# Relationship between Self-Transcendence Value and Ethical Purchase Intention: The Role of Moral Obligation and Perceived Behavioural Control

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## ABSTRACT

The expansion of the global economy has improved living standards but has also brought significant ecological and social challenges, highlighting a notable gap between consumer ethical concerns and actual purchasing behaviours. Although awareness of ethical issues has increased, traditional factors such as price and quality still largely dominate consumer decisions, limiting the translation of ethical awareness into ethical purchase intention (EPI). Given this background, this study aims to investigate how self-transcendence values influence EPI among general adults in China, specifically examining moral obligation as a mediator and perceived behavioural control (PBC) as a moderator. A quantitative approach using survey data from 649 Chinese adults confirmed that self-transcendence values positively influence EPI through increased moral obligation, while PBC significantly enhances this relationship. These findings contribute to understanding the mechanisms underlying ethical consumption and provide practical benefits for companies seeking to align products with ethical values and improve accessibility to ethical choices. Future research should further examine causal relationships using longitudinal data and employ more representative samples to enhance generalizability.

**Keywords:** Self-transcendence  Ethical Purchase Intention  Moral Obligation  Perceived Behavioural Control  Personal Value

## INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the relationship between self-transcendence values and ethical purchase intention (EPI), exploring moral obligation as a mediator and perceived behavioural control (PBC) as a moderator among general adults in China. Despite widespread recognition that ethical and environmental considerations are important, previous research consistently indicates a significant gap between ethical concerns and actual purchase decisions. While numerous studies have focused on identifying determinants of ethical consumption, the role of specific personal values—especially self-transcendence—remains underexplored in non- Western contexts. Furthermore, the mechanisms through which these values influence ethical consumer behaviours and the conditions under which these influences are strengthened remain unclear.

To address these gaps, the current research explicitly examines how self-transcendence values translate into ethical purchasing intentions through moral obligation, and how perceived behavioural control moderates this relationship. The paper is structured as follows: firstly, relevant literature on ethical consumption, values, moral obligation, and perceived behavioural control is reviewed. Then, the methodology, including data collection and analysis techniques, is presented. Subsequently, empirical results are provided, followed by an in-depth discussion of the theoretical contributions, managerial implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Although the expansion of the global economy has brought great benefits such as increased level of income and improved life standards, it has caused some ecological and social crises such as environmental pollutions, wasteful production, unsustainable treatment of natural resources, labour abusive or unfair treatment, and economic inequality (Casais, B., & Faria, J., 2022). Over the last few decades, through media, activist groups and educational institutions, consumers are increasingly aware of these issues and concerned about the impact

of their purchasing behaviours on the environment and society (Carrington et al., 2021).

Despite these, Horton, K. (2020) reported that most consumers still prioritize traditional product features such as price, style, fit, availability, and product knowledge over environmental or society considerations when making purchases. Haase, L. (2020) also found that price and quality are still the primary considerations in the purchasing decision of Millennials. In addition to these, several studies also demonstrated that many consumers are reluctant to convert their environmental and societal concerns into purchase intention or actual purchase. For example, Kaucic and Lu (2019) reported that only 30 percent of consumers who express a positive attitude toward socially and environmentally responsible products actually buy them. Similarly, Carrington et al. (2021) reported that although 89 percent of UK consumers are concerned about environmental or societal issues, only 30 percent translate these concerns into ethical purchase intentions. Also, Burke et al. (2021) found that the majority of consumers are reluctant to pay a premium for products labelled as organic or fair-trade. Given the significant implications of consumer purchasing behaviour for environment and society, previous studies highlighted the need to identify the factors that can induce ethical purchase intention (EPI) or the intention to buy from companies that integrated environmental and social considerations into their operation or production (Stringer, Mortimer & Payne, 2020; Berki- Kiss & Menrad, 2022; Mochla & Tsourvakas, 2024).

**Problem Background**

**Related Work**

Previous studies have extensively investigated ethical purchase intention (EPI), emphasizing various determinants such as personal values, consumer attitudes, and contextual factors. Scholars such as Stringer et al. (2020), Klabi and Binzafrah (2023), and Nguyen et al. (2021) highlight the importance of self-transcendence values, which prioritize social and environmental well-being over individual interests. Despite recognizing the potential of self- transcendence values to enhance ethical consumer decisions, empirical findings remain inconsistent—some studies report strong positive relationships, while others find weak or negligible effects.

Moreover, research addressing how these values operate through intermediate mechanisms—such as moral obligations—is limited. For instance, Stringer et al. (2020) identified environmental concern as a mediator, but did not consider broader ethical contexts beyond specific product categories. Likewise, existing studies have often neglected the moderating role of situational or psychological factors such as perceived behavioural control, which can significantly affect consumers' abilities to act on their moral convictions.

Another notable limitation in current literature is the predominant reliance on samples from Western or developed countries, thus restricting the generalizability of findings to culturally diverse contexts like China. Given that consumer behaviours and ethical values can differ substantially across cultures, examining these constructs in non-Western contexts is critical to developing a comprehensive understanding of ethical consumption globally.

Addressing these limitations, the current study contributes by integrating moral obligation and perceived behavioural control into the analysis of ethical purchase intentions within the Chinese cultural context. This approach not only clarifies the mixed findings of previous research but also enhances the applicability of theoretical frameworks across different cultures.

**Research Gaps**

Although prior studies have examined the role of self-transcendence in ethical consumption, several gaps remain. First, empirical findings on the relationship between self- transcendence and EPI are inconsistent, with some studies reporting strong positive effects while others show negligible or even negative associations (Stringer et al., 2020; Oloveze et al., 2024). This suggests the need for further verification, especially in culturally distinct settings where value priorities may differ from those in Western contexts.

Second, while Value-Belief-Norm theory emphasises moral obligation as a key mechanism linking values

to behaviour, most existing research has focused on concern-based mediators such as environmental or animal welfare concern (Stringer et al., 2020; Klabi & Binzafrah, 2023). The role of moral obligation as a distinct mediator between self- transcendence and EPI remains underexplored.

Third, despite the Theory of Planned Behaviour highlighting perceived behavioural control (PBC) as a major determinant of intention, its potential to moderate the moral obligation–EPI relationship has received little empirical attention. Understanding this moderation could clarify when moral norms are more likely to translate into actionable purchase intentions.

Finally, the literature is heavily skewed towards Western or developed-country samples, limiting the generalisability of findings to emerging markets. Given China's unique socio-cultural context and evolving ethical consumption landscape, there is a need for context-specific evidence that integrates personal values, moral obligation, and perceived behavioural control in explaining EPI.

**Problem Statement**

Despite growing public awareness of environmental and social issues, a substantial gap persists between consumers' ethical concerns and their actual purchasing behaviours. While personal values—particularly self-transcendence—have been identified as potential drivers of ethical purchase intention (EPI), empirical findings on their influence remain mixed, with studies reporting positive, negligible, or even negative effects. This inconsistency suggests that the relationship may be more complex and influenced by underlying psychological mechanisms and contextual factors.

Existing research offers limited understanding of how self-transcendence translates into ethical purchasing. The Value-Belief-Norm theory posits that values influence behaviour through personal norms such as moral obligation, yet moral obligation as a mediator in the self-transcendence–EPI relationship has been largely overlooked in favour of other mediators such as environmental concern. Moreover, even when consumers feel morally obligated to make ethical purchases, their intentions may vary depending on perceived behavioural control (PBC)—the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour. While PBC is a core construct in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, its moderating role in strengthening or weakening the moral obligation–EPI link remains underexplored.

Furthermore, the majority of empirical studies have been conducted in Western or developed-market contexts, limiting the applicability of existing findings to emerging economies like China. Given the cultural differences in value systems, consumption norms, and access to ethical products, there is a pressing need for research that examines these relationships in non-Western contexts. Addressing these gaps will not only clarify the mechanisms and conditions under which self-transcendence values foster EPI but also provide actionable insights for policymakers and businesses aiming to promote ethical consumption in China.

**Value and Ethical Purchase Intention**

Value, the "concepts or beliefs, pertaining to desirable end states" (Lindkvist, M., & Ekener, E., 2023), has been argued to play a fundamental role in shaping consumers' attitudes and decisions regarding ethical consumption (Alsaad, Saif-Alyousfi & Elrehail, 2021; Stringer et al., 2020; Berki-Kiss & Menrad, 2022). Ethical consumption typically involves a conflict between collective societal gain and self-interest. To illustrate, while purchasing green products may benefit society as a whole, they may be more expensive, or require consumers to put in extra effort and time to find or identify products that fall into this category (Stringer et al., 2020). Accordingly, a value frequently associated with ethical consumption is self- transcendence (Stringer et al., 2020), which emphasizes the welfare and interests of others even it may sacrifice personal interest (Borg, 2021).

Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory provides a framework for understanding how self- transcendence values influence ethical consumption. According to VBN theory, pro-social or altruistic intentions and behaviours are shaped by an individual's personal values, beliefs, and norms (Bautista, 2020). This theory posits that personal values represent the ideals or goals that individuals strive to achieve, which in turn shape their beliefs about what

is right (desirable) or wrong (undesirable). These beliefs then activate personal norms or moral obligations, guiding individuals to act in ways they believe they should or should not. For example, individuals who hold self-transcendence values, which emphasize concern for the welfare of others and the environment, are more likely to feel a strong sense of responsibility to make ethical choices. These values foster a belief system that prioritizes contributing positively to society and the environment. Consequently, these beliefs trigger personal norms or moral obligations to act in alignment with these values, such as by purchasing from companies that have integrated environmental and social considerations into their operation or production or purchasing environmentally friendly or socially responsible products (Francis, 2022).

Building on the notions highlighted above, self-transcendence value has been argued to play a key role in facilitating ethical purchase intention (Stringer et al., 2020; Klabi & Binzafrah, 2023). However, the existing empirical evidence regarding the influence of self-transcendence values on ethical purchase intention (EPI) is still limited (Stringer et al., 2020; Klabi & Binzafrah, 2023). Moreover, the findings are inconsistent. Some studies have found a positive effect of self-transcendence values (Klabi & Binzafrah, 2023), while others have reported an insignificant effect (Stringer, 2020) or even a negative effect (Oloveze, 2024). Accordingly, this study proposes that additional empirical evidence is needed to further verify the relationship between self-transcendence value and ethical purchase intention (EPI).

**Mediating Role of Moral Obligation**

Some researchers argued that the relationship between self-transcendence value and ethical purchase intention (EPI) is not straightforward but mediated by other factors (Stringer et al., 2020; Klabi & Binzafrah, 2023). In this regard, building on the idea that "a mediator specifies how, or the mechanism by which, a given effect occurs" (Ramayah et al., 2018, p. 193), some researchers argued that identifying the direct relationship between self- transcendence value and ethical purchase intention (EPI) does not account for "how" self-transcendence value influence ethical purchase intention (EPI) and highlighted the need to identify the factors that may mediate the relationship between self-transcendence value and ethical purchase intention (EPI) (Stringer et al., 2020; Klabi & Binzafrah, 2023).

Accordingly, some researchers attempted to identify the factors that can mediate the relationship between self-transcendence value and ethical purchase intention (EPI). For instances, Stringer et al. (2020) found that the relationship between self-transcendence value and the intention to purchase ethically marketed fast fashion is mediated by the concern for animal welfare and environment. Similarly, Klabi & Binzafrah (2023) found that the relationship between self-transcendence value and intention to purchase electric vehicle is mediated by environmental concern. Despite the existence of these studies, some researchers highlighted that the factors that can explain "how" self-transcendence value influence ethical purchase intention (EPI) remains less investigated and stressed the need for more research to identify the factors that may mediate the relationship between self-transcendence value and ethical purchase intention (EPI) (Stringer et al., 2020; Klabi & Binzafrah, 2023).

Moral obligation, the sense of responsibility to make ethical choices in consumption (Alsaad et al., 2021), may serve as a mediating factor in the relationship between self- transcendence values and ethical purchase intention (EPI). In this regard, as discussed in previous section, scholars repeatedly argued that individuals with self-transcendence value emphasize the welfare of others and the environment. Such value prioritizes contributing positively to society and the environment even it may sacrifice self-interest, which may consequently trigger moral obligations to purchase from companies that have integrated environmental and social considerations into their operation or production or purchase environmentally friendly or socially responsible products (Francis et al., 2022).

Empirically, studies demonstrated that self-transcendence value is positively related to moral obligation or the sense of responsibility to make ethical choices in consumption ( Nguyen et al., 2021). For instance, Nguyen et al. (2021) found positive relationship between self- transcendence value and moral obligation. On the other hand, studies also demonstrated that moral obligation is positively related to ethical purchase intention (EPI) (Nguyen et al., 2021; Chen, 2020; Jin et al., 2020). For instance, Jin et al. (2020) found positive relationship between moral obligation and the intention to purchase ethical food. These highlighted the potential role that

moral obligation plays in connecting the relationship between self-transcendence value and ethical purchase intention (EPI), which is thus far an unexplored area. Accordingly, there is a need to identify the mediating effect of moral obligation on the relationship between self- transcendence value and ethical purchase intention (EPI).

**Moderating Role of Perceived Behavioural Control**

While previous studies repeatedly noted that consumers who feel a strong sense of responsibility to make ethical choices in their consumption (i.e., moral obligation) are more likely to have an ethical purchase intention (EPI), it is not logical to assume that all such consumers have equal level of ethical purchase intention (EPI). Some may have higher or lower levels of ethical purchase intention (EPI), while others may not have it at all (Beldad & Hegner, 2018; Kumar, Kumar, Singh, Sá, Carvalho & Santos, 2023). In this regard, some studies noted that whether consumers possess ethical purchase intention (EPI) or the level of their ethical purchase intention (EPI) is significantly influenced by the environmental and individual attributes. Certain environmental factors or individual traits may determine whether consumers have ethical purchase intention (EPI) and also influence the level of their ethical purchase intention (EPI) (Beldad & Hegner, 2018; Kumar et al., 2023). Accordingly, some studies highlighted the need to identify the environmental or individual attributes that help explain "when" or "for whom" moral obligation is more or less related to ethical purchase intention (EPI) (Beldad & Hegner, 2018; Kumar et al., 2023).

In this regard, building on the idea that "moderation effect is a causal model that postulates when or for whom an independent variable more strongly (or less weakly) causes a dependent variable" (Wu & Zumbo, 2008, p. 370), some researchers started to identify the factors that can moderate the relationship between moral obligation and ethical purchase intention (EPI) (Beldad & Hegner, 2018; Kumar et al., 2023). For instances, Kumar et al. (2023) investigated the moderating effect of green self-identity on relationship between moral obligation and green purchase intention. Similarly, Beldad and Hegner (2018) investigated the moderating effect of gender on relationship between moral obligation and the intention to purchase free trade products. Despite the existence of these studies, some researchers highlighted that the factors that can help explain "when" and "for whom" moral obligation is more or less related to ethical purchase intention (EPI) remains less investigated and stressed the need for more research to identify the factors that may moderate the relationship between moral obligation and ethical purchase intention (EPI) (Beldad & Hegner, 2018; Kumar et al., 2023).

Perceived behavioural control, the perception of the ease or difficulty of purchasing from companies that integrated environmental and social considerations into their operation or production (Hosta & Zabkar, 2021), may serve as a moderating factor in the relationship between moral obligation and ethical purchase intention (EPI). In this regard, Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) asserts that the formation of behavioural intention is greatly hinged on perceived behavioural control (PCB) or the perceived ease or difficulty of performing a behaviour. Specifically, when individuals perceive that it is easy to perform a behaviour, they are more likely to develop strong intention to engage in it. In contrast, when individuals perceive that it is difficult to perform a behaviour, they are less likely to develop strong intention or their intention may be lower (Ajzen, 1991).

Empirically, numerous studies demonstrated that perceived behavioural control (PCB) is positively related to ethical purchase intention (Beldad & Hegner, 2018; Liu, Liu, Perez, Chan, Collado & Mo, 2021; Fauzi, Hanafiah & Kunjuraman, 2022; Kumar et al., 2023). For instances, Kumar et al. (2023) found that there is a positive relationship between perceived behavioural control (PCB) and green purchase intention. Similarly, Fauzi et al. (2022) found that perceived behavioural control (PCB) is positively related to the intention to visit green hotel. Building on these, this study argues that perceived behavioural control (PCB) may determine whether or the extent to which consumers who feel obligated to purchase from companies that have integrated environmental and social considerations into their operation or production (i.e., moral obligation) possess ethical purchase intention (EPI). Thus far, it is an unexplored area and thus there is a need to empirically examine the moderating effect of perceived behavioural control on relationship between moral obligation and ethical purchase intention (EPI).
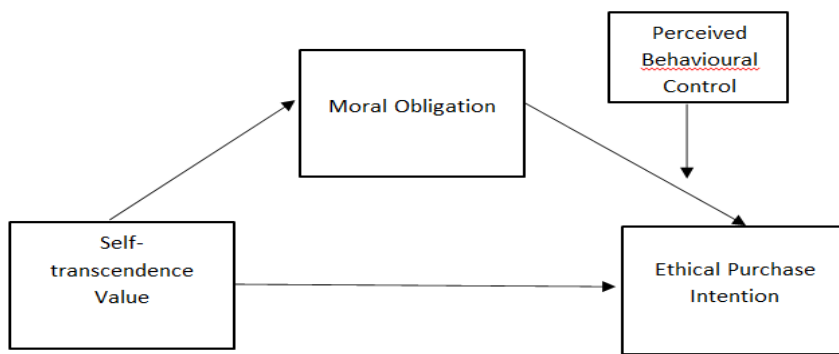
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

# METHODOLOGY

## Participants

General adults in China were targeted as the research population. Convenience sampling was employed to draw samples and self-reported questionnaire was administered through Wenjuanxing (a Chinese platform). Survey invitation was sent to the potential respondents through WeChat. A cover letter was attached to clarify the objectives of this study. The respondents were assured that their responses would be completely anonymous and informed that they have the full discretion to withdraw anytime. Electronic informed consent was retrieved from the respondents. Also, to ensure that this study meets the ethical standards, this study strictly followed the guidelines put forth by 1964 Helsinki declaration and its subsequent amendments.

Building on the procedures noted above, 650 samples were collected. However, 1 of them was identified as outliers. They were discarded from dataset and thus only 649 samples were involved in the final analysis. To ensure adequate statistical power, G*Power software was employed to determine the minimum sample size requirement for this study. The analysis indicated that a minimum of 129 samples was required and thus 649 samples were deemed sufficient to produce findings with adequate statistical power (Power= 0.95, $f2$= 0.15, and $\alpha$= 0.05) (Faul et al., 2007).

## Measures

All variables in this study were measured using items adapted or adopted from well- validated research instruments. Self-transcendence value was measured using 5 items adopted from Higher-Order-Value Scale-17 (HOV17) (Lechner, Beierlein, Davidov & Schwartz, 2024), which were rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (is not at all similar to me) to 6 (is very similar to me). Ethical purchase intention (EPI) was assessed using 5 items adopted from Isa, Chin and Liew (2020), which were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Moral obligation was measured using 2 items adapted from Jin, Lin and McLeay (2020), while perceived behavioural control (PCB) was measured using 2 items adapted from Hosta and Zabkar (2021). These items were rated on 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

To ensure the content validity of the measurement scales employed in this study, four experts specialized in consumer behaviour were invited to assess the relevance of the measurement items. All the measurement items were confirmed by the experts as relevant to measure the intended constructs. As discussed previously, the targeted population for this study was general adults in China. Many of them have limited English proficiency and thus the original English measurement scales were translated to Chinese language. This translation was mainly conducted to make the questions easy for participants to understand. It may help stimulate response rate and reduce the risk of participants responding without adequate or proper understanding of the questions (Saunders et al., 2016). With the aim to ensure that the meaning of the questions was not altered throughout the translation process, forward-backward translation approach was employed. Specifically, the original English questionnaire was first translated to Chinese (i.e., forward translation) by a bilingual translator competent in both English and Chinese. Following this, the Chinese questionnaire was translated back to English (i.e., back

translation) by another translator without prior knowledge of the questionnaire. Subsequently, an expert competent in both Chinese and English and specialized in consumer behaviour was invited to determine whether the terms used in both the original questionnaire and back-translated questionnaire carried the same meaning (i.e., vocabulary equivalence). The feedback confirmed that the terms used in both versions carried the same meaning and it suggests that the meaning or content of the questions was not altered throughout the translation process.

Additionally, with the aim to identify whether the measurement scales can function as intended among the general adults in China, a pre-test was conducted with 5 general adults in China. The feedback indicated that the meaning of most questions was clear. However, a few questions were found to have ambiguous terms and these questions were subsequently modified based on the suggestions provided by the 5 participants. The modified questions were reassessed by these participants. The feedback confirmed that all questions were clear and suggested that no further amendment was needed for the measurement items.

## Data analysis

Data analyses in this study were mainly conducted with Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 27.0 and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) 28.0. Firstly, data cleaning procedures were performed, which encompass identifying multivariate outliers (mahalanobis distance), assessing multivariate normality (multivariate skewness and kurtosis), identifying multicollinearity issue (VIF) and addressing common method variance (CMV). Secondly, descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, standard deviation, and correlation) were generated for the variables of this study (i.e., self-transcendence value, moral obligation, perceived behavioral control and ethical purchase intention). Thirdly, through AMOS 28.0, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed to evaluate the measurement model (model fit, convergent validity, discriminant validity) and test hypotheses.

Fourthly, mediation analysis was performed through bootstrapping approach (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) to identify the mediating effect of moral obligation on relationship between self-transcendence value and ethical purchase intention. Lastly, moderation analysis was performed through two-stage approach in AMOS 28.0. Specifically, the latent score of variables was firstly computed and saved. The interaction term was subsequently developed by multiplying the latent score of moral obligation and perceived behavioral control. The resulting interaction term was used as an independent variable predicting ethical purchase intention (EPI) (Memon, Cheah, Ramayah, Ting, Chuah & Cham, 2019). Furthermore, as recommended by Dawson (2014), the moderating effect of perceived behavioral control (PCB) on relationship between moral obligation and ethical purchase intention (EPI) was also illustrated through interaction plot.

## Research Results

## Preliminary Analysis

Firstly, this study employed mahalanobis distance test to identify multivariate outliers and used p1 <0.005 as the cut-off value (Kline, 2016). Based on this cut-off value, this study identified 1 outlier and removed them from dataset. Secondly, this study assessed the multivariate normality of data through multivariate kurtosis and used (+20; -20) as the cut-off value (Kline, 2016). In this regard, the multivariate kurtosis was found to be -2.068, which falls within the range of (+20; -20) (Kline, 2016). Such result reflected that the data was normally distributed. Thirdly, this study also conducted multicollinearity diagnostic. The detection- tolerance (TOL) and variance inflation factor (VIF) of all constructs meet the threshold value of (TOL>0.10, VIF<10) (Kline, 2016), suggesting that there was no concern for multicollinearity in this study. Lastly, this study also tested for common method variance (CMV) through Harman's single factor test. The results showed that the variance explained by first factor was 47.3 percent. It was below the cut-off value of 50 percent (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986), suggesting that common method variance was not a threat in this study.

## Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics (i.e., mean and standard deviation) for the variables in this study such as perceived behavioural control (PCB), moral obligation (MO), ethical purchase intention (EPI) and self-

transcendence value (ST) as well as the correlation coefficients for their relationship. Apart from the negative correlation between moral obligation (MO) and perceived behavioural control (PCB), the other relationships were all found to be positive.

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation, correlation coefficients

|  | M | SD | PBC | MO | EPI | ST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **PBC** | 2.8765 | 0.87127 | 1 | -0.08[*] | 0.632[**] | 0.650[**] |
| **MO** | 4.3175 | 1.25228 | -0.08[**] | 1 | 0.476[**] | 0.578[**] |
| **EPI** | 3.3067 | 0.84055 | 0.632[**] | 0.476[**] | 1 | 0.695[**] |
| **ST** | 3.7023 | 0.87060 | 0.650[**] | 0.578[**] | 0.695[**] | 1 |

**Measurement Model Assessment**

To assess measurement model fit, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, this study performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Hair et al. (2019) proposed that measurement model fit is deemed good when it has root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of less than 0.08, comparative-fit-index (CFI) exceeding 0.90, tucker-lewis index (TLI) exceeding 0.90, normed chi-square ($\chi^2$/df) of less than 3 and parsimony normed fit index (PNFI) of more than 0.50. Based on the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2019), the measurement model in this study was deemed good fit ($\chi^2$/df=2.443; RMSEA=0.047; CFI=0.982; TLI=0.977; PNFI=0.757).

This study evaluated convergent validity through factor loadings (FL), average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). Hair et al. (2019) proposed that when FL of all measurement items is higher than 0.60, AVE higher than 0.50, CR higher than 0.70, convergent validity is deemed good. However, some scholars suggested that convergent validity can still be deemed adequate even if some FLs fall below 0.60 when AVE is above

0.50 (Hair et al., 2019). As shown in Table 2, the FLs were all found to be above 0.60, all AVE is above 0.50, and CR is above 0.70, suggesting that all the constructs in this study have adequate convergent validity. On the other hand, this study evaluated discriminant validity through Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) criterion. According to Henseler (2015), HTMT should be lower than 0.85 to establish discriminant validity. As shown in Table 3, all HTMT were found to be lower than 0.85, demonstrating that all the constructs have adequate discriminant validity. Collectively, the research instruments used in this study are deemed reliable and valid.

Table 2 Convergent validity

| Constructs | Items | FL | AVE | CR |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Self-Transcendence | ST1 | 0.780 | 0.592 | 0.878 |
|  | ST2 | 0.840 |  |  |
|  | ST3 | 0.600 |  |  |
|  | ST4 | 0.800 |  |  |
|  | ST5 | 0.810 |  |  |
| Ethical Purchase | EPI1 | 0.850 | 0.662 | 0.907 |
| Intention | EPI2 | 0.850 |  |  |
|  | EPI3 | 0.830 |  |  |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | EPI4 | 0.770 | | |
| | EPI5 | 0.770 | | |
| Moral Obligation | MO1 | 0.910 | 0.807 | 0.893 |
| | MO2 | 0.890 | | |
| Perceived Behavioural | PCB1 | 0.830 | 0.704 | 0.826 |
| Control | PCB2 | 0.850 | | |

Table 3 Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

| Constructs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** Self-Transcendence | | | | |
| **2.** Ethical Purchase Intention | 0.583 | | | |
| **3.** Moral Obligation | 0.475 | 0.397 | | |
| **4.** Perceived Behavioural Control | 0.522 | 0.502 | 0.076 | |

**Hypotheses Testing**

Firstly, the effect of self-transcendence value on ethical purchase intention (EPI) was found to be statistically significant (β=0.578, t=18.392, p>0.001), thus supporting H1. Secondly, the mediating effect of moral obligation on relationship between self-transcendence value and ethical purchase intention (EPI) was tested through the bias-corrected bootstrapping approach in AMOS 28.0. Based on 10000 bootstrap samples, the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the indirect effect of self-transcendence value on ethical purchase intention (EPI) through moral obligation does not contain a zero in between (β=0.064; CI: lower 0.031, upper 0.099). Such results reflected that the relationship between self- transcendence value and ethical purchase intention (EPI) is mediated by moral obligation, thus supporting H2. Thirdly, this study examined the moderating effect of perceived behavioral control (PCB) on relationship between moral obligation and ethical purchase intention (EPI) through two-stage approach. In this study, perceived behavioral control (PCB) was found to have statistically significant and positive moderating effect on relationship between moral obligation and ethical purchase intention (EPI) (β=0.309, p=0.008). Thus, H3 was supported. Following this, this study conducted simple slope analysis. Specifically, this study plotted the moderating effect of perceived behavioral control (PCB) in a graph (as shown in Figure 2). The interpolation lines showed that the effect of moral obligation (MO) on ethical purchase intention (EPI) is stronger for those with high level of perceived behavioral control (PCB) (one standard deviation above the mean) than those with low level (one standard deviation below the mean).
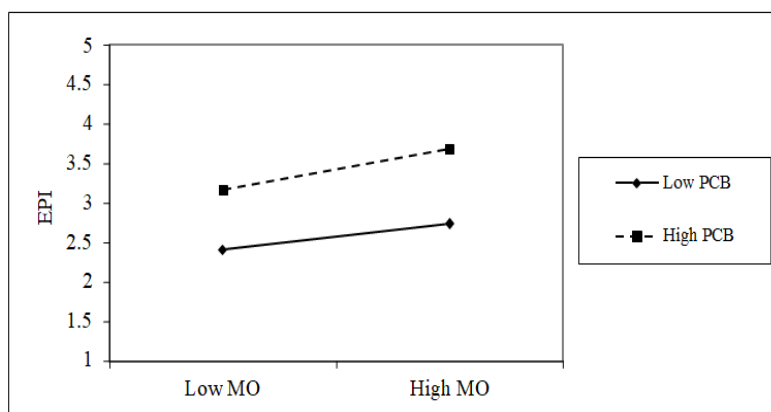


Figure 2: Moderating effect of perceived behavioral control

# DISCUSSION

This study primarily aims to identify (1) the mechanism that help explain "how" self- transcendence value influence ethical purchase intention (EPI) and (2) "for whom" moral obligation is more or less related to ethical purchase intention (EPI). The results that help achieving the aims of this study were discussed below.

**Relationship among self-transcendence value, moral obligation and ethical purchase intention**

Previous studies repeatedly investigated the effect of self-transcendence value on ethical purchase intention (EPI) (Manchiraju & Sadachar, 2014; Mainardes, de Araujo, Lasso & Andrade, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2017; Stringer et al., 2020; Klabi & Binzafrah, 2023). However, this study found that the findings of these studies appear to be mixed, with some studies reported positive effect (Nguyen et al., 2017; Klabi & Binzafrah, 2023), while others reported an insignificant effect (Manchiraju & Sadachar, 2014) or even a negative effect (Mainardes, de Araujo, Lasso & Andrade, 2017). To provide additional empirical evidence to further verify the effect of self-transcendence value on ethical purchase intention (EPI), this study examined the direct effect of self-transcendence value on ethical purchase intention (EPI). Consistent with Nguyen et al. (2017) and Klabi and Binzafrah (2023), this study found that the effect of self-transcendence value on ethical purchase intention (EPI) is statistically significant and positive.

Additionally, as discussed in previous sections, researchers argued that the effect of self-transcendence value on ethical purchase intention (EPI) is not straightforward but mediated by other factors (Stringer et al., 2020; Klabi & Binzafrah, 2023). For examples, Stringer et al. (2020) found that the relationship between self-transcendence value and the intention to purchase ethically marketed fast fashion is mediated by the concern for animal welfare and environment. Similarly, Klabi & Binzafrah (2023) found that the relationship between self-transcendence value and intention to purchase electric vehicle is mediated by environmental concern. Consistent with these, this study found that the relationship between self-transcendence value and ethical purchase intention (EPI) is mediated by moral obligation. Such finding provided empirical support for the proposition of Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory. VBN theory posits that personal values (e.g., self-transcendence value) shape individual's belief about what is right (desirable) or wrong (undesirable) and it subsequently triggers moral obligations. Individuals with self-transcendence value, which emphasize concern for others and the environment, are more likely to feel obligated to make ethical choices in their consumption and these prompt actions like purchasing from socially and environmentally responsible companies (Stern et al., 1999).

These findings highlighted moral obligation as the mechanism by which self- transcendence value increases ethical purchase intention (EPI). That is, self-transcendence value improves ethical purchase intention (EPI) through triggering moral obligation in consumption or purchase from socially and environmentally responsible companies.

**Moderating role of perceived behavioural control**

While researchers argued that consumers who feel a strong sense of responsibility to make ethical choices in their consumption (i.e., moral obligation) are more likely to have an ethical purchase intention (EPI), this study argues that it is not logical to assume that all such consumers have equal level of ethical purchase intention (EPI). Some may have higher or lower levels of ethical purchase intention (EPI), while others may not have it at all (Beldad & Hegner, 2018; Kumar, Kumar, Singh, Sá, Carvalho & Santos, 2023). In this regard, some studies noted that whether consumers possess ethical purchase intention (EPI) or the level of their ethical purchase intention (EPI) is significantly influenced by the environmental and individual attributes. Certain environmental factors or individual traits may determine whether consumers have ethical purchase intention (EPI) and also influence the level of their ethical purchase intention (EPI) (Beldad & Hegner, 2018; Kumar et al., 2023). For examples, some researchers identified the factors that can moderate the relationship between moral obligation and ethical purchase intention (EPI) (Beldad & Hegner, 2018; Kumar et al., 2023). For instances, Kumar et al. (2023) investigated the moderating effect of green self-identity on relationship between moral obligation and green purchase intention. Similarly, Beldad and Hegner (2018) investigated the moderating effect of gender on relationship between moral obligation and the intention to purchase free trade

products.

Consistent with these, this study found that the relationship between moral obligation and ethical purchase intention (EPI) is moderated by perceived behavioural control (PCB). These reflected the idea that, among consumers who feel obligated to make ethical choices in their consumption (i.e., moral obligation), those with higher level of perceived behavioural control (PCB) are likely to have higher ethical purchase intention (EPI) than those with low level of perceived behavioural control (PCB). In line with studies that found positive relationship between perceived behavioural control (PCB) and ethical purchase intention (EPI) (Beldad & Hegner, 2018; Liu, Liu, Perez, Chan, Collado & Mo, 2021; Fauzi, Hanafiah & Kunjuraman, 2022; Kumar et al., 2023), the finding of this study identified perceived behavioural control (PCB) as a driving factor for ethical purchase intention (EPI) and highlighted it as a factor that can explain "for whom" moral obligation is more strongly or weakly related to ethical purchase intention (EPI).

## CONCLUSION

Building on the results highlighted previously, this study not only identified moral obligation as the mechanism through which self-transcendence value increases ethical purchase intention (EPI) but also identified perceived behavioural control (PCB) as the factor that can explain "for whom" moral obligation is more or less related to ethical purchase intention (EPI). These provided insights into how to increase or stimulate the ethical purchase intention (EPI) of consumers. Firstly, companies should develop their products in a way that explicitly meet the ethical standard. It is also important to clearly communicate these commitments with the consumers, which may trigger consumers' sense of moral obligation to support or purchase from them. Secondly, companies aiming to stimulate ethical purchase intention (EPI) of consumers should make ethical purchasing more accessible and attainable by addressing the potential obstacles and empowering consumers with the confidence to make ethical choices in their consumption behaviour. This may involve ensuring the affordability and availability. Although this study significantly contributed to the literature, this study suffers from some limitations. Firstly, this study simultaneously collected data for all variables and thus is unable to draw inferences about the direction of causality among the focal variables of this study. Accordingly, future study may contribute to the literature by using longitudinal approach, which may make it possible to determine the causal relationship. Secondly, this study employed convenience sampling, which makes it impossible to obtain a representative sample. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to the broader adult population in China. Future studies could contribute to the literature by verifying the findings of this study with different sample sets. Additionally, future research could utilize more representative samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

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