Consumer attitude and behavior in the ethical fashion industry

Exposé

Submitted by
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Abstract

Title: Consumer attitude and behavior in the ethical fashion industry

Keywords: Consumer, attitude, behavior, ethical fashion, attitude-behavior gap, France

Background: Over the last few years, increasing awareness and concerns in the ethical industry have been experienced. After a particular attention has been paid to the food industry, this understanding started to be expanded to the fashion industry. Indeed, the study of ethical apparel industry is gaining more and more stature on the literature as its impacts on environment are steadily increasing. To understand this industry, a special focus on the attitude and behavior of ethical fashion consumers is also given. However, a problem is raised: even if people are much more concerned about ethical fashion than it used to be, an attitude-behavior gap is noticed as people do not transform this consciousness into purchase.

Purpose: Therefore, the aim of the study is to provide a better knowledge of the ethical fashion consumption in the French market. The latter is done through an analysis of the different drivers and barriers that influence the attitude-behavior gap in the ethical apparel industry.

Method: The collection of qualitative and quantitative information will be done through an online questionnaire sent to the French market. The respondents will be between 18 and 30 years old.
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1. Introduction

Nowadays, one can observe that there is a global growth of people’s concerns regarding the environment. Individuals recognize the need to act differently in a world that suffers from the overconsumption of the human beings. This consciousness is noticeable with the purchases’ increase of ethical products, especially in the food industry. However, this trend is also gaining ground in the apparel industry. The ethical purchase of garments is predicted to rise in the mainstream society like the growth already experienced by the “green food and green cosmetics” industries (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012, p.177).

The mass consumption in the apparel industry has a crucial impact on environment. Bray (2009) stated that “European Union and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have highlighted that clothing are high impact accounting for 5-10% of the EUs total environmental impact”. The major effects on the environment are related to the use of pesticides that infects other products such as food for instance. Chemicals are also used in an extensive way which might have some repercussions on environment and human health. Furthermore, a lot of clothes are discarded as soon as people consider them too old or not trendy anymore. This increases the number of textiles wastes and damages the environment. The intense usage of machines and natural resources also causes noise, sound and air pollution (Challa, 2010).

In order to fight against these environmental impacts, there is a substantial development of the ethical fashion. According to Joergens, ethical fashion is defined as “fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labor conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton” (2006, p.361).

Nevertheless, it seems to be controversial to bind ethical and fashion since fashion is a fast-moving good. Indeed, the apparel industry is distinguished by “rapid changes in styles, novelty and mass consumption” (Shaw et al., 2006, p.430). Therefore, this notion appears to be conflicting to the ethical idea of consumption. In order to understand the ethical fashion consumption, it is undeniable that a study of buyers’ attitude and behavior is required. The theories of reasoned action and planned behavior help to acquire a better knowledge of consumer behavior. However, a “gap between what consumers say about the importance of ethical issues and what they do at the checkout counter” has been identified during the
purchase of ethical products (Auger and Devinney, 2007, p.361). Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the attitude-behavior gap in the fashion clothing industry with a special focus on the French market. While French consumers declare that they are enticed to buy products with the label “Made In France”, a better quality and less impact on environment, the ranking of the top three companies in France indicates the opposite. Indeed, the three firms Vivarte, KIABI Europe and Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) do represent the rapidly changes of collections at a reasonable price which points the paradox (Euromonitor International, 2013).

In order to reach the goal of the paper, a review of the previous literature is done. First of all, the attention is placed on a brief understanding of the fashion industry and consumers’ attitudes and behavior when purchasing garments. Then, an analysis of the so-called theory of reasoned action and theory of planned behavior is given. Afterwards, an examination of the factors that influence behavior when buying an ethical cloth is proceeded with the help of the modified theory of planned behavior. Subsequently, an evaluation of the gap that occurs between the attitude and behavior is made. Finally, a deep study of the French consumers’ attitude and behavior is made through questionnaire. According to the results, some conclusions are provided as well as tactics in order to develop the consumption.

2. Problem statement and research question

2.1 Problem statement

As previously mentioned, the attention is given to the French market as the latter lacks studies in the field. Indeed, the ethical apparel industry is a quite new phenomenon in France and only a small number of sources are available. Besides, as formerly discussed, an attitude-behavior gap in the ethical fashion French market is also identifiable.
2.2 Research question

The following research question was designed:

“What are the main drivers and barriers influencing the attitude-behavior gap in the ethical fashion in the French market?”

2.3 Hypotheses

In order to answer the research question, the following hypotheses should be verified thanks to the methodology.

Before going in depth in the attitude-behavior gap, a focus on one element which influences the intention is required. When analyzing British and German consumers, Joergens discovered that ethical awareness and concerns do not “significantly affect their purchase decisions” (2006, p.369). However it seems interesting to find out if this statement can be validated with the French population. Therefore the following hypotheses were designed:

**H1a:** Ethical awareness does not have a significant influence on the intention in the ethical fashion purchasing process.

**H1b:** Ethical concerns do not have a significant influence on the intention in the ethical fashion purchasing process.

Thanks to the theory of planned behavior, one is aware that attitude influences intention and then behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). However according to Shaw, Shiu, Hassan, Bekin, and Hogg (2007), the “attitude does not directly impact intention but rather required the motivational stage of desire” when it comes to the apparel industry (p.34). Niinimäki, (2010) confirmed that desire is a driver to reach the purchase. Thus, the following hypothesis was created:

**H2:** The presence of desire has a positive impact on the attitude-behavior gap in the ethical fashion purchasing process

According to Niinimäki (2010), ethical consumer commitment is a driver that leads to the purchase of eco-clothes. Gupta and Ogden (2006) added that the level of consumer involvement is a way to consolidate the attitude-behavior gap. As a
consequence, the following hypothesis was designed:

**H3:** A high level of consumer involvement has a positive impact on the attitude-behavior gap in the ethical fashion purchasing process.

As reported by Jägel, Keeling, Reppel, and Gruber (2012), individual values such as “value for money, image and well-being” are purchasing drivers in the ethical clothing industry (p.373). Moreover, thanks to the interviews realized by Sudbury and Böltner (2011) on young urban adults in United Kingdom and Germany, it has been found out that individuality maintains the attitude-behavior gap. Therefore, the hypothesis is:

**H4:** Individual values maintain the attitude-behavior gap in the ethical fashion purchasing process.

According to Hassan, Shaw, Shiu, Walsh, and Parry (2013), uncertainty plays a major role in the ethical consumption process. The more uncertainty is present the more difficult the purchase is. Thus, the following hypothesis was conceived:

**H5:** Uncertainty has a negative impact on the attitude-behavior gap in the ethical fashion purchasing process.

Many studies mentioned the fact that ethical consumption is influenced by the price (Chan & W.Y. Wong, 2012; Joergens, 2006). Therefore, the hypothesis is:

**H6:** Price has a negative influence on the attitude-behavior gap in the ethical fashion purchasing process.

3. Theoretical background

The theories of reasoned action and planned behavior were adopted in order to analyze and explain consumer behaviors in ethical contexts. The theory of reasoned action was designed for behavior under volitional control. It relies on the fact that the behavior results from the intention. The latter is then influenced, on one side by the attitude and on the other side, by the subjective norm. The behavioral beliefs and the outcome evaluation impact the attitude. Regarding the subjective norm, it is determined by the normative beliefs and the motivation to comply. The theory of planned behavior is an extension of the theory of reasoned action that is applied for non-volitional behaviors. It also differs from the theory of reasoned action in the addition of the notion of perceived behavioral control as a driver of both the intention and the behavior.
4. Review of literature

4.1 Apparel industry

### 4.1.1 Fashion industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>TITLE / SOURCE</th>
<th>REFERENCE</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fashion definition – fashion</td>
<td>A theory on fashion consumption</td>
<td>(Ma, Shi, Chen, and Luo, 2012)</td>
<td>A definition of fashion is provided as well as an analysis of the relationship between innovation, classic and prevalence. It is noticed that fashion consumption can be segmented into two categories: social consumption motives and individual motives. Regarding the psychological motives, they can be divided into two groups: rational motives and perceptual motives. Besides, the buying process decision in fashion can be categorized into three categories: high, medium and low influence purchasing. They are all linked to perceived risks and habits (cognitive resistance).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological motives and behavior in fashion consumption</td>
<td>Apparel shopping behavior – Part 1: Towards the development of a conceptual theoretical model / SA Journal of Industrial Psychology</td>
<td>(Du Preez, 2003)</td>
<td>A theoretical model with a macro-approach of factors impacting the apparel shopping behavior is developed. It includes the market-dominated variables (product, promotion, price, place) and the consumer dominated variables (demographics, social-cultural influences and the psychological fields).</td>
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### 4.1.2 Theory of reasoned action/planned behavior

<table>
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<th>TOPIC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory of reasoned action</td>
<td><em>Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior</em></td>
<td>(Ajzen &amp; Fishbein, 1980)</td>
<td>The theory of reasoned action emerges. The latter relies on the fact that attitude and subjective norm lead to the intention and then, behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of planned behavior</td>
<td>From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior / <em>Action control: From cognition to behavior</em></td>
<td>(Ajzen, 1985)</td>
<td>The author improves the theory of reasoned action with the introduction of the perceived behavioral control as another influence variable on the intention. This theory is named theory of planned behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of planned behavior</td>
<td>The theory of planned behavior / <em>Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes</em></td>
<td>(Ajzen, 1991)</td>
<td>The theory of planned behavior receives further research in order to confirm the utility of the model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of desire and plan on the variables of the theory of planned behavior</td>
<td>Intending to be ethical: An examination of consumer choice in sweatshop avoidance / <em>Advances in Consumer Research</em></td>
<td>(Shaw, Shiu, Hassan, Bekin, and Hogg, 2007)</td>
<td>Two other variables are added to the theory of planned behavior when testing in the apparel industry: the desire and the plan. The first one occurs between the attitude and the intention and the second one has, between the intention and the behavior.</td>
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### 4.2 Ethical apparel industry

#### 4.2.1 Ethical fashion

<table>
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<th>TITLE / SOURCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethical fashion definition – Awareness, behavior, attitudes towards ethical fashion</td>
<td>Ethical fashion: myth or future trend? / Journal of Fashion Marketing &amp; Management</td>
<td>(Joergens, 2006)</td>
<td>First of all, the author provides a definition of ethical fashion. Then she evaluates the awareness of ethical issues on fashion consumers (in United Kingdom and Germany), its resulting behavior and effects on purchase. Finally she analyses consumer’s attitudes towards ethical fashion. Price, style and quality seem to be the main drivers when buying an ethical garment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical consumers’ intentions, behaviors and constraints</td>
<td>Fashion victim: The impact of fair trade concerns on clothing choice / Journal of Strategic Marketing</td>
<td>(Shaw, Hogg, Wilson, Shui, and Hassan, 2006)</td>
<td>The authors study consumers’ ethical intentions to avoid sweatshop purchases, their actual behaviors and constraints when purchasing an ethical garment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumers’ purchasing behavior in the French market</td>
<td>Mode et consumption responsable: Regards des consommateurs / Institut français de la mode</td>
<td>(Chaballier &amp; Ruelle, 2009)</td>
<td>The results after the diffusion of a survey are discussed. The latter aims to understand consumers’ purchasing behavior in the ethical fashion industry in the French market. The following points are studied: awareness, purchasing criteria, barriers and expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of the ethical purchasing</td>
<td>Eco-clothing, consumer identity and ideology /</td>
<td>(Niinimäki, 2010)</td>
<td>The ethical purchasing decisions process is analyzed. The latter relies on the construction of self</td>
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Consumer attitude and behaviour in the ethical fashion industry

<table>
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<tr>
<th>process</th>
<th>Sustainable Development</th>
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<tr>
<td>and the ongoing change process people are confronted to. Consumer commitment, wishes, needs, values, desires, aesthetic and emotions are drivers to the reaching point of purchase.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Y consumers’ perceptions</th>
<th>Young generation perceptions of sustainability in the apparel industry / Journal of Fashion Marketing &amp; Management (Hill &amp; Lee, 2012)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A special focus on Y consumers is given with the aim to analyze their awareness and concerns about sustainability in the fashion industry. It results that they lack knowledge and need to be educated.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes and values relationship</th>
<th>Individual values and motivational complexities in ethical consumption: A means-end approach / Journal of Marketing Management (Jägel, Keeling, Reppel, and Gruber, 2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The relation between attributes and values when purchasing an ethical product is analyzed. Five patterns emerge after conducting a semi-qualitative laddering approach based on environmental and altruist ethical concerns, individual motives of value for money, personal image and well-being.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eco-fashion consumption impacted by product-related attributes, store-related attributes and premium price</th>
<th>The consumption side of sustainable fashion supply-Understanding fashion consumer eco-fashion consumption decision / Journal of Marketing &amp; Management (Chan &amp; W.Y. Wong, 2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The eco-fashion consumption decision process is affected by three variables: product-related attributes, store-related attributes and premium price. Some tactics should be employed in order to develop a good perception around these variables.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Price of Fashion Marketing &amp; Management</td>
<td>Policies – Focus on the Gap company</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The influence of ethical trading policies on consumer apparel purchase decisions - A focus on the gap Inc. / International Journal of Retail &amp; Distribution Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guarantees for an ethical product</td>
<td>Memento de la mode éthique / Sicom 06071, Parimage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactics to increase consumer value and avoid green marketing myopia</td>
<td>Avoiding green marketing myopia - Ways to improve consumer appeal for environmentally preferable products / Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information impact when buying a cloth</td>
<td>The influence of information about labor abuses on consumer choice of clothes: A grounded theory approach / <em>Journal of Marketing Management</em> (Valor, 2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consumers' willingness to pay for a premium price for added information</td>
<td>Effects of social responsibility labeling and brand willingness to pay for apparel / <em>International of Consumer Studies</em> (Hustvedt &amp; Bernard, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and support relationship</td>
<td>The impact of ethical fashion on consumer purchase behavior / <em>Journal</em> (Shen, Wang, Lo, and Shum 2012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consumer attitude and behaviour in the ethical fashion industry

Lead to a higher degree of willingness to pay for ethical products. Consumer education, advertisements with social and messages and participation of consumers, designers and retailers are mentioned as crucial points to increase ethical fashion purchases.

Important role of online communities

Knowledge sharing among green fashion communities online / Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012)

The article proves that the role of online communities can be considered as a useful way that spreads knowledge among customers.

4.2.2 Modified theory of planned behavior

<table>
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<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>TITLE / SOURCE</th>
<th>REFERENCE</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact of self-identity and ethical consumer</td>
<td>In search of fair trade: Ethical consumer</td>
<td>(Ozcaglar-Toulouse, Shiu, and)</td>
<td>An analysis of the two variable, self-identity and ethical obligation, is evaluated in the ethical decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Citation</td>
<td>Summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consumer attitude and behaviour in the ethical fashion industry</td>
<td>Shaw, 2006</td>
<td><em>International Journal of Consumer Studies</em></td>
<td>The authors report that questionable behavior in ethical contexts cannot be explained by the ethical judgment. Thus, they recommend the addition of social norm (instead subjective norm) and perceived unfairness as impacts variables on intention to purchase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of social norms and perceived unfairness on intention</td>
<td>(Fukukawa &amp; Ennew, 2010)</td>
<td><em>Journal of Business Ethics</em></td>
<td>An empirical investigation into ethically questionable behavior in consumption showed that the ethical judgment did not explain the behavior. Social norm and perceived unfairness were found to be significant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism of ethical judgment</td>
<td>(Celuch &amp; Dill, 2011)</td>
<td><em>Journal of Education for Business</em></td>
<td>The theory of reasoned action is extended with the addition of the ethical judgment as an impact variable on the intention. This study is realized in the ethical decision-making process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty: definition, causes, outcomes and solutions</td>
<td>(Hassan, Shaw, Shiu, Walsh, and Parry, 2013)</td>
<td><em>Journal of Consumer</em></td>
<td>Firstly, a definition of the uncertainty is developed. Then, the causes of the uncertainty and outcomes of the uncertainty are mentioned. Some solutions are finally provided in order to avoid uncertainty.</td>
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### 4.2.3 Attitude-Intention-Behavior gap

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition of a gap - Ways to fortify the gap</td>
<td>The attitude-behavior gap in environmental consumerism / APUBEF Proceedings</td>
<td>(Gupta &amp; Ogden, 2006)</td>
<td>A definition of the gap is given. Besides, the level of consumer involvement and the perceived consumer effectiveness are provided as ways to consolidate the attitude-behavior gap that exists in the ethical consumption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of the intention-behavior gap with the role of three other variables</td>
<td>Why ethical consumers don’t walk their talk: Towards a framework for understanding the gap between the ethical purchase intentions and actual buying behavior of ethically minded consumers / Journal of Business Ethics</td>
<td>(Carrington, Neville, and Whitwell, 2010)</td>
<td>A special focus on the intention-behavior gap is made in the ethical purchase process. Three variables take part in this gap: the added implementation intentions, the actual behavioral control and the situational context. They all play a crucial role between the intention and the behavior that leads to the purchase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude-behavior held by the Individualism</td>
<td>Fashion marketing and the ethical movement versus individualistic consumption: Analyzing the</td>
<td>(Sudbury &amp; Böltner, 2011)</td>
<td>Young urban adults in United Kingdom and Germany have been interviewed in order to evaluate the attitude-behavior gap. It appears that individuality plays a major role in maintaining of this gap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior affected by demographic, external and internal factors</td>
<td>Mind the gap: Why do people act environmentally and what are the barriers to pro-environmental behavior? / Environmental Education Research (Kollmuss &amp; Agyeman, 2002)</td>
<td>Some theoretical frameworks are reviewed in order to analyze the gap. It appears that demographic, external and internal factors affect the behavior. Finally a model pro-environmental behavior is provided with the different barriers that obstruct the achievement of a concerned behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Measures to reduce the gap</td>
<td>Sustainable consumption: Green consumer behavior when purchasing products / Sustainable Development (Young, Hwang, McDonald, and Oates, 2010)</td>
<td>The authors provide some criteria in order to close the gap between attitudes and behavior: consumer value, purchase experience, time for research, knowledge, availability of ethical products and affordable price.</td>
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5. Methodology: Questionnaire

**Setting:** The questionnaire will be spread online in January 2014.

**Participants:** The sample of the questionnaire will be composed by French people between 18 and 30 years. The respondents are chosen first of all because they will represent the consumer of tomorrow. Young people are also more interested in fashion and more educated than older ones. They will be selected through online platforms and personal contacts.

**Measurement instruments:** Software for online survey: Sphinx.

**Data analysis:** Qualitative, open questions, and quantitative techniques, mainly Likert scale questions, will be employed.

**Content:** As mentioned in the section 2.1, very few studies have been designed and allow a deep analysis of the French market patterns. Therefore, it is necessary to employ different techniques through a questionnaire in order to cover a large geographical area: France. Thanks to the survey, the behaviors, opinions, motives, expectations and profile of the sample will be discovered and the hypotheses would be confirmed or disconfirmed. The sample is estimated through Raosoft, an online sample size calculator. Taking into account that the age of the respondents should be between 18 and 30 years old, the total sample amounts 10,300,859 people (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, 2013). According to Raosoft, with an error margin of 5%, a confidence level of 95% and a response distribution of 50%, the approximate number of people to reach is 385.
6. Overview of chapters

Abstract
List of content
List of tables
List of abbreviations

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   1.1 Research problem
   1.2 Topic importance
   1.3 Contributions
   1.4 Thesis structure

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   2.1 Problem statement
   2.2 Research question
   2.3 Hypotheses

3. Literature review and theoretical background
   3.1 Fashion industry
      3.1.1 Definition of fashion
      3.1.2 Theory of planned action
      3.1.3 Theory of planned behavior
   3.2 Ethical apparel industry
      3.2.1 Ethical fashion definition
      3.2.2 Modified theory of reasoned action/plan
      3.2.3 Attitude-intention-behavior gap

4. Research methodology
   4.1 Method: Questionnaire
      4.1.1 Setup
      4.1.2 Execution
      4.1.3 Results
   4.2 Summary of results
   4.3 Concerns for validity

5. Conclusion
   5.1 Implications for companies
   5.2 Limitations of the study
   5.3 Suggestions for further researchers

6. Bibliography

7. Appendix
## 7. Work plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERIOD OF TIME</th>
<th>PHASE</th>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01.10.13 – 11.11.13</td>
<td>Research phase</td>
<td>Elaboration and adjustment of the exposé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.11.13 – 09.12.13</td>
<td>Theory phase</td>
<td>Literature review and development of the theoretical section of the master thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.12.13 – 23.01.14</td>
<td>Intermediate presentation</td>
<td>Elaboration of the presentation and the intermediate report</td>
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<tr>
<td>01.01.14 – 31.01.14</td>
<td>Analysis phase</td>
<td>Focus groups and spread of the questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.02.14 – 28.02.14</td>
<td>Evaluation phase</td>
<td>Evaluation of the results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.03.14 – deadline</td>
<td>Finalization phase</td>
<td>Finalization of the master thesis: review, adjustment, preparation of the final report and presentation</td>
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</table>
Bibliography


Carrington, M., Neville, B., Whitwell, G. (2010). Why ethical consumers don’t walk their talk: Towards a framework for understanding the gap between the ethical purchase intentions and actual buying behavior of ethically minded consumers. *Journal of Business Ethics, 97*(1), 139-158. doi: 10.1007/s10551-010-0501-6


