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Consumer Resistance to Sustainable Fashion: Green Skepticism, Face Consciousness, Need for Status, and Eco-Shame

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Despite increasing environmental awareness, consumers continue to favor conventional fashion over sustainable alternatives. This study explains active consumer resistance to sustainable fashion by integrating functional, psychological, and emotional barriers within Innovation Resistance Theory. Specifically, it examines perceived limited choices, green skepticism, face consciousness, and need for status as predictors of resistance purchase intention, while testing eco-shame and need for status as moderators.

Methodology: A quantitative explanatory survey was conducted among 602 visitors to three fashion and sustainability exhibitions held in the Greater Jakarta area in June 2026: Shafara at Bintaro Xchange Mall, Jakarta Muslim Fashion Week at ICE BSD, and Sustainable (Matter)ial Connection at the Jakarta International Convention Center. The measurement and structural models were evaluated using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).

Finding: Green skepticism was the strongest direct predictor of resistance purchase intention ($\beta=0.419$), followed by need for status ($\beta=0.296$), perceived limited choices ($\beta=0.177$), and face consciousness ($\beta=0.136$). Eco-shame strengthened the effect of perceived limited choices on resistance ($\beta=0.148$), but did not significantly moderate the green skepticism-resistance relationship ($\beta=-0.025$). Eco-shame significantly weakened the relationship between face consciousness and resistance ($\beta=-0.140$), while need for status strengthened the effect of face consciousness ($\beta=0.042$). The model explained 70.3% of the variance in resistance purchase intention and demonstrated high predictive relevance ($Q^2_{predict}=0.695$).

Conclusion: The study shifts sustainable fashion research from an adoption-oriented perspective toward active resistance. It extends Innovation Resistance Theory by combining product-choice constraints, distrust of environmental claims, social-image motives, status consumption, and eco-shame in one empirical model in an emerging-market context. The findings show that consumers may resist sustainable fashion not because they reject sustainability, but because they question its credibility, variety, and symbolic value.

Keywords: Sustainable Fashion; Consumer Resistance; Innovation Resistance Theory; Green Skepticism; Eco-Shame.

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INTRODUCTION

The global fashion industry creates substantial economic value, but its dominant fast-fashion model is also associated with shortened product life cycles, rapidly changing trends, intensive resource use, chemical pollution, carbon emissions, and increasing textile waste. Sustainable fashion has therefore emerged as an alternative production and consumption model that combines economic viability with environmental responsibility and social considerations. This orientation is consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production, which calls for changes not only in industrial processes but also in consumer decisions (Sahimaa et al., 2024).

The market transition toward sustainable fashion nevertheless remains slower than environmental awareness would suggest. Consumers may acknowledge pollution, textile waste, and climate-related concerns while continuing to purchase conventional fashion products. Sustainable apparel is frequently evaluated as less accessible, less varied, less aligned with current trends, or less capable of communicating prestige. This discrepancy between environmental awareness and actual consumption is commonly discussed as an attitude-behaviour or green gap. The gap indicates that favourable environmental attitudes do not automatically remove the barriers that preserve established consumption routines (Noor & Shah, 2024).

Indonesia provides a relevant setting for examining this problem. Exposure to sustainability campaigns, local responsible-fashion initiatives, and environmental discussions has increased, particularly in urban markets. At the same time, conventional and global fast-fashion brands remain attractive because of their product variety, trend responsiveness, familiarity, and symbolic value. The coexistence of environmental awareness and persistent preference for conventional fashion suggests that resistance is not simply the absence of purchase intention; it may constitute an active decision to avoid, delay, or reject sustainable alternatives (Rasfeld, 2026).

Most sustainable fashion studies have been developed from adoption-oriented perspectives, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and Value-Belief-Norm approaches, explaining how attitudes, social norms, and environmental concern stimulate purchase intention. These perspectives are important, but they primarily ask why consumers adopt sustainable products. They are less suited to explaining why informed consumers actively preserve familiar purchasing patterns and oppose a supposedly beneficial innovation. Innovation Resistance Theory (IRT) offers a more appropriate lens. IRT conceptualises resistance as a normal consumer response to innovations that disrupt routines, require behavioural change, create uncertainty, or conflict with established identities, distinguishing functional barriers (usage, value, and risk) from psychological barriers (tradition and image) (Szaban et al., 2026).

This study operationalises functional barriers through perceived limited choices (usage barrier) and green skepticism (risk barrier). Perceived limited choices capture concerns about design variety, trend compatibility, and accessibility (Busalim et al., 2024). Green skepticism captures doubt regarding the truthfulness, transparency, standards, and environmental benefits of sustainability claims (Zaid et al., 2025). Psychological barriers are operationalised through face consciousness (image barrier) and need for status (value/image barrier) (Carranza et al., 2023). Beyond functional and psychological evaluations, sustainability communication can also generate moral emotions. Eco-shame refers to discomfort arising when individuals perceive

that their behaviour falls short of environmental expectations (Nicolau et al., 2024; Nielsen & Gamborg, 2024). This study examines eco-shame and need for status as moderators within an integrated IRT framework among 602 exhibition visitors in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Fashion and Consumer Resistance

Sustainable fashion encompasses environmentally responsible materials, ethical production, waste reduction, longer product use, circularity, and more deliberate consumption (Sahimaa et al., 2024). Consumer resistance differs conceptually from low purchase intention: while low intention reflects indifference, resistance reflects an active tendency to avoid, delay, oppose, or reject an innovation (Wiratama et al., 2022). In this study, resistance purchase intention is manifested through unfavourable impressions, critical evaluations, preference for conventional fashion, dissatisfaction with sustainable alternatives, and a stated willingness to reject purchase.

Innovation Resistance Theory

Contemporary literature on consumer behavior (Khan et al., 2022; Talwar et al., 2023) establishes that innovation resistance is not an abnormal reaction or merely the opposite of adoption. Instead, it represents a standard consumer response when an innovation introduces change, uncertainty, or conflict with existing beliefs and practices. Functional barriers arise from usage difficulty, inadequate value, and perceived risk, whereas psychological barriers occur when an innovation conflicts with tradition or carries an undesirable image.

Hypotheses Development

Perceived Limited Choices & Resistance: Limited product choices resemble a usage barrier because the innovation is difficult to integrate into preferred styles and routines (Busalim et al., 2024).

- **H1:** Perceived limited choices positively influence resistance purchase intention toward sustainable fashion.

Green Skepticism & Resistance: Green skepticism is a risk barrier, as unverified green claims create uncertainty and perceived greenwashing (Zaid et al., 2025).

- **H2:** Green skepticism positively influences resistance purchase intention toward sustainable fashion.

Face Consciousness & Resistance: Face consciousness reflects an image barrier where consumers evaluate whether apparel protects or improves social presentation (Liao et al., 2023).

- **H3:** Face consciousness positively influences resistance purchase intention toward sustainable fashion.

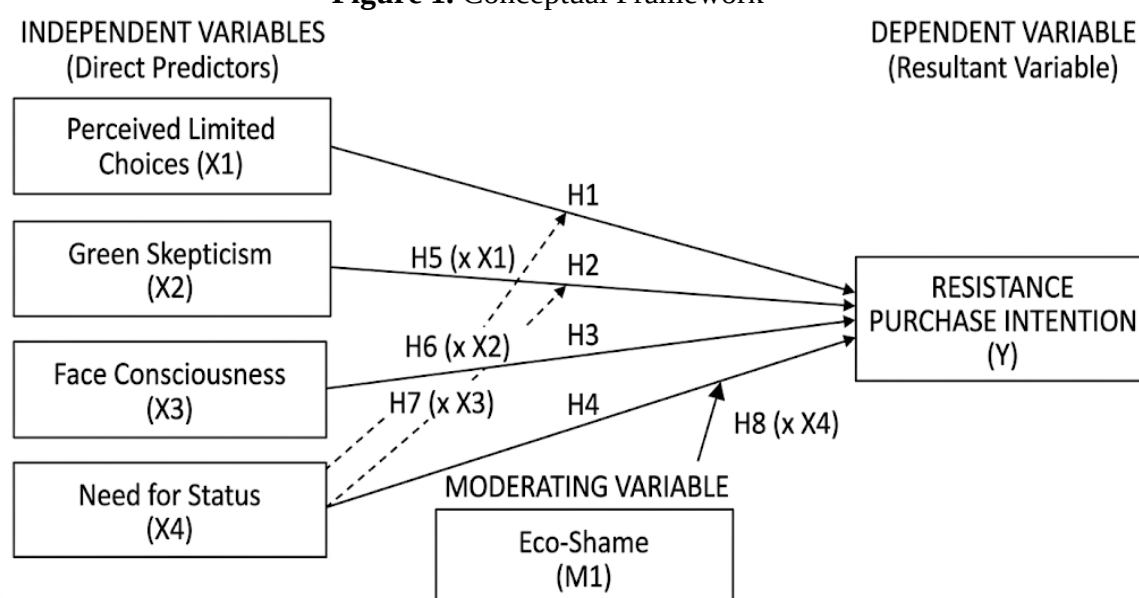
Need for Status & Resistance: Need for status acts as a value and image barrier when conventional products offer stronger symbolic prestige than sustainable apparel (Carranza et al., 2023; Kamarau et al., 2024).

- **H4:** Need for status positively influences resistance purchase intention toward sustainable fashion.

Eco-Shame as a Moderator: Eco-shame can intensify frustration over limited choices (H5), interact with green skepticism (H6), or alter the image concerns of face-conscious consumers (H7) (Concina, 2025; Nicolau et al., 2024).

- **H5:** Eco-shame moderates the relationship between perceived limited choices and resistance purchase intention.
 - **H6:** Eco-shame moderates the relationship between green skepticism and resistance purchase intention.
 - **H7:** Eco-shame moderates the relationship between face consciousness and resistance purchase intention.
- Need for Status as a Moderator: High status motivation amplifies face consciousness, as social evaluation matters more when products signal rank and success (Carranza et al., 2023).
- **H8:** Need for status moderates the relationship between face consciousness and resistance purchase intention.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Note: Solid lines represent direct structural paths (H1–H4), whereas dashed lines represent moderating interaction effects (H5–H8).

METHOD

Research Design and Context

The study used a quantitative explanatory survey with a cross-sectional design. Data were collected at three professional exhibitions in Greater Jakarta during June 2026: Shafara at Bintaro Xchange Mall (5–7 June 2026), Jakarta Muslim Fashion Week at ICE BSD (12–14 June 2026), and Sustainable Material Connection at JICC (20–24 June 2026).

Population, Sampling, and Data Collection

Target respondents were consumers aware of sustainable fashion or exposed to sustainability initiatives. Non-probability purposive sampling was applied via QR-code questionnaires at registration areas. A total of 602 usable responses were gathered (80.4% female, 19.6% male; 55.0% aged 30–40 years; 65.4% bachelor's degree holders; 66.3% residing in Greater Jakarta).

Measurement and Analysis

Constructs were measured using five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) adapted from validated sources (Sadiq et al., 2026). PLS-SEM was conducted using SmartPLS, following a two-stage evaluation: measurement model (indicator loadings, AVE, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, HTMT, Fornell-Larcker) and structural model (VIF, R^2 , f^2 , Q^2 predict, path coefficients, bootstrapping).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Descriptive Results

The mean scores for the constructs were: Perceived Limited Choices ($M = 3.9396$, $SD = 0.77386$), Green Skepticism ($M = 3.8616$), Face Consciousness ($M = 3.8688$, $SD = 0.73240$), Need for Status ($M = 4.2159$, $SD = 0.68948$), Eco-Shame ($M = 3.3509$, $SD = 1.05943$), and Resistance Purchase Intention ($M = 3.9498$, $SD = 0.78890$).

Measurement Model

All indicator loadings exceeded 0.70 (0.731 to 0.922). AVE values (0.638 to 0.765) exceeded 0.50, and composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.70, confirming convergent validity and internal consistency. Discriminant validity was established through HTMT ratios (< 0.90) and Fornell-Larcker criteria.

Table 1. Convergent Validity and Composite Reliability

Construct	Items	Loadings Range	Cronbach's Alpha	ρ_A	AVE	Composite Reliability
Perceived Limited Choices	3	0.818 – 0.858	0.784	0.792	0.696	0.873
Green Skepticism	3	0.731 – 0.871	0.768	0.791	0.684	0.866
Face Consciousness	4	0.754 – 0.835	0.812	0.827	0.638	0.875
Need for Status	3	0.808 – 0.856	0.789	0.794	0.704	0.877
Eco-Shame	4	0.847 – 0.922	0.898	0.914	0.765	0.928
Resistance Purchase Intention	5	0.825 – 0.885	0.915	0.917	0.746	0.936

Source: Primary Data Processed via SmartPLS 4.0 (2026)

Note: All indicator outer loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, while Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are well above 0.50, supporting convergent validity; furthermore, internal consistency reliability is established as Cronbach's Alpha, ρ_A , and Composite Reliability values all surpass the standard cutoff criterion of 0.70.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Multicollinearity was absent (inner VIFs: 1.266 to 3.239). The model explained 70.3% of the variance in resistance purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.703$) with high predictive relevance (Q^2 predict = 0.695).

Table 2. Model and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Structural Path / Moderation	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Perceived Limited Choices → Resistance Purchase Intention	0.177	3.966	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Green Skepticism → Resistance Purchase Intention	0.419	8.906	< 0.001	Supported

Hypothesis	Structural Path / Moderation	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H3	Face Consciousness $\rightarrow$ Resistance Purchase Intention	0.136	3.966	< 0.001	Supported
H4	Need for Status $\rightarrow$ Resistance Purchase Intention	0.296	7.527	< 0.001	Supported
H5	Eco-Shame $\times$ Perceived Limited Choices $\rightarrow$ Resistance Purchase Intention	0.148	3.601	< 0.001	Supported
H6	Eco-Shame $\times$ Green Skepticism $\rightarrow$ Resistance Purchase Intention	-0.025	0.565	0.286	Not supported
H7	Eco-Shame $\times$ Face Consciousness $\rightarrow$ Resistance Purchase Intention	-0.140	5.284	< 0.001	Supported
H8	Need for Status $\times$ Face Consciousness $\rightarrow$ Resistance Purchase Intention	0.042	2.155	0.016	Supported

Source: Primary Data Processed via SmartPLS 4.0 (2026)

Note: Path significance was evaluated using 5,000 bootstrapping subsamples (* $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$), where t-values greater than 1.65 reflect directional significance at $p < 0.05$; overall, the structural model demonstrates strong explanatory power and predictive relevance, explaining 70.3% of the variance in resistance purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.703$, Q^2 predict = 0.695).

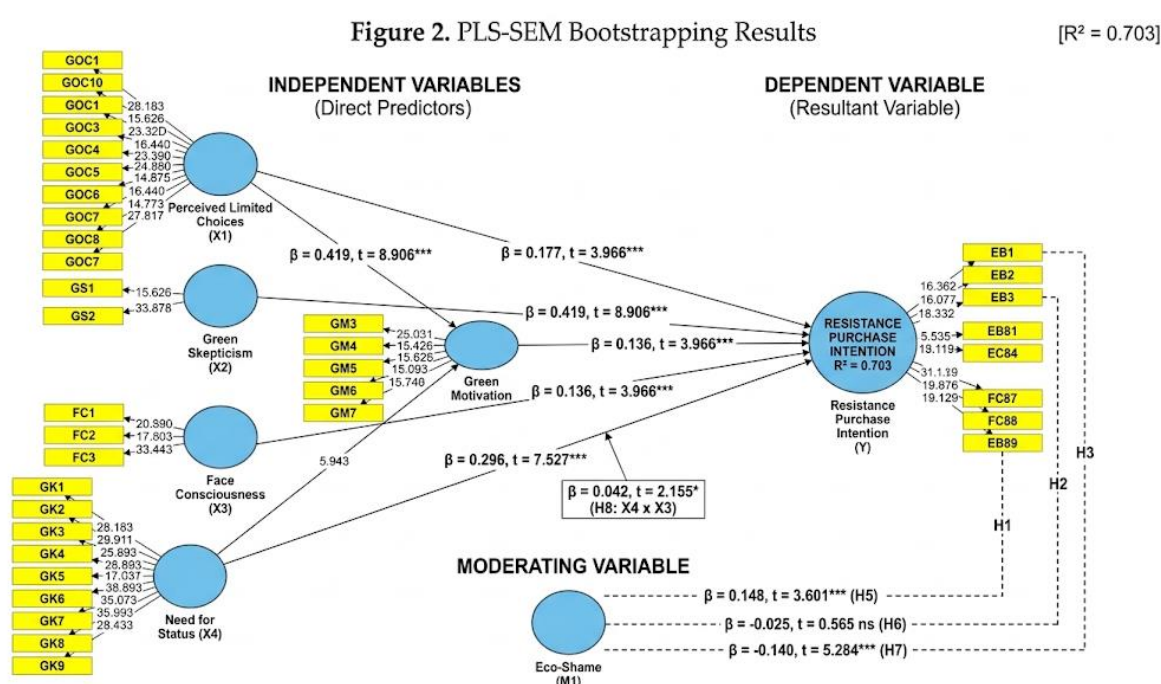


Figure 2 illustrates the structural model evaluation and empirical bootstrapping results generated via Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS. The diagram presents the standardized path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and significance levels derived from 5,000 bootstrapping subsamples to evaluate the hypothesized direct and moderating relationships.

Overall, the structural model demonstrates strong explanatory power, accounting for 70.3% of the variance in resistance purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.703$), alongside a high predictive relevance (Q^2 predict = 0.695).

- **Direct Structural Pathways:** All four direct predictors exerted statistically significant positive impacts on resistance purchase intention ($p < 0.001$). Green skepticism (X2) represents the dominant direct driver ($\beta = 0.419, t = 8.906$), followed by need for status (X4; $\beta = 0.296, t = 7.527$), perceived limited choices (X1; $\beta = 0.177, t = 3.966$), and face consciousness (X3; $\beta = 0.136, t = 3.966$). These paths confirm hypotheses H1 through H4.
- **Moderating Pathways (Eco-Shame & Need for Status):**
 - **H5 (Eco-Shame $\times$ Limited Choices):** Significant positive interaction ($\beta = 0.148, t = 3.601, p < 0.001$), indicating that eco-shame amplifies the positive impact of product choice constraints on resistance.
 - **H6 (Eco-Shame $\times$ Green Skepticism):** Non-significant interaction ($\beta = -0.025, t = 0.565, p = 0.286$), demonstrating that eco-shame does not alter skepticism-based resistance.
 - **H7 (Eco-Shame $\times$ Face Consciousness):** Significant negative interaction ($\beta = -0.140, t = 5.284, p < 0.001$), showing that eco-shame mitigates image-driven resistance.
 - **H8 (Need for Status $\times$ Face Consciousness):** Significant positive interaction ($\beta = 0.042, t = 2.155, p = 0.016$), confirming that high status motivation strengthens the relationship between face consciousness and active resistance.

Discussion

Perceived Limited Choices as a Functional Usage Barrier

The significant positive effect of perceived limited choices on resistance purchase intention ($\beta = 0.177, p < 0.001$) empirically confirms that product assortment acts as a direct usage barrier within Innovation Resistance Theory (IRT). Consumers do not evaluate sustainable fashion solely on its moral or environmental merits; rather, they demand that it fulfills conventional apparel criteria, such as aesthetic diversity, sizing accuracy, trend responsiveness, and versatility across occasions. When sustainable offerings are perceived as narrow, outdated, or hard to integrate into daily wardrobes, adopting them requires personal compromise and extra search costs. In response, active resistance functions as a rational defensive response to preserve the convenience, familiarity, and wardrobe consistency provided by conventional fast fashion. This finding aligns with the usage barrier literature in green consumption (Busalim et al., 2024), demonstrating that environmental communication cannot substitute for fundamental product availability and design appeal.

Green Skepticism as the Primary Risk Mechanism

Green skepticism emerged as the strongest direct predictor of consumer resistance ($\beta = 0.419, p < 0.001$), accounting for the largest effect size ($f^2 = 0.280$) in the structural model. This indicates that resistance to sustainable fashion is fundamentally driven by cognitive distrust rather than mere functional inconvenience or social image concerns. Consumers do not necessarily reject ecological responsibility in principle; instead, they doubt the truthfulness, transparency, and standards underlying corporate environmental claims. In an era marked by widespread greenwashing, ambiguity in sustainability labeling transforms green marketing into a source of risk rather than reassurance (Zaid et al., 2025). Under IRT, green skepticism operates as an informational risk barrier. When verifying ethical sourcing and production footprint requires substantial effort, skepticism provides a legitimate cognitive justification for consumers to stick to conventional apparel without experiencing personal moral dissonance.

Consequently, generic promotional campaigns yield diminishing returns unless backed by verifiable, traceable, and independent supply-chain evidence.

Face Consciousness and Social Image Protection

The positive impact of face consciousness on resistance purchase intention ($\beta = 0.136, p < 0.001$) highlights the socially embedded nature of clothing decisions. In visible consumption categories like fashion, garments serve as symbolic instruments to manage public impressions, maintain respect, and avoid negative social evaluation (Liao et al., 2023). When sustainable apparel is perceived as visually unappealing, less trendy, or lacking social prestige, face-conscious individuals interpret its purchase as a potential threat to their public presentation. Under IRT, this constitutes an image barrier. Consumers actively resist sustainable alternatives to safeguard their desired social identity and prevent social rejection or ridicule by peers. Although face consciousness exhibits a smaller direct coefficient compared to skepticism or status, its presence proves that fashion legitimacy is governed by collective social norms as much as individual preferences.

Need for Status and Symbolic Value Deficits

Need for status stood as the second most influential direct predictor of resistance ($\beta = 0.296, p < 0.001$). Respondents consistently acknowledged that conventional fashion communicates social rank, prestige, and success far more effectively than sustainable alternatives. Within IRT, this finding links value and image barriers. Consumers evaluate the symbolic return on investment of apparel; if a sustainable garment carries a premium price tag while delivering inferior visible prestige or status signaling, the perceived value proposition becomes unfavorable (Carranza et al., 2023). Ethical and ecological attributes do not automatically convert into social distinction. Therefore, unless sustainable fashion brands build aspirational narratives, design leadership, and symbolic value, status-oriented consumers will continue to favor established conventional and luxury brands as superior status markers.

The Differentiated Moderating Roles of Eco-Shame

The moderation analysis reveals that eco-shame does not operate as a uniform driver, but acts as a complex boundary condition whose effect depends on the nature of the underlying barrier:

1. **Amplifying Limited Choice Frustration (H5):** Eco-shame significantly strengthened the positive relationship between perceived limited choices and resistance ($\beta = 0.148, p < 0.001$). When consumers experience high moral pressure regarding environmental degradation, perceiving a lack of attractive sustainable choices intensifies psychological tension. Frustrated by the inability to align moral obligations with aesthetic preferences, consumers resort to defensive rejection of the sustainable market.
2. **Invariance Across Green Skepticism (H6):** Eco-shame did not significantly moderate the skepticism-resistance link ($\beta = -0.025, p = 0.286$). Skepticism is fundamentally a cognitive, evidence-based assessment of claim credibility. Emotional guilt or shame does not resolve informational ambiguity, confirming that skepticism remains a stable risk barrier regardless of emotional intensity.
3. **Attenuating Image-Based Resistance (H7):** Eco-shame significantly weakened the positive effect of face consciousness on resistance ($\beta = -0.140, p < 0.001$). This negative moderation represents a tension between prestige-based face and moral-environmental face. When eco-shame is high, the reputational value of behaving responsibly overrides

conventional prestige concerns, leading face-conscious consumers to reduce their image-driven opposition to sustainable fashion.

4. Need for Status as a Social Boundary Condition

Finally, need for status positively moderated the relationship between face consciousness and resistance purchase intention ($\beta = 0.042, p = 0.016$). This interaction confirms that social image concerns lead to higher resistance when paired with strong status-seeking motives. Sensitivity to public evaluation does not automatically trigger opposition; it becomes particularly restrictive when the consumer explicitly uses fashion to communicate rank and social standing. For status-motivated individuals, sustainable fashion must move beyond avoiding harm to actively providing social distinction through superior design, limited capsule series, and authentic storytelling.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

This study advances sustainable fashion research by shifting the analytical paradigm from traditional, adoption-oriented frameworks toward active consumer resistance through the lens of Innovation Resistance Theory (IRT). Analyzing survey data from 602 exhibition visitors in Greater Jakarta using PLS-SEM, the empirical findings demonstrate that consumer resistance to sustainable fashion is driven by a complex interplay of functional, psychological, and emotional mechanisms.

Specifically, all four direct antecedents—perceived limited choices (usage barrier), green skepticism (risk barrier), face consciousness (image barrier), and need for status (value/image barrier)—exert positive and significant impacts on resistance purchase intention. Among these, green skepticism emerged as the primary and dominant predictor ($\beta = 0.419$), revealing that active resistance is fundamentally rooted in cognitive distrust toward environmental claims and perceived greenwashing, rather than mere product constraints or social image motives. Need for status stood as the second strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.296$), underscoring that conventional fashion continues to offer superior symbolic and status-signaling value in emerging markets.

Furthermore, incorporating eco-shame and need for status as boundary conditions extends IRT into the emotional domain. The moderation results demonstrate that eco-shame does not operate uniformly:

- It amplifies resistance stemming from perceived limited choices by heightening psychological tension when moral desires clash with poor product variety ($\beta = 0.148$).
- It exerts no significant effect on the green skepticism–resistance relationship, proving that skepticism remains a stable, evidence-based cognitive barrier ($\beta = -0.025, p = 0.286$).
- It weakens image-driven resistance among face-conscious consumers by elevating moral accountability above prestige-based social presentation ($\beta = -0.140$).

Finally, need for status positively moderates the face consciousness relationship ($\beta = 0.042$), confirming that social evaluation concerns translate into stronger resistance when consumers specifically utilize apparel to communicate rank and social standing.

Managerial and Policy Implications

1. Enhancing Claim Credibility: Fashion brands must move away from generic "eco-friendly" claims and adopt specific, traceable, and independently certified supply-chain disclosures to neutralize green skepticism.

2. Expanding Assortment & Design Appeal: Product developers must ensure sustainable apparel satisfies core aesthetic, sizing, trend, and functional criteria to eliminate the usage barrier.
3. Elevating Symbolic Value: Marketers should reposition sustainable fashion as aspirational through premium craftsmanship and design leadership, bridging the status-value deficit.
4. Avoiding Negative Shame Messaging: Campaign strategies should focus on positive social proof and empowerment rather than shame-inducing appeals, which risk triggering defensive rejection.

Suggestions

This study is limited by its cross-sectional design, reliance on non-probability sampling among exhibition visitors in Greater Jakarta, and a female-dominated sample. Future research should utilize longitudinal designs, expand into diverse geographic and cultural contexts, examine actual longitudinal purchase behavior, and explore additional boundary conditions such as generational cohorts, brand familiarity, and price sensitivity.

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