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How Millennials' Personality Traits Influence Their Eco-Fashion Purchase Behavior

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This study examined how millennials' personality traits (i.e., ecological consciousness and social consciousness) influence their behavior outcomes (i.e., purchase intention and willingness to pay more) in the eco-fashion context by applying attribution theory. This study also tested the moderating effect of need for variety on the relationship between millennials' personality traits and their behavior outcomes. A focus group including 9 participants and an online questionnaire involving 141 participants were used to accomplish the purpose of the study. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test how well the measured variables represented the various constructs, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the hierarchical relationships among millennials' personality traits and their behavior outcomes. The results indicated that millennials' ecological consciousness and social consciousness positively influenced their purchase intention and willingness to pay more for eco-fashion. Furthermore, the results supported the existence of a moderating effect of millennials' need for variety on the relationship between social consciousness and willingness to pay more. Specifically, when millennials had a higher need for variety, their social consciousness had a stronger positive effect on willingness to pay more for eco-fashion. This study extends previous work involving attribution theory by affirming that millennials' eco-fashion consumption behavior is influenced by their personality traits such as ecological consciousness and social consciousness. In addition, this study has managerial implications for apparel manufacturers, designers, and retailers and offers suggestions for educators in fashion marketing.

Keywords: *Millennials' Personality Traits, Ecological Consciousness, Social Consciousness, Eco-fashion, Attribution Theory, Purchase Intention, Willingness to pay More.*

Introduction

The U.S. fashion and apparel industry is a $12 billion business, and the average American family spends $1,700 on clothes annually (BLS Data 2018). However, the fashion and apparel industry is also the second largest polluter in the world (Conca 2015). The carbon footprint created by the fashion and apparel industry is significantly growing every day, and the fashion industry has recently begun to launch eco-fashion to promote ethical fashion and to achieve sustainable growth in revenue and in market share (Choi et al. 2011). Eco-fashion produced in an ethical and ecological production system is fashion clothing designed for a long lifetime of use, and it causes few or no negative environmental or social impacts (Niinimaki 2010). According to GFK (Germany's largest market research

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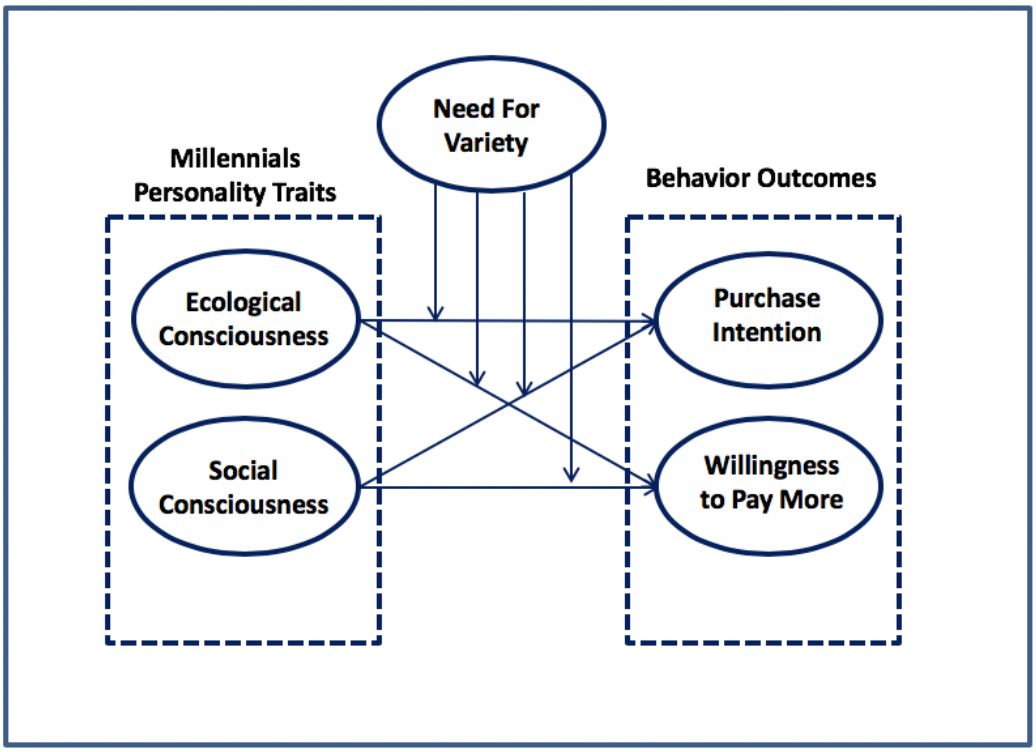
organization), more than half (56%) of US consumers are willing to pay extra for eco-friendly products and prefer to see green advertisement used to promote these products (Gibbs and Hungerford 2016). Unfortunately, eco-fashion products are still a niche market because of the perceived high cost and the lack of awareness of the benefits of eco-friendly products (Speier 2016). Therefore, what the proper target market of eco-fashion might be and how to engage those customers in eco-fashion acquisition on a consistent basis are important questions of interest to eco-fashion designers, manufacturers, and retailers.

Millennials are individuals born between 1981 and 1999; with a population of 80 million and with $600 billion in annual spending, they are the largest generation in the US, and they account for 1/3 of all consumer spending (Kestenbaum 2017). They have great purchasing power and are the most powerful consumer group in the marketplace. According to the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), 48% of millennials purchase eco-friendly products in an effort to protect our planet, and they do what they can to live a more sustainable lifestyle (Kibbe 2014). Also, millennials are young whose ages were between 18 and 23, and they are in a developmental stage in which lasting beliefs and mindsets are formed (Brosdahl and Carpenter 2011). Their beliefs about and trust in eco-fashion are relatively easily developed at this stage. In this sense, millennials may be an ideal target market for eco-fashion, and eco-fashion designers, manufacturers, and retailers must think about marketing strategies to engage them in eco-fashion purchasing in ways that are relevant to their particular characteristics.

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of millennials' consumption behavior with regard to eco-fashion. Specifically, what personality traits of millennials have significant effects on their purchase intention regarding eco-fashion and willingness to pay more for it? What are primary factors moderating the relationship between millennials' personality traits and their buying behavior? To address this issue, attribution theory (AT) was adopted in this study. AT was originally derived from Heider (1958), who believed that people tend to see cause and effect relationships between different events or things. Jones and Davis (1965) further argued that a person's behavior matches or corresponds with her or his personality traits. Specifically, attribution theory shows how an individual explains events as she does and how the individual's past experience influences her present purchase decision (Hammerl et al. 2016). This study examines how certain of the millennials' personality traits, i.e. ecological consciousness and social consciousness, influence their behavior outcomes, i.e. purchase intention and willingness to pay more, in the eco-fashion context. This study also tests whether the need for variety can be an important moderator increasing millennials' engagement in eco-fashion acquisition. The conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Conceptual Model*



Literature Review

Millennials, born between 1981 and 1999, have been described as the generation that is most aware of a variety of social problems such as child labor, low wages, and problematic working environments, and they are willing to correct those wrongs (Lu et al. 2013). Currently, millennials spend $600 billion annually, and the amount of money millennials are expected to spend annually in the next five years is more than 3 times the amount they are currently spending (Kestenbaum 2017). Products with eco-friendly features are among the top 5 categories in which millennials are willing to pay more (Gibbs and Hungerford 2016). Further, millennials are socially and environmentally conscious; they are world-minded and have greater awareness of sustainability issues (Jankovska et al. 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to target millennials for the purpose of establishing in them long-term positive attitudes and behaviors related to eco-friendly products (Kang et al. 2013).

According to Heider (1958), a person's behavior can be explained in terms of two kinds of attributions: internal attributions, i.e. a person acts in certain way because of her personality traits, motives, or beliefs and external attributions, i.e. a person behaves in certain ways because of the situation in which she finds herself. In this study, both internal and external attributions can be applied to explain millennials' eco-fashion purchase behavior. Millennials' purchase intention and willingness to pay more for eco-fashion are attributed to certain aspects of their personality traits, i.e. ecological consciousness and social consciousness, and their

clothing purchase behavior can also be influenced by the availability of new or different products. Specifically, millennials may have a tendency to seek variation in hedonic products such as music, leisure activities, and fashion products (Ratner et al. 1999). For them, a greater desire for variety may have stronger influence on the relationship between their personality traits and behavior outcomes.

The Influence of Ecological Consciousness on Purchase Intention and Willingness to Pay More

Ecological consciousness is an awareness of the importance of being respectful toward living things in the natural world such as plants, trees, animals, and insects; it thus reflects the harmony that should exist between humans and nature (Alwitt and Berger 1993). Ecologically conscious individuals such as millennials tend to have strong concerns about the environment, the natural world, and social issues; they care about the environment, read eco-labels, and show a strong sense of environmental concern (Alsmadi 2012). Environmental concern is positively related to environmentally conscious consumers' recycling behavior, willingness to pay higher prices for high quality products, and green buying behavior (Sharma and Bansal 2013). Those who have high levels of environmental consciousness respect the living things in the natural world and are willing to purchase products and services that have a positive impact on the environment (Chang 2012). To satisfy their environmental concerns and follow ethical standards, ecologically conscious individuals tend to purchase eco-products and alter their behaviors in accordance with their green beliefs (Cho et al. 2013). Therefore,

H1a: Millennials' ecological consciousness will positively influence their purchase intention regarding eco-fashion.
H1b: Millennials' ecological consciousness will positively influence their willingness to pay more for eco-fashion.

The Influence of Social Consciousness on Purchase Intention and Willingness to Pay More

Social consciousness, also known as social awareness, is the consciousness shared within a society concerning social situations (Cooley 1992). Indivi-duals' awareness and sense of responsibility regarding environmental and social issues were found to have a positive impact on their green purchasing behavior, e.g. socially conscious consumers like millennials care about corporate social responsibility and make purchases from organizations that promote fair-trade and socially responsible products (Bina 2017). Socially conscious individuals are willing to engage in conscious processing to think about ways to improve the quality of life in society and enhance others' lives by purchasing and paying more for eco-friendly products (Brooker 1976). Eco-friendly purchase behavior is a type of socially responsible behavior. An individual is socially concerned when she takes into account the public consequences of her private consumption and

attempts to use her purchasing power to create social change (Kozar and Hiller-Connel 2013). Therefore,

H2a: Millennials' social consciousness will positively influence their purchase intention regarding eco-fashion.
H2b: Millennials' social consciousness will positively influence their willingness to pay more for eco-fashion.

The Moderating Effect of Need for Variety

Need for variety is the personal desire to adopt new styles and to maintain differentiation (Kim et al. 2002). Managers and retailers view a consumer's choosing a different brand or a different product as a process involving a search for variety because consumers see the new product to be different from former ones. High variety seekers are very curious to try something that is different, unfamiliar, and new, and they are more likely to perceive greater variety in their choices; low variety seekers like to stick with products that they usually purchase (Baumgartner and Steenkamp 1996).

Need for variety is related to hedonic shopping for items such as eco-fashion clothing; this notion relates to a person's tendency to switch away from a choice made on a previous occasion (Ratner et al. 1999). Specifically, individuals with a high need for variety will be more likely to interpret their personality-related behavior as high involvement purchasing, while individuals with a low need for variety will have less desire for their belongings to appear different and unique from those of other individuals, and this personal characteristic will subsequently undermine their personality-related willingness to pay more for and intention to purchase eco-fashion products (Baumgartner 2002). Therefore,

H3a: Millennials' need for variety will moderate the relationship between ecological consciousness and purchase intention. When they have a higher need for variety, millennials' ecological consciousness will have a stronger positive effect on purchase intention.
H3b: Millennials' need for variety will moderate the relationship between ecological consciousness and willingness to pay more. When they have a higher need for variety, millennials' ecological consciousness will have a stronger positive effect on willingness to pay more.
H3c: Millennials' need for variety will moderate the relationship between social consciousness and purchase intention. When they have a higher need for variety, millennials' social consciousness will have a stronger positive effect on purchase intention.
H3d: Millennials' need for variety will moderate the relationship between social consciousness and willingness to pay more. When they have a higher need for variety, millennials' social consciousness will have a stronger positive effect on willingness to pay more.

Methodology

This study used both qualitative and quantitative techniques to accomplish its purpose. Specifically, a focus group interview was conducted to select appropriate eco-fashion clothing images for the online survey, and an online questionnaire using a survey tool website (Qualtrics) was used to collect quantitative data to test the hierarchical relationships among millennials' personality traits and their behavior outcomes. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 20 for descriptive information and AMOS 20 for testing the measurement model and the structural model. With AMOS 20, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test how well the measured variables represented the various constructs. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to examine the causal relationships among all latent variables.

Procedure and Sample

To decide the eco-fashion visual images for the study, eco-fashion images from websites were identified by using key words such as "eco", "green", "ethical", "natural", "organic", and "sustainable". Then, a number of male and female eco-fashion images in a variety of designs and styles including shirts, T-shirts, sweaters, fleece clothing, jackets, and jeans were chosen. A volunteer focus group interview was conducted and the participants were nine undergraduate students majoring in consumer sciences in a southeastern university in the United States. The moderator of the focus group was a professor of Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management Department; and the assistant moderator was a PhD student in the Department of Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management. At the beginning of the group discussion, the researcher provided the definition of eco-fashion, which is provided in the introduction of this study. The participants discussed their ideas, thoughts, and feelings toward eco-fashion images based on popular style and color, sustainable design (organic cotton, made in USA, low impact dyes, fair trade, and soul flower originals), and the age range in relation to the eco-fashion images. Based on the focus group discussion, a total of sixteen (eight female and eight male) eco-fashion images were selected for the online survey, and the age range of the survey sample was decided as 18-55.

The questionnaire was developed using a survey tool website (Qualtrics), and the online survey link was sent to the online consumer panel, whose members were recruited by a marketing research firm in California. According to Kline (2005), a sample size between 100 and 200 for SEM is medium. Therefore, a total of 141 respondents constituted the sample. The demographic information shows that more than half of the respondents were Caucasians (60.3%), and about one-fourth of millennials were in the age groups of 19–26 (23.9%) and 27–35 (60.9%). As for annual household income, the largest group earned $40,000 to $59,999 (26.2%), followed by less than $20,000 (22.7%) and $20,000 to $39,999 (17.0%).

Measures

All measures were adapted from previous studies and were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). The scale items for need for variety were adapted from Van-Trijp et al. (1996); those for ecological consciousness from Peloza et al. (2013); those for social consciousness from Wagner et al. (2009); those for purchase intention from Rodgers (2003); and those for willingness to pay more from Shen et al. (2012).

Results

The results indicate that millennials' personality traits, i.e. ecological consciousness and social consciousness) positively influence their behavior outcomes, i.e. purchase intention and willingness to pay more for eco-fashion. Also, millennials' need for variety moderates the relationship between social consciousness and willingness to pay more.

Measurement Model

The measurement model was comprised of 4 constructs measured by 14 items. Factor loadings of all items ranged from 0.651 to 0.932, and all paths were significant (p<0.001). The composite reliabilities of the constructs ranged from 0.836 to 0.957, meeting the minimum criterion of 0.70 (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994). The factor loadings and composite reliabilities of the measurement model are provided in Table 1. The fit statistics of the measurement model were $\chi^2(71) = 131.384$; $\chi^2/df = 1.85$; CFI = 0.964; TLI = 0.953; and RMSEA = 0.078. Therefore, the model was found to fit the data very well, and all measures were reliable.

Once reliabilities had been established, convergent and discriminant validity were assessed. Convergent validity was supported by the factor loadings ranging from 0.651 to 0.932 (p<.001), the composite reliabilities exceeding the recommended level of .70, and average variance extracted (AVE) values greater than the recommended threshold value of .50 (Hair 2011). Discriminant validity was also confirmed by the finding that the AVEs exceeded the squared correlation coefficients, i.e. shared variance, between all possible pairs of constructs (Fornell and Larcker 1981) (Table 2).

Table 1. *The Measures*

Variable	Measurement Items	Factor Loading	Composite Reliability
Ecological Consciousness	When I have a choice between two equal products, I always purchase the one less harmful to other people and the environment.	0.778	0.896
	I try only to buy products that can be recycled.	0.877	
	I tend not to buy household products that harm the environment.	0.780	
	I make every effort to buy paper products made from recycled paper.	0.866	
Social Consciousness	I am a socially responsible person.	0.685	0.836
	I am concerned to improve the well-being of society.	0.891	
	I often find myself thinking about ethical issues.	0.755	
	It is never necessary to sacrifice the welfare of others.	0.651	
Purchase Intention	I would like to make a purchase toward eco-fashion.	0.958	0.957
	I would like to have more information about eco-fashion	0.929	
	I'm interested in buying eco-fashion	0.927	
Willing to Pay More	I am willing to pay a premium for eco-fashion.	0.920	0.915
	I would rather spend my money on eco-fashion clothes more than anything else.	0.798	
	I prefer to purchase eco-fashion clothing even if it is somewhat more expensive.	0.932	

Table 2. *Construct Validity of the Measurement Model (AVE)*

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Ecological Consciousness	**0.610**			
2. Social Consciousness	0.552	**0.339**		
3. Purchase Intention	0.524	0.436	**0.880**	
4. Willingness to Pay More	0.500	0.399	0.616	**0.784**

Notes: Diagonal entries show the average variance extracted by the construct. Off-diagonal entries represent the squared variance shared (squared correlation) between constructs.

Structural Model

A structural model was used to examine the causal relationships among all latent variables in the conceptual model. The fit indices of the structural model were $\chi^2(71)=131.384$, $\chi^2/df=1.859$, CFI=0.964, TLI=0.953, and RMSEA=0.078. As illustra-ted in Table 3, millennials' ecological consciousness positively influenced their purchase intention (H1a) and willingness to pay more (H1b); millennials' social consciousness positively influenced their purchase intention (H2a) and willingness to pay more (H2b).

Table 3. *Hypotheses Testing Results*

Hypo-thesis	Structural Path	Standardized Regression Weight	S.E.	t-Value	Result
H1a	Ecological Consciousness → Purchase Intention	0.520	0.144	4.483***	Supported
H1b	Ecological Consciousness → Willingness to Pay More	0.529	0.166	4.350***	Supported
H2a	Social Consciousness → Purchase Intention	0.274	0.146	2.436*	Supported
H2b	Social Consciousness → Willingness to Pay More	0.239	0.1689	2.021*	Supported

$^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

The Moderating Role of Need for Variety

Table 4. *Moderating Effects of NFV*

Hypo-thesis	Structural Path	Standardized Regression Weight		$\chi 2$ Difference	Result
		High Group	Low Group	(df=1)	
H3a	Ecological Consciousness → Purchase Intention	0.361	0.589	12.608	Not Supported
H3b	Ecological Consciousness → Willingness to Pay More	0.738	0.341	8.902	Not Supported
H3c	Social Consciousness → Purchase Intention	0.113	0.368	6.597	Not Supported
H3d	Social Consciousness → Willingness to Pay More	-0.077	0.434	0.716	Supported

The moderating effect of need for variety was tested through multi-group analysis: this involved splitting the sample into sub-groups according to whether respondents scored high or low on the measurement items of NFV (need for variety). The mean score for respondents' NFV was 5.07. Thus, respondents who rated higher than 5.07 on NFV (N=69) were categorized into the "high" group, and respondents who rated lower than 5.07 on NFV (N=72) were categorized into the "low" group. The difference in chi-square values between the unconstrained model (in which all paths were constrained to be equal except for the link between ecological consciousness and purchase intention) and the constrained model (in which all paths were constrained to be equal across high-NFV and low-NFV groups) determines whether NFV acted as a moderating variable. In this way, H_{3b} H_{3c}, and H_{3d} could be tested as well. As illustrated in Table 4, the chi-square difference test revealed that there was no significant difference between the two groups in the paths from ecological consciousness to purchase intention ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 12.608, p = 0.000), from ecological consciousness to willingness to pay more ($\Delta\chi^2$

= 8.902, p = 0.002), and from social consciousness to purchase intention ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 6.597, p = 0.010). There was a significant difference between the two groups in the path from social consciousness to willingness to pay more ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 0.716, p = 0.397). Thus, only H_{3d} was supported.

Discussion and Implications

Consumers have a positive attitude towards eco-fashion, but the positive attitude does not always translate into action (Carey and Cervellon 2014). In other words, there is an attitude-behavior gap in eco-fashion purchasing. To choose the right marketing strategies for reducing the attitude-behavior gap in millennials eco-fashion purchasing, this study employed attribution theory (AT) to explain how millennials' personality traits, i.e. ecological consciousness and social consciousness, influence their behavior outcomes, i.e. purchase intention and willingness to pay more for eco-fashion. In addition, this study tested the moderating effect of need for variety on the relationship between millennials' personality traits and their behavior outcomes. The results of this study contribute to the literature and have implications for understanding millennials' eco-fashion purchasing behavior. The results of this study also offer recommendations for educating millennials in an ethical consumerism.

This study extends previous work involving attribution theory (Heider 1958, Jones and Davis 1965) by affirming that millennials' eco-fashion consumption behavior matches certain aspects of their personality traits such as ecological consciousness and social consciousness. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that millennials' social consciousness has a more significant impact on their willingness to pay more for eco-fashion when their need for variety is high rather than low. This study also has managerial implications for apparel manufacturers, designers, and retailers. First of all, the findings support the idea that ecological consciousness and social consciousness positively influence purchase intention and willingness to pay more. Therefore, marketers can advertise the ecological attributes and social benefits of eco-fashion in terms of production processes (i.e., the dyeing process) and materials (i.e., the use of eco-fabric) to increase millennials' purchase intention and willingness to pay more for eco-fashion.

Further, ecological consciousness has a stronger impact on cognitive response than social consciousness does, implying that millennials' ecological consciousness is a particularly important predictor of their eco-fashion purchasing behavior. Environmental changes such as those affecting plants, animals, and the weather can more easily generate individuals' awareness than social issues can because even relatively minor changes in the environment can influence the harmony between humans and nature (Alwitt and Berger 1993). Further, social issues are less likely to catch individuals' attention because social issues such as child labor or low wages are related to ethical issues and have no significant influence on many people. Therefore, when applying these findings to management strategies, manufacturers and retailers may wish to promote eco-sign campaigns on social

media platforms to help millennials identify the eco-signs and to encourage their eco-fashion purchasing behavior.

The findings of the study also support the existence of a moderating effect of millennials' need for variety on the relationship between social consciousness and willingness to pay more. Specifically, when there is a higher need for variety, millennials' social consciousness can have a stronger positive effect on their willingness to pay more for eco-fashion. With this knowledge, manufacturers and designers can create and produce a greater variety of styles of eco-fashion products to strengthen millennials' willingness to pay more for eco-fashion, and retailers can emphasize the novel and cool features of eco-fashion products such as the use of natural plant dyes and fabrics to strengthen millennials' willingness to pay more for eco-fashion.

In addition, this study offers suggestions for educators in fashion marketing. Ethical decision making is complex, and consumers' actual pur-chase behavior toward ethical products such as eco-fashion is limited. However, millennials are young consumers born between 1981 and 1999 (Kestenbaum 2017); they have great purchasing power and are the most powerful consumer group in the marketplace; millennials' beliefs and mindsets are in a developmental stage (Brosdahl and Carpenter 2011) and their beliefs about and trust in eco-fashion are relatively easily developed at this stage. Because they are familiar with technology and social media, millennials can influence their family purchase decision directly and indirectly. Therefore, educating millennials to care about ethical components of products and engage in an ethical consumerism are important. Specifically, universities should consider expanding fashion education in millennials to introduce how fast fashion consumption affects the environment and contributes to negative effects and climate changes, and educators should make efforts to help millennials identify the ecological attributes and social benefits of eco-fashion and engage in an ethical consumerism.

Conclusions

This study examined how millennials' personality traits (i.e., ecological consciousness and social consciousness) influence their behavior outcomes (i.e., purchase intention and willingness to pay more) in the eco-fashion context by applying attribution theory. This study also tested the moderating effect of need for variety on the relationship between millennials' personality traits and their behavior outcomes. A focus group including 9 participants and an online questionnaire involving 141 participants were used to accomplish the purpose of the study. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test how well the measured variables represented the various constructs, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the hierarchical relationships among millennials' personality traits and their behavior outcomes. The results indicated that millennials' ecological consciousness and social consciousness positively influenced their purchase intention and willingness to pay more for eco-fashion. Furthermore, the results supported the existence of a moderating effect of

millennials' need for variety on the relationship between social consciousness and willingness to pay more. Specifically, when millennials had a higher need for variety, their social consciousness had a stronger positive effect on willingness to pay more for eco-fashion.

This study has some limitations that lead to recommendations for future studies. First, the participants were nine female undergraduate students majoring in consumer sciences in a southeastern university in the United States. They are younger millennials and their ages were between 18 and 23. They are more aware of the sustainability issues than other majors' students such as engineering. However, their response may be gender or age biased. Therefore, the researcher asked all nine participants to think from the perspectives of their older brothers or sisters, the age-biased biases may still exist. Future studies can do two focus group studies that include a wide age range of millennials. Specifically, one focus group recruits younger millennials and the other focus group includes older millennials. Second, this study used only 16 (8 male and 8 female) images as visual images. Future studies can identify a wider spectrum of eco-fashion styles to increase the generalizability of the study. Third, the proposed model was tested millennials in the eco-fashion context. Therefore, when generalizing these findings to other types of eco-products such as eco-friendly package food and eco-friendly party supplies or other generations such as generation X, caution must be exercised.

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