



## Type of Article (Research Article)

# A Sociological Study Of The Impact Of Ethical Consumerism Indicators On The Quality Of Social Relations Among Ardabil Citizens

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### Abstract

Humans are inevitably reliant on the consumption of goods and services for the continuity of life. This consumption can manifest as ethical consumerism, whereby the production, processing, and provision of goods and services occur with minimal harm to humans, animals, and the environment. The present study aims to identify and analyze the sociological indicators of ethical consumption among the citizens of Ardabil. Drawing on the theories of “conspicuous consumption” (Veblen) and “mass consumption” (Adorno & Horkheimer), data were collected using grounded theory methodology and semi-structured interviews. The statistical population comprised Ardabil citizens, and purposive sampling was conducted across three social deciles (as classified by the Iranian government). Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, resulting in a total of 90 interviews. Findings indicate that ethical consumerism can be conceptualized through two main categories: “responsible consumption” and “irresponsible consumption.” Additionally, four clusters of factors—individual (responsible and irresponsible consumption), socio-cultural (education, literacy, and social structures), psychological-motivational (imitation, need, and shopping pleasure), and economic (capital management)—were identified as the primary determinants influencing patterns of ethical consumerism.

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

Consumption, as one of the fundamental dimensions of human life, has always been closely linked to survival and basic needs. In contemporary society, however, a clear gap has emerged between actual needs and consumption patterns, where consumption extends beyond meeting biological requirements to serve as a means of signaling social status, shaping individual identity, and reproducing structural inequalities. Rapid consumption growth, while contributing to relative improvements in well-being, has generated profound environmental, cultural, and social consequences, including pressure on natural resources, ecosystem degradation, widening inequalities, and the formation of unsustainable lifestyles. Cities, as the primary arenas of modern life, are key sites for the emergence of these patterns, where goods and services not only satisfy material needs but also embody symbolic and cultural values. In this context, attention to “ethical consumerism” becomes crucial—a perspective emphasizing conscious and responsible selection of goods and services that considers environmental, social, and human impacts, seeking to balance real needs, social responsibility, and intergenerational justice. This study focuses on Ardabil and examines ethical consumerism across three social strata—affluent, semi-affluent, and less-affluent—investigating sociological dimensions and adherence to its indicators.

### Methodology

This qualitative study employed a grounded theory approach. Data were collected from two sources: a demographic questionnaire to capture participants’ background characteristics and semi-structured interviews to extract dimensions and indicators of ethical consumerism. Theoretical and purposive sampling was conducted, including 90 participants from Ardabil across three social deciles (less-affluent, semi-affluent, and affluent). Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Data analysis followed open, axial, and selective coding procedures to identify core categories and develop a final conceptual model. To enhance validity, preliminary categorizations were shared with participants for review and necessary adjustments. Interviews began with open-ended questions and progressed to theoretical and confrontational questions, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants’ experiences and perspectives. Descriptive analysis of demographic characteristics revealed a clear and comparable distribution of gender, age, education, housing, and income across deciles.

### Results And Discussion

Data analysis revealed that ethical consumerism among Ardabil citizens results from the complex interplay of individual, socio-cultural, psychological-motivational, and economic factors. From 90 interviews, 61 sub-concepts were identified, reduced to 20 primary concepts and 6 key sub-categories, ultimately leading to the core category of “citizens’ ethical consumerism.” Individual factors include responsible and irresponsible consumption, education, and literacy. Socio-cultural factors emphasize education, institutional roles, and social structures. Psychological and motivational factors comprise imitation, needs, and shopping pleasure, while economic factors involve capital management and income distribution. Findings indicate that consumer behavior is simultaneously influenced by ethical attitudes, social and media pressures, status-related motivations, and economic constraints, producing tensions between attitudes and actual consumption practices. The study demonstrates that ethical consumption is not merely an individual choice but a dynamic process shaped within the context of social relationships, cultural structures, and economic pressures. Despite citizens’ awareness of responsible consumption, factors such as fashion trends, advertising, and conspicuous consumption hinder its full realization. The findings highlight that promoting public education, macro-level policy, and media campaigns for conscious consumption can strengthen ethical consumer behavior. Ethical consumption in Ardabil presents a dual perspective: on one hand, it reflects social and environmental awareness; on the other, it is constrained by structural pressures and contradictions. Therefore, achieving it requires multi-level interventions and strategic planning at individual, cultural, and institutional levels.