

Towards an understanding of ethical consumption: Translation and validation of a scale of ethical beliefs in Peruvian consumers

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ABSTRACT

Achieving a more conscious Peruvian citizenry and strengthening prosocial values that allow for the construction of a more ethical and sustainable consumer culture in the country seems increasingly distant, but diagnosing the problem could be a first step. In this regard, this study carried out the process of translating and validating the ethical beliefs scale, which, after undergoing a restructuring process, consisted of 16 items and 3 dimensions. The participation of 500 Peruvian consumers was obtained. After statistical processing, an adequate model fit was found (CMIN/DIF = 3.85; CFI = 0.936; SRMR = 0.076; RMSEA = 0.076). The aim is to gain a better understanding of ethical consumption through the diagnosis of this variable. The results could serve as a basis for transforming the worldview of companies, government, and society in order to achieve fair consumption.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, purchasing decisions have been increasingly influenced by ethical and sustainability considerations. Evidence of this can be found in reports that 66% of consumers worldwide are willing to pay more for products and services that come from companies committed to positive social and environmental impact. This percentage increases significantly among younger consumers, indicating a growing trend. In the Peruvian context, and specifically in the south of the country, there is an urgent need for culturally adapted measurement tools that allow researchers and companies to better understand consumers' ethical beliefs and behaviors (Mancuso et al., 2024).

We know, thanks to research such as that of Hunt and Vitell (1986), that ethical decisions are deeply influenced by personal values and cultural norms. In this regard, the work of Sudbury-Riley & Kohlbacher (2016) has been a beacon. They created the Ethically Minded Consumer Behavior (EMCB) scale, a tool that captures how consumers act on issues such as environmental care and corporate social responsibility. Tested in countries as diverse as the United Kingdom, Germany, Hungary, and Japan, this scale is not only reliable but also allows for the comparison of ethnic behaviors across cultures. What these authors teach us is that ethical consumers often say "no" to products from companies that do not respect certain principles, a decision that reflects deep values and, at times, personal sacrifices.

Ethical consumption is also a fascinating puzzle, especially when viewed through the lens of cultural and social differences. Some researchers, such as Yang et al. (2024), have pointed out that consumers' ethical beliefs vary greatly depending on where they live and the economic conditions they face. This is not just an academic curiosity: understanding these differences is key to deciphering how people decide what is right or wrong when shopping. For example, Dueñas et al. (2014) explain that what one culture considers ethical may be viewed very differently in another, complicating the creation of universal tools to measure these beliefs. However, not everyone agrees (Khan & Abbas, 2023b) argues that there are certain ethical values that transcend borders, although they recognize that any measurement tool needs a local touch to work well.

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Along the same lines, caring for the environment has changed the way we consume. Ogiemwonyi & Tahir (2023) mention that choosing eco-friendly products is no longer just a matter of preference, but almost a responsibility to reduce environmental damage and move towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Their research, based on theories such as planned behavior and self-identity, explored how factors such as idealism, a sense of moral obligation, and a willingness to use green products influence sustainable choices. With data from 262 people, they found that these elements, along with strong environmental ethics, push consumers toward more responsible habits. Furthermore, moral obligation and concern for the environment make people more willing to choose eco-friendly products. In other words, this study reminds us that if we want more sustainable consumption, both businesses and governments need to understand consumers' motivation to consume consciously.

1.1 Consumer ethical beliefs

The term “consumer ethical beliefs” does not have a specific origin attributable to a single person. Rather, it is a concept developed within the field of consumer psychology and business ethics that has evolved over time as consumer attitudes and behaviors toward ethical and moral issues related to consumption have been studied (Banovic et al., 2019). This concept has been used in various academic studies to understand how consumers' ethical perceptions affect their purchasing decisions and their support for certain products or brands (Chowdhury & Fernando, 2014; Ogiemwonyi & Tahir, 2023). Over the decades, several academics and experts have contributed to defining and applying this concept in different contexts, but there is no single person who can be identified as its original creator.

In this sense, within the context originally proposed by Muncy and Vitell (1992), ethical beliefs in consumers are defined as the moral principles and evaluations (Rawwas, 1996) that they apply when analyzing certain questionable behaviors in the commercial context. This could include moral philosophies and personality traits (Gala et al., 2023), religiosity (Hassan & Rahman, 2024), and the ability to discern whether the responsibility for an unethical act lies with the buyer or the seller (Nimri et al., 2021). In contrast, consumers who have a more positive view of certain brands tend to reject such behaviors less, highlighting the impact that fundamental attitudes have on consumer morality (Gala et al., 2023; Muncy & Vitell, 1992; Vitell et al., 2007; Vitell & Muncy, 2005).

Consumer ethical beliefs fall within the broader framework of consumer ethics in the field of consumer psychology and business ethics. There is no single specific theory; rather, it is integrated into various theories and models that study how ethical considerations influence consumers' purchasing decisions and behaviors. Among these, the most relevant approaches in the context of this study are the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Theory of Ethical Behavior (TEB). TPB has proven to be effective in situations related to responsible consumption (Dangaiso, 2023; Lin & Dong, 2023). Sun et al. (2020) refer to elements such as attitudes, social norms, moral identity, and perceived control over actions, with trust being a key moderator, all of which could be potential factors influencing the ethical behavior of each consumer. This perspective enriches traditional TPB by incorporating ethical and moral elements, which fits perfectly with the concept of consumer ethical beliefs, analyzing how moral identity and perceived values can influence attitudes and choices with an ethical approach. On the other hand, the EBT strengthens the original idea from its premise that consumers' purchasing decisions are deeply influenced by their ethical beliefs and values. Those ethical values could include considerations of environmental sustainability (Khan & Abbas, 2023b), animal welfare, social equity, and brand transparency. Consumers with strong ethical beliefs tend to prefer products and brands that align with their moral values, showing a greater willingness to pay a premium price. Furthermore, these ethical beliefs can affect consumers' perceptions of brand credibility and responsibility, thereby influencing their brand loyalty and long-term purchasing behavior (Nguyen et al., 2020; Sun, 2020).

1.2 Scales for assessing consumer ethical beliefs

Previous studies that measure consumer behavior through their ethical beliefs have been notable for their diversity. Table 1 details some scales developed in other contexts. In the current scenario, where consumers' ethical beliefs show a strong tendency toward social and environmental awareness, consumer behavior has been researched to develop new products and services, establish mechanisms to differentiate oneself in the market, improve brand reputation, among other things (Diallo & Lambey-Checchin, 2017; Govind et al., 2019; Tolentino et al., 2021). However, these studies are isolated from the development of a scale that can be used to operationalize the concept of ethical beliefs. In this context, this research aims to validate the Consumer Ethical Beliefs (CES) scale to evaluate ethically questionable consumer behaviors, which still needs to be validated in the Peruvian context. The results are intended to identify the ethical consumer segment, allowing the marketing area to design campaigns aligned with ethical values that promote responsible consumption.

2. Materials and methods

This study aimed to translate and validate the reliability of the instrument that measures ethical beliefs in Peruvian consumers, which was proposed by Dai et al. (2011) and applied to Chinese consumers. The scale consisted of nine dimensions and 35 items, which were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly believe that it is wrong (1)" to "strongly believe that it is not wrong (5)". The population considered was all Peruvian consumers, and for the sampling, a non-probabilistic convenience sample was applied, where the inclusion criteria were Peruvian consumers, adult consumers,

consumers who are fluent in Spanish, and who have purchasing power; the exclusion criteria were consumers with no shopping experience, those who refused to give their informed consent, and minors.

Table 1

Other scales that measure ethical beliefs

Name of the scale	No. of items	Dimensions	Reliability and validity values	Applied context	Measure
Ethically Minded Consumer Behavior (EMCB) Scale	10	Ecobuy Ecoboycott Recycle Csrboycott Paymore	>0.86	United Kingdom, Germany, Hungary, and Japan	1 = never true 5 = always true
Attitudes towards unethical behavior	-	Actively benefiting Passively benefiting Questionable practices No harm/no foul activities	>0.70	Spain	
Updated Muncy-Vitell CES	31	Download/purchase counterfeit products Recycle/environmental awareness Doing the right thing/doing good		Europe	1= I strongly believe it is wrong 5= I strongly believe it is not wrong
Ethical Sensitivity Scale	10	Personal ethical sensitivity Interpersonal ethical sensitivity	>0.84	France	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
Ethical Standards of Judgment Questionnaire (ESJQ)	31	Actively benefiting from illegal activities Passively benefiting Benefiting from illegal activities Passively benefiting Benefiting from deceptive or questionable but legal activities No harm/no foul Downloading/purchasing counterfeit products Recycling Doing good	>0.76	-	1 = I strongly believe it is wrong 5= I strongly believe it is not wrong
Ethically minded consumer behavior (EMCB)	10	Eco-purchasing Eco-boycott Recycle CSR boycott Pay more	>0.7	Vietnam	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
Muncy-Vitell Scale (MVQ)	10	Illegal Passive Active Not harmful	0.83	United States	1 = Strongly believe it is not wrong 5 = Firmly believe it is wrong

2.1 Validation of the instrument

The original scale was submitted to an expert review (four experts: two doctors of administration with experience in marketing, one master's degree holder in research specializing in statistics, and one methodologist), who validated the content of the questionnaire. Subsequently, ten focus groups determined the semantic validity of each item. The final version of the instrument was applied to Peruvian consumers. To this end, a bilingual professional with experience in translating from English to Spanish and vice versa carried out the back-translation process, which is a widely used method to avoid any discrepancies or loss of meaning in the initial instrument (Behr, 2017). After that, a focus group was held to give semantic validity to each of the items. To this end, seven representatives from the sample participated, who were invited to join a Zoom room for 50 minutes. Each of them gave their opinion on their understanding of the items, which were finally clarified.

2.2 Data collection

The questionnaire was hosted on the Google Form platform, which allowed a hyperlink to be generated. This link was shared with Peruvian consumers so they could respond to the self-administered questionnaire, which was available from July 28, 2024, to February 24, 2025. It should be noted that prior to data collection, authorization was obtained from the ethics committee of the Universidad Peruana Unión through certificate 2024-CE-EPG-00114, and thereafter, informed consent was obtained from the study participants, who were informed of the purpose of the research. Data was collected from a total of 500 participants, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Sociodemographic profile of the 500 study participants.

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	256	51.2
	Female	244	48.8
Age range	18–29	383	76.6
	30–49	108	21.6
	50–75 years old	9	1.8
Educational level	Doctorate	5	1.0
	Master's degree	40	8.0
	Bachelor	259	51.8
	Regular Basic Education	196	39.2
Region of origin	Peruvian jungle	90	18.0
	Peruvian coast	281	56.2
	Peruvian Highlands	129	25.8
Religious affiliation	Adventist	218	43.6
	Evangelical	27	5.4
	Catholic	134	26.8
	Other Christian religion	39	7.8
	Non-religious	82	16.4

2.3 Statistical analysis

SPSS and AMOS software were used for data analysis, the former for exploratory factor analysis and the latter using a structural equation model (SEM) to test the adjustment indices that allow the adjustment of observed data to be determined based on the covariance between items, Both are error-free methods whose estimates are comprehensive, realistic, reliable, and accepted as one of the rigorous methodological standards for instrument validation (Erkorkmaz et al., 2013; Lam, 2024; Panahi et al., 2023).

3. Results

3.1 Exploratory factor analysis

Data from 300 respondents were used to perform exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Table 3 shows the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the items, where it can be seen that the items are distributed across three factors according to the variable analyzed. There is a clear difference between the three factors. The KMO and Bartlett's test (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sample adequacy = 0.902, greater than 0.7 is high, and Bartlett's test (Sig = 0.000) is very significant for performing factor analysis. The total variance explained in the model is 57.415%, which is greater than 50%, with dishonest consumption (DC) = 37.952%, disruptive consumption (CR) = 13.956%, and questionable consumption (QC) = 5.506%. All items were grouped according to their initial dimensions. Then, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed.

Table 3

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) pattern matrix

Item	Factor		
	1	2	3
DC2	0.891		
DC5	0.842		
DC6	0.819		
DC4	0.767		
DC7	0.693		
DC3	0.685		
DC1	0.658		
CR5		0.719	
CR1		0.699	
CR4		0.681	
CR3		0.641	
CR2		0.462	
QC3			0.835
QC2			0.777
QC4			0.690
QC1			0.593

Extraction method: maximum likelihood.

3.2 Confirmatory factor analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the total data set, comprising 500 participants. Table 4 shows the validation of the final measurement model with convergent reliability and validity. It can be seen that Cronbach's alpha (α) values range from 0.825 to 0.913. These values are satisfactory since, for the model to be considered adequate, all values must be above

0.70 (Agbo, 2010). Likewise, the composite reliability (CR) values are between 0.831 and 0.915, which is also favorable since, for a model to be considered optimal, the values must be greater than 0.70 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). On the other hand, the AVE values are between 0.521 and 0.608, which is considered optimal since, to have acceptable values for this indicator, they must be equal to or greater than 0.5. This means that the measurement model meets all the indicators of reliability and convergent validity.

Fig. 1 shows the factorial structure of the scale used to assess ethical beliefs in the study population.

Table 4

Validation of the final measurement model with convergent reliability and validity

Predictor	Items	Estimate	Alpha	CR	AVE
Dishonest consumption (DC)	DC1	0.745	0.913	0.915	0.608
	DC2	0.711			
	DC3	0.812			
	DC4	0.857			
	DC5	0.876			
	DC6	0.756			
	DC7	0.682			
Disruptive consumption (CR)	CR1	0.853	0.837	0.841	0.521
	CR2	0.847			
	CR3	0.610			
	CR4	0.631			
	CR5	0.622			
Questionable consumption (QC)	QC1	0.618	0.825	0.831	0.554
	QC2	0.781			
	QC3	0.843			
	QC4	0.717			

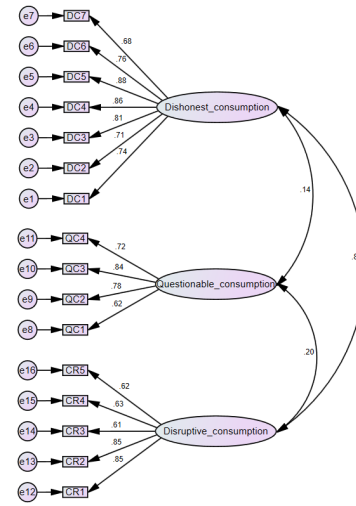


Fig. 1. Factor structure of the scale to evaluate ethical beliefs

Table 5 shows the indicators of the fit of the measurement model of the scale to evaluate ethical beliefs. According to the CFA results with a three-dimensional structure where the sixteen items explained the three factors, excellent and acceptable fit indices were obtained.

Table 5

Statistical indices of goodness of fit of the scale for assessing ethical beliefs

Measure	Threshold	Estimate	Interpretation
CMIN	--	388,821	--
DF	--	101,000	--
CMIN/DF	Between 1 and 3	3,850	Acceptable
CFI	>0.95	0.936	Acceptable
SRMR	<0.08	0.076	Excellent
RMSEA	<0.06	0.076	Acceptable

Note: CMIN = Chi-square, DF = Degrees of freedom, SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, CFI = Comparative Fit Index.

To evaluate the discriminant validity of the model, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion was used (Henseler et al., 2015). If the HTMT value is less than 0.90, discriminant validity between two reflective constructs is considered to exist. In this regard, Table 6 shows that the highest correlation has a value of 0.779, which is less than 0.90. These results confirm the discriminant validity of the model.

Table 6

Discriminant validity

	DC	QC	CR
DC			
QC	0.205		
CR	0.779	0.303	

4. Discussions

The objective of this study was to translate and validate the ethical beliefs scale for Peruvian consumers, in order to provide the academic and scientific community with a metric that allows for a deeper understanding of consumer behavior. To this end, an instrument used in an Asian country was taken and, after undergoing a process of back-translation and semantic validation, an instrument consisting of 16 items and three dimensions was identified. This instrument allows for a clear diagnosis that would provide important support when developing marketing strategies, which would promote a culture of ethical consumption and a fair and sustainable economy. Although the original scale had 9 dimensions and 35 items, many of

the items were discarded during the validation process. This procedure is valid according to the methodological literature, which explains that when a cross-cultural adaptation is carried out, it is valid to eliminate items or dimensions, provided that they are not culturally equivalent and do not compromise the validity of the instrument (R. Hambleton et al., 2004) and even when there is low factor loading or poor semantic adequacy, provided that this improves the factor structure without compromising the validity of the construct, improves parsimony, and internal consistency (Delgado et al., 2007).

Thus, the translated and validated scale consisted of the following dimensions: dishonest consumption, questionable consumption, and disruptive consumption, to support these factors that intervene in the consumption metric. It was found, in the first instance, that consumers with low ethical beliefs generate a sense of anxiety about status and are subject to social pressures that affect ethical consumption behavior, which demonstrates dishonest consumption (Chiou & Pan, 2008). In this regard, (Chowdhury, 2020; Maheshwari & Fielding, 2019a) refer to the fact that any moral identity or amoral manipulation has a significant effect on dishonest consumption, the latter affecting consumers' ethical beliefs. A clear example of this scenario is when a consumer purchases organic products and boycotts harmful products (Toti & Moulins, 2017).

Additionally, this study has shown that questionable consumption is part of the validated metric. To support this finding, previous studies have been identified that support the idea that questionable consumption occurs when a consumer engages in ethically ambiguous behaviors, such as benefiting from sellers' mistakes or participating in legally permissible but morally dubious actions (Chowdhury, 2019; Maheshwari & Fielding, 2019b). Finally, the disruptive consumption dimension is part of the scale. but morally dubious actions (Chowdhury, 2019; Maheshwari & Fielding, 2019b). Finally, the disruptive consumption dimension is part of the scale. To support this assertion, evidence has been identified that disruptive consumption practices regularly empower consumers by giving them other conventional consumption options, such as choosing products from companies that prioritize ethics and sustainability and align with ethical consumption values (Yildirim & Sakar, 2022).

Although this scale consists of three dimensions, other studies that sought to measure the same variable consist of five dimensions, such as active benefiting, passive benefiting, questionable, doing no harm, and recycling/doing good (Rodríguez & Ramos, 2017). Others consist of two dimensions: personal ethical sensitivity and interpersonal ethical sensitivity. In the first, there is harmony between conviction, principles, and values at the time of purchase; in the second, it is related to those external aspects of ethical sensitivity (Toti & Moulins, 2017). In all cases, the scale has had an ideal model fit in each of the contexts applied, including Peruvian consumers. Consequently, this study has validated a metric capable of measuring consumer ethical beliefs. In general terms, it was confirmed that the scale of ethical beliefs in consumers is divided into three dimensions and 16 items, whose reliability indicators translate into a valid, easy-to-apply instrument, which would allow for greater participation by the study subjects. even though the number of items is smaller, it is necessary to take into account that this does not compromise the validity of the construct (Campbell & Fiske, 1959); on the contrary, it allows for the rapid diagnosis of ethical beliefs, which would be beneficial for stakeholders interested in learning more about or exploring consumer details.

4.1 Theoretical implications

This study has demonstrated an adequate model fit. Although the original scale consisted of nine dimensions, the final model contains three, representing a theoretical restructuring of the model. This means that, due to fragmented behaviors, the items have been grouped into more general dimensions, which more adequately capture consumer perceptions. Thus, the theoretical basis for psychometric validation applicable in the Peruvian context remains, which substantially contributes valuable cross-cultural evidence that provides special support for demonstrating that theoretical models are sensitive to the context of their application.

4.2 Practical implications

The validated scale provides a brief, self-administered instrument that facilitates its application in practical contexts when a diagnosis is required. The dimensions are clear and allow for results that lead to the design of intervention strategies to promote ethical consumption.

5. Conclusions

This study has undergone theoretical restructuring and has demonstrated high reliability indices, providing an abbreviated and robust metric that measures ethical consumer behavior. Thus, the scale has a new factorial structure whose dimensions are: dishonest consumption, questionable consumption, and disruptive consumption. In this context, a scale is provided that captures ethical consumption patterns in Peru, a country where limited access to information influences consumption decisions, allowing public bodies to design differentiated policies based on the diagnosis made. Likewise, this research, contextualized in exploring Peruvian consumer behavior, opens a public debate on the need to address illegal and ethical behavior, as it is important to consider that beyond individual practices, a diagnosis of ethical consumer behavior will allow for a first approach to the normalization of transgression that exists in consumption processes. Therefore, the validated scale, beyond contributing to the country's academic development, represents a tool that can transform the worldview of companies,

government, and society in order to build fair consumption that is aligned with each of the country's social and environmental challenges.

6. Limitations and future research

Although this study presents an important theoretical restructuring of the model, the reliability indicators are adequate. However, no analysis was performed to identify invariance with respect to gender, age, and/or academic background, so future studies could analyze the difference between these groups to identify whether these dimensions remain the same.

In addition, this study has collected cross-sectional data, which limits our knowledge of whether the dimensions are consistent over time or whether there is a social or economic context that allows for variation. Future studies could therefore focus on examining changes in this variable in the face of such eventualities. Finally, in order to explore consumer ethical behavior in greater depth, future studies are recommended to identify the factors that represent barriers to ethical consumption.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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