of various challenges (Chakraborty et al., 2022). Multiple researchers (Chakraborty et al., 2022) define PE as the belief that individuals can exert control over the results of their actions in a favourable way. Hence, it is hypothesised that:

H1: Product attributes have a positive association with the perceived effectiveness of consumers of sustainable apparel.

Consumer satisfaction is the psychological state or emotional response that occurs after a consumer has made a purchase decision. It is the result of comparing the consumer's confirmed expectations with their initial expectations (Kim & Kim, 2024). The level of satisfaction that consumers experience when purchasing a green product is directly related to their satisfaction with the information provided on the product label at the time of purchase (Gelderman et al., 2021). Labelling affects consumers' perceptions of product appearance, texture, and content, making it a crucial factor in purchasing decisions. Academic studies have shown the importance of labelling in consumer decision-making (Coelho et al., 2019). This study posits that consumer choice is significantly impacted by both emotions and conscience, particularly

in the context of green products. It suggests that satisfaction with labelling plays a pivotal role in shaping consumers' purchase intentions. Hence, the present study hypothesises the following:

H2: Product attributes positively associated with green labelling satisfaction among consumers of sustainable apparel.

### **2.3 Perceived Effectiveness (PE)**

According to Dai and Guo (2024), PE refers to the domain-specific self-confidence that customers possess to resolve a given challenge successfully. Yarimoglu and Binboga (2019) state that individuals who believe their actions have the potential to address a problem tend to exhibit higher levels of confidence and engage in actions to resolve the issue. Existing studies on pro-environmental consumer behaviour have consistently demonstrated a favourable correlation between perceived consumer effectiveness and consumers' intentions. Similarly, the survey conducted by Bong Ko and Jin (2017) revealed that when customers perceive purchasing green garments as easy, they develop a stronger inclination towards engaging in such behaviour. Similarly, Han (2015) and Jaiswal and Kant (2018) have documented a favourable correlation between consumers' PE and their aspirations to embrace green consumerism. Previous research has examined the correlation between PE and purchase intentions regarding environmentally friendly items. As such, the present study hypothesises the following:

H3: Perceived Effectiveness has a positive association with green purchase intention.

### **2.4 Green Labelling Satisfaction**

Consumer satisfaction is based on their expectations of the product's capabilities and performance (Faerber et al., 2020). The positive emotional state experienced after achieving desired goals with a product or service is called satisfaction (Lestari & Syah, 2022). Consumer satisfaction is extensively studied in marketing research, as Faerber et al. (2020) show. Labelling satisfaction has often been overlooked, especially in pro-environmental behaviour (Aitken et al., 2020). A recent study on sustainable apparel shows that labelling satisfaction is essential for environmental awareness (Dhir et al., 2021a). Satisfaction predicts consumer intentions which makes it an important variable.

A comprehensive review of green marketing literature shows that consumer satisfaction has received the most attention (Aitken et al., 2020), while labelling satisfaction has received less attention. Labelling satisfaction's role in environmental sustainability is therefore urgently investigated. Hence, the present study hypothesises the following:

H4: Green labelling satisfaction has a positive association with green purchase intention.

### **2.5 Green Purchase Intentions and Green Purchasing Behaviour**

According to Ajzen (1991), intention is the psychological phenomenon that makes a person feel obligated to respond. According to Sharma (2021), purchase intentions are consumers' intentions to buy eco-friendly products to help the environment. To clarify, consumers who purchase products and services are concerned about both the product's eco-friendliness and the manufacturing process's environmental impact (Wang, 2014). Wu et al. (2018) found a positive correlation between purchasing intentions and eco-friendly product consumption. Jaiswal and Kant (2018) found that intentions to buy green affect actual green purchasing behaviour. Purchase intention is consumers' likelihood to buy a product or service in the future (Martins et al., 2019).

The SOBC model suggests that purchase intention is a behavioural response. This reaction leads to purchasing. Consistent with previous research on pro-environmental behaviours, this study expects that consumers' purchase intentions towards green garments will be linked to their purchasing behaviour. Based on the preceding discussion, the present research hypothesises the following:

H5: Green purchase intentions have a positive association with green purchasing.

Based on the discussion from the literature review and the hypotheses developed, the proposed research framework is presented in Figure 1.

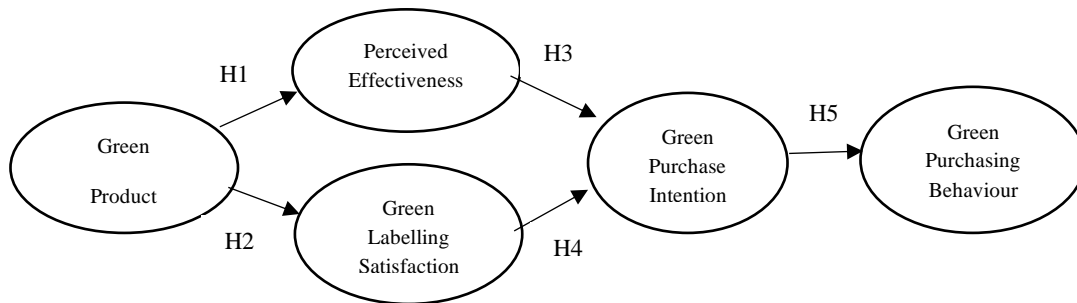


Fig. 1. Research Framework

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study embraces a quantitative methodology. A survey was conducted to collect data and test the hypotheses. The data were collected through an online questionnaire. The key advantages of online surveys include lower costs and time investment, the ability to easily reach a wide audience of potential respondents, and the option to ensure participant anonymity (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). A total of 39 sets of questionnaires were distributed to the target respondents for pilot testing to determine if there were any notable difficulties experienced by the respondents in understanding the survey questions and providing adequate responses. After the pilot testing, the questionnaire was distributed via multiple online platforms to engage the respondents. Instant messaging applications such as WeChat, WhatsApp, Telegram, and others were used to disseminate questionnaire links. The duration for questionnaire distribution was one week in November 2023, during which the gathered data underwent a screening process.

Concerning the sampling strategy, a purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents. This study concentrated on Generation Y, comprising individuals born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s, to resonate with the acknowledgement of this demographic's pivotal role in molding contemporary consumer trends. The target population was delineated by the age range characteristic of Generation Y, with a particular emphasis on Malaysian residents. Thus, only the respondents born from 1980 to 2000 were selected as Generation Y (Hendricks & Cope, 2013). Questions about the birth year were included to filter the selected respondents. The sample size of this study was determined using the power analytic procedure proposed by Cohen (1988). Therefore, G\*Power was used to identify the minimum sample size required for a maximum of five predictors, a power of 80%, and an effect size of 0.15 was 92. A total of 358 respondents participated and thus meeting the minimum sample size requirement.

#### 3.1 Instruments

A self-administered questionnaire was utilized to collect primary data. The survey comprised three parts. Section A focused on demographics, Section B examined behaviour determinants, and Section C included questions regarding green purchase intention and behaviour. Section A's questions captured the respondents' profiles, such as gender, age, education, and monthly income. Section B (influencing factors) and Section C (green purchasing intention and behaviour) were the questions designed on a five-point Likert scale, where one indicated "strongly disagree" and five designated "strongly agree".

The measurements for variables were adapted from reliable sources such as green product attribute from Chakraborty et al. (2022) with the composite reliability (CR) value of 0.947; perceived effectiveness (CR = 0.86), green labelling satisfaction (CR = 0.80) and green purchasing behaviour (CR = 0.77) from Dhir et al. (2020a) as well as green purchase intention from Chaudhary (2018) with CR value of 0.94. The items for each of the variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Measurements of Variables

Variable	Item	Source
Green Product Attribute	PA1: I find the price of sustainable apparel products to be valuable information.	Chakraborty et al. (2022)
	PA2: I regularly look for the price tags on sustainable apparel products.	
	PA3: I use internet sources to compare the prices of sustainable apparel products.	
Perceived Effectiveness	PE1: It is valuable for individuals to do anything about protecting the environment.	Dhir et al. (2021a)
	PE2: An individual's behaviour affects pollution and natural resource problems. Therefore, it does make a difference in what they do.	
Green Labelling Satisfaction	LS1: Most sustainable apparel products are clearly labelled, so I can tell whether they are green from the packaging.	Dhir et al. (2021a)
	LS2: When shopping, I can easily distinguish between sustainable apparel products and non-sustainable apparel products.	
	LS3: It is easy to identify sustainable apparel product labels.	
	LS4: I am confident I understand sustainable apparel product labelling information.	
Green Purchase Intention	PI1: I will consider buying sustainable apparel products because they are less polluting in the coming times.	Chaudhary (2018)
	PI2: I will consider switching to an environmentally friendly brand for ecological reasons.	
	PI3: I plan to spend more on sustainable and conventional apparel products.	
Green Purchasing Behaviour	PB5: I buy apparel products made of organically grown natural fibers.	Dhir et al. (2021a)
	PB6: I buy apparel products with low impact or no dye processing.	
	PB7: I buy apparel products with environmentally friendly labelling or packaging techniques.	

The collected data were analyzed using SmartPLS, an inclusive software program that performs partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to examine the developed hypotheses (Sarstedt & Cheah, 2019). PLS-SEM was selected for the analysis as it is well-suited for information science and social science studies, where the constructs contribute to forming a composite measurement model (Hwang et al., 2019).

#### 4.0 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The respondents' profiles are presented in Table 2. A total of 170 (47.5%) of the respondents were male, while 188 (52.5%) were female. The respondents' income levels varied. The largest group, comprising 167 (46.6%) of respondents, earned between RM 3,501 and RM 5,500 monthly. This is followed by 107 (29.9%) who earned RM 1,501 to RM 3,500. The smallest group earned below RM 1,500, which was 2.5%. A significant majority, 289 (80.7%) of the respondents, held a bachelor's degree or a professional

certificates. This was followed by postgraduates (11.5%), diploma holders (5.0%), and others (2.8%), including those with SPM and STPM qualifications.

Table 2. Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	170	47.5
	Female	188	52.5
Monthly Income	Below RM 1,500	9	2.5
	RM 1,501 - RM 3,500	107	29.9
	RM 3,501 - RM 5,500	167	46.6
	RM 5,501 - RM 7,500	46	12.8
	Above RM 7,501	29	8.1
Education Level	Diploma	18	5.0
	Bachelor's Degree / Professional Certificates	289	80.7
	Postgraduates (E.g. Master, PhD)	41	11.5
	Others	10	2.8

The reliability and validity of the measurement items were cross-checked to assess the measurement model. As shown in Table 3 exhibited, all loadings for indicators exceeded 0.708, ensuring indicator reliability. All constructs' average variance extracted (AVE) were greater than 0.5, confirming convergent reliability. The discriminant validity of all constructs was verified via the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlation (HTMT). The results of HTMT were presented in Table 4, all HTMT values were below the threshold of 0.85 (Kline, 2015), confirming discriminant validity.

Table 3. Convergent Validity

Variables	Items	Loadings	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Green Labelling Satisfaction (LS)	LS1	0.975	0.991	0.963
	LS2	0.987		
	LS3	0.989		
	LS4	0.974		
Green Product Attribute (PA)	PA1	0.898	0.932	0.821
	PA2	0.933		
	PA3	0.885		
Green Purchasing Behaviour (PB)	PB5	0.984	0.982	0.949
	PB6	0.957		
	PB7	0.982		
Perceived Effectiveness (PE)	PE1	0.993	0.993	0.986
	PE2	0.993		
Green Purchase Intention (PI)	PI1	0.994	0.994	0.982
	PI2	0.988		
	PI3	0.990		



Table 4. HTMT Ratio of Correlation

Variables	LS	PA	PB	PE	PI
LS					
PA	0.878				
PB	0.744	0.716			
PE	0.873	0.835	0.676		
PI	0.894	0.843	0.757	0.898	

Note: LS: Green Labelling Satisfaction; PA: Green Product Attribute; PB: Green Purchasing Behaviour; PE: Perceived Effectiveness; PI: Green Purchase Intention.

The analysis continued with the assessment of the structural model. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used to identify the existence of multicollinearity. Referring to Table 5, all VIF values below the threshold of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2017), indicating no collinearity issues. Besides, the green product attribute explained 62.4% of the variance in perceived effectiveness with an  $R^2$  value of 0.624. The  $R^2$  of 0.691 indicated that green product attributes explained 69.1% of variance in green labelling satisfaction. Both perceived effectiveness and green labelling satisfaction collectively explained 84.3% of the variance in green purchase intention, as the  $R^2$  value is 0.843. Green purchase intention explained 55.6% of the variance in green purchasing behaviour with the  $R^2$  value of 0.556. The results of  $Q^2$  values also indicated the predictive relevance of the constructs, as all the  $Q^2$  values were greater than zero. The level of effect size ( $f^2$ ) was also presented in Table 5. All of the constructs were showed substantial effect size.

Table 5. Path Coefficient and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	T statistics	P values	Interval Estimate		VIF	$f^2$	$R^2$	$Q^2$
					LL	UL				
H1	PA -> PE	0.790	24.101	0.000	0.717	0.847	1.000	1.661	0.624	0.622
H2	PA -> LS	0.831	30.141	0.000	0.772	0.880	1.000	2.240	0.691	0.689
H3	PE -> PI	0.487	4.744	0.000	0.277	0.683	3.893	0.388	0.843	0.635
H4	LS -> PI	0.464	4.616	0.000	0.266	0.660	3.893	0.352		
H5	PI -> PB	0.746	16.461	0.000	0.649	0.826	1.000	1.253	0.556	0.440

Note: LS: Green Labelling Satisfaction; PA: Green Product Attribute; PB: Green Purchasing Behaviour; PE: Perceived Effectiveness; PI: Green Purchase Intention.

Green product attribute ( $\beta = 0.790$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) was positively related to perceived effectiveness. Thus, H1 was supported. Green product attribute ( $\beta = 0.831$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) was also found to influence green labelling satisfaction positively. H2 was also supported. Both perceived effectiveness ( $\beta = 0.487$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and green labelling satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.464$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were significantly and positively related to green purchase intention, supporting H3 and H4 respectively. Green purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.746$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) positively impacted green purchase behaviour, providing support for H5.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

In this study, all the proposed hypotheses were supported. Green product attributes were found to influence perceived effectiveness positively. The results were aligned with the findings of Griffith and Chen (2004), which state that product characteristics are essential in contributing to the effective use of marketing strategies. As customers perceive product attributes as the additional benefits provided by the manufacturers, this improves product evaluation (Mukherjee & Hoyer, 2001). Similarly, green product

attributes were positively associated with green labelling satisfaction. The finding is supported by the study of Van der Colff et al. (2016), which states that attributes of labels affect consumers' satisfaction with food labels. When the green product attribute meets the expectations of pro-environmental customers, they tend to be more satisfied with the green information provided on the labels.

This study also found that perceived effectiveness was positively related to green purchase intention. The result was consistent with the findings of Jaiswal and Kant (2018) and Park and Lin (2020). This is because if the pro-environmental customers believe their actions could significantly contribute to solving environmental issues, they will purchase green apparel. However, the result was contradicted with the finding of Neumann et al. (2021) whose participants were from 29 different countries. They found that perceived consumer effectiveness did not predict purchase intention, and consumers were not ready to purchase sustainable clothing. On the other hand, while consumers assert, that they possess sufficient environmental knowledge, they often lack product-specific information (Aitken & Watkins, 2014), which may lead to lower satisfaction with labeling (Dhir et al., 2021b). However, green labelling satisfaction positively impacted green purchase intention in this study. This aligns with Dhir et al. (2021a), which found that satisfied customers spread positive word of mouth about a company, subsequently leading to the intention to purchase green apparel. Contrary to Morwitz et al. (2007), who found that purchase intentions does not always lead to actual purchase behavior of sustainable products, this study found that green purchase intention led to green purchasing behaviour, supporting Dhir et al. (2021a). The desire to save the environment will lead to the willingness to purchase pro-environmental products which is signaled through purchase intention (Sharma et al., 2020). Thus, consumers are also concerned about the environmental implications linked to the products (Wei et al., 2017). When consumers' motivation to protect the environment and their concern about the environmental impact of products are combined, green purchase intention is linked to green purchasing behaviour. The benefits of products (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002) as well as purchases that could fulfill needs and self-interest are also taken into consideration (Park & Lin, 2020).

### **5.1 Theoretical Implications**

This research significantly advances the theoretical understanding of sustainable apparel purchasing behaviour among Generation Y in Malaysia. It offers profound insights into consumer behaviour in the sustainable fashion domain by integrating the crucial role of marketing strategy into the SOBC theory. Elucidating the interplay between product attributes, perceived effectiveness, green labelling satisfaction, green trust, and purchase intentions, this study enhances the current literature with a more refined comprehension of what drives environmentally conscious purchasing decisions. It highlights the pivotal roles of product attributes, perceived effectiveness, and green labelling satisfaction in shaping green purchase intention and, subsequently, green purchasing behaviour. It also extends the dynamics of green consumerism in the context of Generation Y in an emerging economy. Furthermore, the study bridges a critical theoretical gap by providing empirical evidence for the 'green gap' phenomenon which is the disparity between sustainable purchase intentions and actual behaviour. It enriches the fields of marketing and consumer behaviour by offering a platform for future research.

### **5.2 Practical Implications**

From a practical perspective, this research provides critical insights for marketers, manufacturers, and policymakers in promoting sustainable apparel. Identifying product attributes and labelling satisfaction as key drivers of purchase intentions highlight actionable strategies for businesses. Companies can enhance green product features through transparent and detailed labelling and effectively communicate these qualities to consumers to foster stronger purchase intentions. In emerging markets like Malaysia, businesses can enhance consumer trust by providing transparent eco-labels that highlight green product attributes, such as organic fabrics or energy-efficient production methods. For policymakers, the findings emphasize the necessity of implementing stringent regulations and standards for sustainable apparel to ensure credible product claims. Establishing mandatory eco-labelling frameworks and third-party certification systems can

enhance transparency and prevent greenwashing. Collaborations with industry stakeholders to develop national sustainability standards can further promote responsible business practices. Such measures can strengthen consumer confidence and drive wider adoption of sustainable products. Moreover, the study underlines the importance of educational campaigns to raise awareness about the environmental impact of conventional apparel and the benefits of sustainable alternatives among consumers. Such initiatives can play a pivotal role in bridging the intention-behavior gap to align consumers' environmental values with their purchasing decisions. By leveraging these insights, businesses and policymakers can create an impactful approach to expanding the sustainable apparel market. Collectively, these efforts can drive environmentally responsible consumer practices and behaviour, particularly among the younger generation in Malaysia, and contribute to a broader cultural shift toward sustainable consumption.

### **5.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study provides valuable insights into Generation Y's purchasing behaviours for sustainable apparel in Malaysia by, emphasising the influence of product attributes, perceived effectiveness, and green labelling satisfaction. However, several limitations must be acknowledged to contextualise these findings. First, the sampling was limited to a single geographical location, introducing social desirability bias and external validity challenges. The unique social and cultural structure of Malaysia, distinct from other developing and developed countries, limits the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, the study did not incorporate the role of cultural factors in shaping consumer behavior, despite evidence that cultural values significantly influence green purchasing habits (Hussain & Huang, 2022). Also, the current study only assesses the direct relationship based on the SOBC model. This study can include a mediator to look beyond the factors mediating the relationship and the factors predicting the purchasing behaviour. Cross-sectional design, capturing attitudes at one point in time, restricts understanding evolving consumer behaviours and trends (Zikmund, 2000). Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data increases the risk of response bias, potentially overstating eco-friendly behaviours. These limitations highlight the need for caution when applying these findings to broader contexts.

Future research should address these gaps to deepen the understanding of sustainable apparel consumption and its practical implications in an emerging market. Expanding demographic and geographic diversity, which is typical in many emerging markets, in sampling would improve the generalisability of findings, capturing variations in behaviour across cultural and socio-economic contexts. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how global environmental trends, market developments, and policy changes influence attitudes over time. This is particularly the case in the emerging market where many of these factors are still at the developmental stage. Moreover, exploring external factors such as technological advancements, marketing strategies, and the impact of social media on consumer perceptions could offer actionable recommendations for stakeholders. Investigating psychological concepts like cognitive dissonance and the intention behaviour gap would deepen understanding of why pro-environmental attitudes do not always translate into green purchases. A mediator can be included in the future study to examine the factors mediating the relationship and predicting purchasing behaviour.

In conclusion, this study provides critical insights into sustainable apparel purchasing behaviour among Generation Y in Malaysia by emphasising the importance of product attributes, perceived effectiveness, and green labelling satisfaction in shaping green purchase intentions. It highlights the 'green gap,' where pro-environmental intentions often do not translate into actual purchasing actions. It also illustrates the need for trust-building, effective communication, and consumer education to promote sustainable behaviours. While focused on a specific demographic, the findings contribute to the broader understanding of sustainable consumerism and offer actionable implications for stakeholders.

## 6.0 CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORS

The authors confirm equal contributions in each part of this work. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of this work to be submitted.

## 7.0 FUNDING

This work received no specific grant from any funding agency.

## 8.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

## 9.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work received no specific grant from any funding agency.

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