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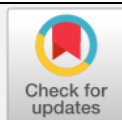
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### ABSTRACT

Nestlé is one of the largest food companies in the world, with a presence in 191 countries and solid loyal customers. Nevertheless, a big organization like this cannot escape adverse ethical behavior in their company. Business ethics is the study of an organization's corporate governance and initiatives related to corporate social responsibility. Businesses are morally obligated to give the public, stakeholders, customers, and the government the real worth of their money. Every firm engages in unethical practices for personal gain. This study aims to determine whether Nestlé will be able to survive in the long run if it is involved in unethical practices. Furthermore, this study intends to determine whether their involvement affects the customer's purchase intention to buy their product. An online survey has been conducted to gather more information and provide evidence to support the conclusions. One hundred respondents from Malaysia, Indonesia, and India participated in this study. The analysis demonstrated that brand awareness, business ethics, and business ethics impact the intention of customers to buy Nestlé products. This study offers insightful information about how consumers view Nestlé, which could help them increase consumer trust in their

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brand.

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## 1. Introduction

Fostering a culture of business ethics has become increasingly important in today's globalized company climate (Trevino & Nelson, 2021). Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk was established in 1866, marking the beginning of the Nestlé firm. With operations in over 190 nations and 308,000 workers dedicated to improving life quality and nurturing a healthy future, Nestlé is the world's largest producer of beverages and food (Nestlé, 2022). Nestlé, however, made an error that shouldn't have happened and would have harmed the company's reputation. In a letter to the editor, a group dedicated to upholding the principles of equality and fairness urged readers to steer clear of Nestlé products because of the company's lengthy history of unethical business practices, especially when it involves the exploitation of natural resources and violations of human rights. Nestlé has come under fire for allegedly promoting the sale of infant formula over breast milk, especially in underdeveloped countries with limited access to hygienic conditions (Frankel, 2023). The world's longest-running boycott has been targeted against Nestlé, which provides various goods.

In a report published in October 2019, Nestlé was implicated in several alleged violations of workers' rights. Despite having adequate safeguards for important issues like forced labor, child work, freedom of association, and discrimination in its supply chain policy, Nestlé's auditing and reporting systems were insufficient (Greenwald & Sainato, 2019). Baby Milk Action has called for a boycott of Nestlé since 1988 due to its advertising of baby foods violating worldwide marketing regulations. A survey was created to better understand the connection between the purchase intentions of Nestlé customers and their understanding of corporate social responsibility. One hundred ten responses were collected for the survey, which was part of a Nusantara Project research study. The relationship between customer brand awareness and the purchase intention of Nestlé has been studied. Brand awareness is divided into awareness of business ethics, consumer purchase intention, and practice of business ethics in the organization.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Brand Awareness

The brand is very important today. The brand becomes an identity for a product so that consumers can be aware of the presence of a particular product. The brand clarifies the existence of competition because the brand is a means of differentiating between one product and another so that a product does not become a generic product. A brand is described as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or layout, or a combination of these, intended for recognizing the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to distinguish them from competitors" by the American Marketing Association (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Managing a brand is crucial since it helps your product stand out and be recognizable. The ability of consumers to recognize a brand under diverse circumstances can be used to gauge brand awareness because it is correlated with the strength of brand nodes or traces in memory (Keller, 2013). Brand awareness

represents the consumer's capacity to identify or recollect a brand within a product category (Aaker, 1991). Consumers tend to feel more confident in their purchasing decisions when acquainted with a brand name. The extent of brand awareness significantly shapes consumer behavior, as individuals typically prefer familiar brands over unfamiliar ones. This preference stems from the assurance and trust built through repeated exposure to the brand. Consequently, consumer purchase intention is notably influenced by brand awareness. As consumers gravitate towards brands they recognize and trust, it becomes evident that brand awareness plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer purchase decisions.

*H1: Brand awareness is linked to consumer purchase intention.*

## **2.2. Business Ethics**

Ethics can be summed up as a system of moral rules that distinguish between right and wrong. Ethics is a normative subject of study because it influences what a person should or shouldn't do (Gheraia et al., 2019). A business is an organization that produces and sells goods and services people want to make money. The products in question are goods since they can be perceived by the senses and have a physical form, whereas services are actions that benefit customers or businesspeople. Based on the most recent studies on ethical behavior, consumers are allegedly getting more worried about the ethical aspects of products, services, and business practices. Successfully managing these issues could have an advantageous financial effect on the company (Vahdati et al., 2015). This is because whenever a person decides whether or not to purchase a commodity or service, they typically make decisions that can support a sustainable consumption pattern. Each purchase has consequences for trash, ethics, and the community. People participate in a more difficult decision-making process when considering sustainable lifestyles. These regular choices on ethical or practical environmental solutions frequently lead to trade-offs between competing concerns (Moisander, 2007). Hence, we propose a link between business ethics and customer purchase intention.

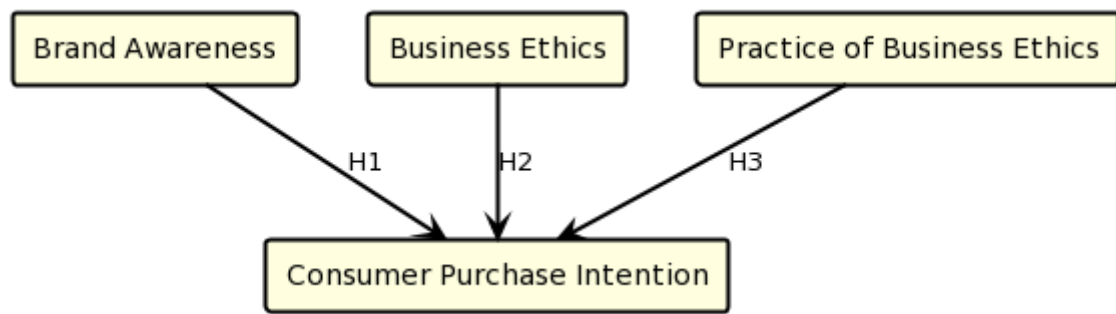
*H2: Brand awareness is linked to consumer purchase intention.*

## **2.3. Practice of Business Ethics**

Every company endeavor depends on the client's happiness to succeed. The consumer always comes "first" and is followed by the profit whenever a business is just getting started (Solomon, 2020). Businesses that can completely please their clients will continue to hold the top spots in the market. Customer pleasure is crucial for corporate success and, simultaneously, for increasing market value, according to today's business organizations. Customer favors a store or company that satisfies their needs, wants, or both. Customers purchase goods to fulfill expectations. Therefore, Companies must set pricing that reflects product quality to draw customers and keep long-term partners (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Customer satisfaction is closely related to business ethics. Customers are encouraged to forge enduring relationships with the company via business ethics. In the long run, this link enables the business to fully comprehend client demands and expectations. Companies can improve customer satisfaction by maximizing positive client interactions while minimizing negative ones.

Additionally, a business that follows ethical practices would have little trouble winning the trust of its clients. Customers are likelier to stick with a company and make repeat purchases when their expectations are realized. Hence, we propose a positive link between business ethics and customer purchase intention.

*H3: The practice of business ethics is linked to consumer purchase intention.*



**Figure 1. Research Framework**

The research framework for this study is shown in **Figure 1**. Consumer purchase intention is shown as the dependent variable in **Figure 1**, whereas the independent variables are brand awareness, business ethics, and practice of business ethics.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Sample and Procedure

Each researcher has a unique strategy for gathering data for their studies. Research can be conducted using both primary and secondary data. As a result, both primary and secondary data were employed in this investigation. For the primary data, 110 food consumers from the four participating countries—Malaysia, Indonesia, India, and China—were surveyed online using a Google Form. This survey investigates the impact of brand awareness, business ethics, and the practice of business ethics on consumers' purchasing intentions. This survey used three questions—Likert scale, multiple-choice, and dichotomous—to design. A five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree) measures responses to questions.

Furthermore, a question that has three viable responses is a dichotomous question. In surveys, dichotomous questions are frequently used to elicit agree/disagree responses. Regarding multiple-choice questions, they are frequently presented with square checkboxes that let respondents select every option that applies to them. The data was then examined using IBM SPSS Statistics 26, descriptive analysis, and multiple regression analysis. Additionally, this research used secondary data from journals, papers, and the internet.

**Table 1. Summary of Respondents Profile (N=110)**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	66	60
Male	44	40
<b>Age</b>		
18-24 years old	55	50
25-34 years old	13	11.8
35-44 years old	9	8.2
45-55 years old	20	18.2

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Above 55 years old	13	11.8
<b>Nationality</b>		
Malaysian	65	59.1
Indonesian	17	15.5
Indian	16	14.5
Chinese	12	10.9
<b>Living Area</b>		
Urban	88	80
Rural	22	20
<b>Education Level</b>		
High school	8	7.3
Diploma	14	12.7
Bachelor's Degree	64	58.2
Master's Degree	21	19.1
Doctor of Philosophy	3	2.7
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Student	57	51.8
Employed	46	41.8
Unemployed	5	4.5
Retired	2	1.8
<b>Annual Income</b>		
No income	50	45.5
Less than RM25,000	20	18.2
RM25,001 - RM50,000	10	9.1
RM50,001 - RM100,000	14	12.7
RM100,001 - RM 200,000	13	11.8
RM200,001 or more	3	2.7

**Table 1** displays a summary of the demographics of the respondents to this study. The sample comprised 44 (40%) men and 66 (60%) women. (N=110). With 50% of the total respondents, the respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 made up half of the respondents. Respondents between 45 and 55 come in second with 18.2%. The number, 11.8%, is the same for the 25-34 and over 55 age categories. Last but not least, the age group with the lowest percentage, 8.2%, is 35 to 44. Malaysia accounted for 59.1% of respondents' countries of origin. Indonesians would come in second with 15.5%, closely followed by Indians with 14.5%. About 10.9% of the survey participants were Chinese. Eighty percent (80%) of the respondents were from urban areas, with the remainder hailing from rural areas. According to the results, the majority of respondents (58.2%) had bachelor's degrees, followed by Master's degrees (19.1%) and diplomas (12.7%). The final two were a doctor of philosophy with 2.7% and a high school diploma with 7.3%. In addition, 46 respondents were employed, while 57 were students. The final two respondents are retired, with two and five unemployed respondents. In addition, 45.5% of respondents reported having no income. The fact that students made up most of the responders may be the cause. Accordingly, with 18.2%, 12.7%, and 11.8%, respectively, the categories of less than RM25,000, RM50,001 - RM100,000, and RM100,001 - RM 200,000 are next.



Only 9.1% and 2.7% of responders are in the RM50,001 to RM100,000 and RM200,001 or more, respectively.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Results

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients, and Zero-order Correlations of Variables**

Variables	1	2	3
Brand Awareness	<b>0.388</b>		
Business Ethics	-0.157	<b>0.885</b>	
Practice of Business Ethics	0.268**	-0.098	<b>0.246</b>
<b>Dependent Variable</b>			
Consumer Purchase Intention	0.260**	0.181**	0.566**
Mean	9.67	19.62	6.56
Standard Deviation	1.873	6.587	1.267
No. of item	4	10	2
<i>Note: N= 110; *p = &lt;0.01, **p&gt;0.01, ***p&lt;0.001. Bolded figures indicate Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha</i>			

**Table 2** presents the descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, and zero-order correlations of variables in the study. The first variable, Brand Awareness, has a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.388, indicating moderate internal consistency. The second variable, Business Ethics, shows a negative correlation of -0.157 with Brand Awareness and a high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.885, indicating excellent internal consistency. The third variable, Practice of Business Ethics, has a positive correlation of 0.268 with Brand Awareness and a negative correlation of -0.098 with Business Ethics. It also exhibits a moderate internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.246. Moving to the dependent variable, Consumer Purchase Intention, it shows a positive correlation of 0.260 with Brand Awareness, 0.181 with Business Ethics, and 0.566 with Practice of Business Ethics. These correlations suggest that higher levels of Brand Awareness, Business Ethics, and Practice of Business Ethics are associated with greater Consumer Purchase Intention. The means for the variables indicate an average score of 9.67 for Brand Awareness, 19.62 for Business Ethics, and 6.56 for Practice of Business Ethics. The standard deviations reveal the variability within each variable, with values of 1.873 for Brand Awareness, 6.587 for Business Ethics, and 1.267 for Practice of Business Ethics. It is important to note that the sample size for the analysis is N=110. The significance levels (\*p<0.01, \*\*p>0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001) denote the statistical significance of the correlations, with \*\* indicating a significant correlation at p<0.01.

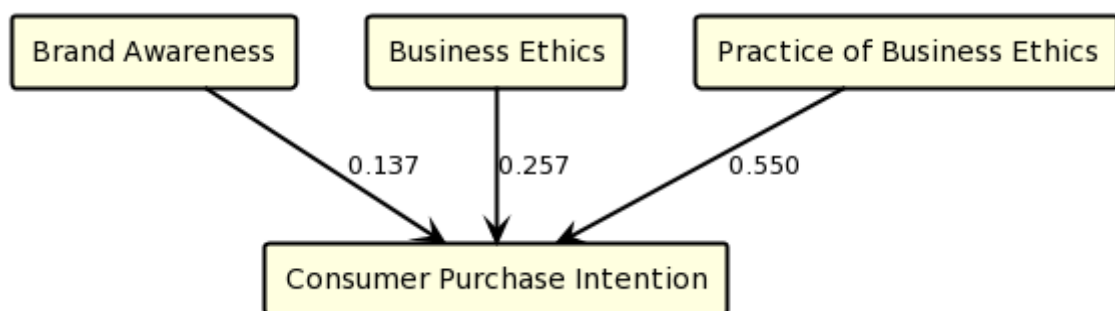
**Table 3. Summary of Regression Analysis**

Variables	Consumer Purchase Intention
Brand Awareness	0.137
Business Ethics	0.257
Practice of Business Ethics	0.550
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.392

Variables	Consumer Purchase Intention
F Value	21.552
Durbin-Watson Statistic	1.757

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table 3** summarizes the regression analysis conducted to examine the relationship between the variables (Brand Awareness, Business Ethics, and Practice of Business Ethics) and the dependent variable (Consumer Purchase Intention). The regression coefficients indicate the strength and direction of the relationship. The regression coefficient for Brand Awareness is 0.137, indicating a positive and statistically significant relationship with Consumer Purchase Intention at  $p < 0.05$ . This suggests that higher levels of Brand Awareness are associated with increased Consumer Purchase Intention. The regression coefficient for Business Ethics is 0.257, indicating a positive and statistically significant relationship with Consumer Purchase Intention at  $p < 0.01$ . This suggests that a stronger emphasis on Business Ethics is associated with higher levels of Consumer Purchase Intention. The regression coefficient for the Practice of Business Ethics is 0.550, indicating a positive and statistically significant relationship with Consumer Purchase Intention at  $p < 0.001$ . This suggests that actively implementing and practicing Business Ethics is strongly associated with increased Consumer Purchase Intention. The coefficient of determination, denoted as R, is 0.392. This indicates that the independent variables (Brand Awareness, Business Ethics, and Practice of Business Ethics) explain approximately 39.2% of the variation in Consumer Purchase Intention. The F value of 21.552 is significant, indicating that the overall regression model is statistically significant in predicting Consumer Purchase Intention. This suggests that the combined influence of the independent variables is significantly related to the dependent variable. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.757 is used to test for autocorrelation in the residuals of the regression model. A value between 1.5 and 2.5 indicates no significant autocorrelation. In this case, the value of 1.757 suggests no significant autocorrelation in the residuals. The regression analysis demonstrates that Brand Awareness, Business Ethics, and Practice of Business Ethics influence Consumer Purchase Intention, with Practice of Business Ethics having the strongest impact.



**Figure 2. Hypothesized Model**

## 4.2. Discussion

The results show that the practice of business ethics is strongly correlated with the customer's purchase intention. This is because the practice of business ethics is very crucial to the customers. A company that implements ethical procedures would easily gain the customers' trust. Moreover, business ethics has a close relationship with customer satisfaction. Building a good and strong customer relationship allows the company to understand customer expectations and needs thoroughly. When the customers' expectations are met, the likelihood of

the customer continuing to purchase products from the brand is higher. Not only that, but the company could also gain the trust of key stakeholders, such as investors and consumers, that could help develop and expand the company in the future. Altogether, this shows that brands that are truthful to their consumer have a higher chance of increasing the customer purchase intention.

This study also shows that business ethics is significantly impacted by consumer purchase intention. According to the most recent studies on ethical behavior, consumers are allegedly more concerned with the ethical aspects of products, services, and business practices. If the company resolves these issues successfully, it might have a positive financial impact on the company (Vahdati et al., 2015). This is because every time a person chooses whether or not to buy a good or service, they usually make the choices that can support a sustainable consumption pattern. Each purchase has consequences for resources, waste, ethics, and the community. People participate in a more difficult decision-making process when considering sustainable lifestyles. Trade-offs between opposing concerns are frequently the result of these routine decisions regarding moral or useful environmental solutions (Moisander, 2007). In conclusion, a company's business ethics impact consumers' purchasing intentions.

Even though the results are lower than those for the other variables, the findings still suggest that brand awareness influences customer purchase intention. The buyer would feel more at ease while choosing if they were familiar with the brand name. Consumers do not prefer unknown brands. Customers are, therefore, more likely to choose a brand they are familiar with over one they are unfamiliar with due to great brand recognition. Brand awareness plays a crucial role in determining consumer buying intentions, and that particular brand will grow in customers' minds to influence their purchasing intentions of customers (Grewal et al., 1998). An item with significant brand recognition will be more popular with consumers. This is because consumers typically purchase brands they know and believe in. Therefore, brand awareness influences the customer's purchasing intention.

### **4.3. Implication**

This research has revealed that ethical issues and corrupt practices have significantly increased due to numerous boycotts and ethical carelessness. Laws, ethics, and norms are distinct entities; while laws are universally acknowledged, ethics are rooted in personal convictions, although both are intended to be congruent and non-conflicting. Based on the research hypothesis linking business ethics with user retention, the findings indicate that corporate reputation is the most influential factor in user retention. This underscores the importance of considering corporate reputation as a key strategy for market sustainability. Researchers assert that while reputation cannot be built overnight, its neglect can severely damage an institution's reputation. Therefore, they advocate for proactive reputation management, recognizing it as an intangible asset determinant of organizational stability.

Moreover, from the perspective of public relations specialists, the public image reflects ethical behavior, advocating against misconduct. Ethical practices are believed to enhance organizational effectiveness and foster a culture of continual improvement. To ensure the long-term viability of organizations in the business landscape, every institution must embrace ethical norms as inherent behaviors. Business ethics contribute to retention; evidence suggests that stakeholders expect organizations to integrate ethical values, moral principles, and codes as value-added propositions when assessing a brand or company. Corporate reputation and ethical business practices foster customer loyalty, improving retention, enhancing customers' purchasing intentions, and ensuring prolonged customer allegiance. Consequently, this study



proposes a comprehensive model to ascertain how organizations can endure in the face of involvement in unethical practices over the long term.

## 5. Conclusion

In this age of numerous products and services, the customer will go for the one affected by various factors. This research is conducted to see the impact of business ethics and brand awareness on the purchase intention of Nestlé customers. The variables considered for the study are business ethics, practice of business ethics, and brand awareness, and the dependent variable is the purchasing intention of the customer.

The finding states that the firm's business ethics and brand awareness significantly impact the purchase intentions. As the firm's ethical behavior and brand recognition frame the perception in the mind of the customer about that firm and its products, attention should be given to both aspects. The findings of this research can be used not only by Nestlé but also by other businesses. Ethical firms are as important as the product, so measures should be taken in this direction. Moreover, this will help establish the business and ensure sustainable development in the long run.

There are a few limitations in the study as well. As data is collected online mode through Google form, it is assumed that it is filled with due attention. However, this assumption may also be wrong. This research is about ethical aspects, but it is unclear whether the respondents properly know the meaning and importance of ethics. Most respondents are from the 18-24 years age group, and most are students who are not earnest specifically. Additionally, the data collected is limited to a few countries, while Nestlé's customers are worldwide. Therefore, the upcoming researchers who want to research this dimension can consider these limitations.

## 6. Acknowledgment

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## 7. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors have declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

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