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Editorial and introduction to the Journal and this themed issue

Welcome to Volume 1 Issue 1 of the Journal of Consumer Ethics.

As we can see from the articles in this issue, the ideas of consumer ethics, consumption ethics and ethical consumers are contested and sometimes even controversial. Nevertheless, at the same time, we can see that they are also both popular and important.

Our editorial board liked the idea of beginning the Journal of Consumer Ethics with a reflection on some 'classic texts' in the field, and we asked the authors to consider whether and how their views on the subject had changed since their work was first published.

Popular...

One common theme that emerged is the extent to which the authors were surprised by the response to their work. Newholm and Shaw, for example, comment on the more than 400 citations that their work has received, and Micheletti notes how unexpected the magnitude of the global response to her book was for both her and her editor.

These ideas are popular because, in the modern world, almost all of us are consumers, and most of us like to think of ourselves as, in some sense of the word, ethical. Many of us are producers too – and might have been affected by ethical market interventions by competitors or campaigners or both. As a consequence, the subject is also of immediate practical interest outside academia – from environmentalists to chief executives.

This wide aspect to ethical consumption ideas is also reflected in the range of academic disciplines now beginning to focus on the subject. In this issue we focus on the 'early adopters' in geography, business studies, politics and marketing. But in one of the two recent book reviewed here we also find texts from historians, anthropologists, psychologists, ethicists and urban planners. And in the news section we look at work from educationalists, farmers and hair dressers!

The breadth of the subject, and our desire to attract a wider audience, means that in this Journal we are asking contributors to write slightly shorter pieces than is usual for academic journal articles. We are also asking authors to try to avoid over technical language.

....and Important

Consumer ethics are also important because their emergence in the last decades of the 20th century can, in many cases, be identified as attempts to solve some of the social and environmental problems thrown up by unregulated globalising markets. Micheletti in her reflection for example describes it as "concerned citizens trying to use their shopping choices to fill a political responsibility vacuum left by government".

But consumer ethics are specially important because these problems are 'non-trivial'. Dan Welch picks up on some of this in his review of 'the Problem with Consumerism' but the unsustainability of consumer society itself is a theme which we expect to run throughout the future issues of this journal. It is probably not contentious to suggest that there will be a link between its popularity and its importance as a tool to address – albeit imperfectly – the serious social and environmental problems that humans, as a species, now face.

In this issue...

Launching this academic journal by revisiting some of the 'classic' texts seemed an obvious choice. We thank the authors of these works for their contribution to the development of the research community. Our selection for this issue was necessarily subjective and limited by time and resources. You might be surprised that we have missed your discipline entirely or the key paper that fired your enthusiasm; so we welcome further suggestions. The five we have reproduced here are in alphabetical order by author.

We do hope they will also be a useful collection for students including those in the early stages of doctoral studies. Most of the authors touch on where they think the subject might be headed, but Barnett, Clarke and Cloke specifically lists four areas which they think are worthy of future research. In short these include 'responsibilisation', collectivisation of consumer action, cultural capital and legitimacy.

Our plan is for each issue to have themed and non-themed content as well as book reviews, news and reports of conferences and meetings both historical and forthcoming. So, as well as the classic texts in this issue, we also have some other material which we hope serves as an example of what we are looking for. If you see anything we might like, do email us at journal@ethicalconsumer.org

Most of the contributions to this first issue are European in focus. This is very much more by accident than design. We know from our research that consumer ethics can be observed across

many varying cultures and time periods. We hope in future that the contributions we reproduce will reflect this more fully.

...and in the future

Our next issue, themed around gender and ethical consumption, and due for publication in October 2017, already has a large number of themed contributors lined up. But do contact us if you have an article outside the theme or some other content such as book reviews or news we may be interested in.

Volume 2 Issue 1, due for publication in March 2018 will be themed around clothing and consumer ethics – our first attempt to theme an issue around a commodity rather than a concept. From there we plan to move to three issues a year – so do sign up to our mailing list for calls to papers.

Our goal is to keep the journal free and open access to both readers and contributors and to fund it through sponsorship and donations. Ethical Consumer Research Association is planning to support it through its first pilot year, but do visit the subscriptions/support area of the website if you think you might be able to help. Subscribing to Ethical Consumer Research Association means that you can access the journal as a single PDF as well as signing up as a founding supporter of this most exciting new project!

Rob Harrison

Editor

Whatever Happened to Ethical Consumption

Clive Barnett¹, Nick Clarke² and Paul Cloke³

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‘Consuming ethics: articulating the subjects and spaces of ethical consumption’ (Barnett *et al* 2005) outlines a conceptual framework for further inquiry, developed at the start of a research project funded as part of the ESRC/AHRC *Cultures of Consumption* Programme, involving Clive Barnett, Paul Cloke, Nick Clarke and Alice Malpass¹. In the course of undertaking empirical research (between 2003 and 2006), and also through the conversations with other researchers facilitated by the Programme, we subsequently refined our own thinking about ethical consumption. The argument presented in the book-length account of our project, *Globalizing Responsibility* (Barnett *et al* 2010) is significantly refined when compared to the ‘Consuming Ethics’ paper. In order to situate both the argument in that first paper, and also the refinement to the conceptual framework over the course of the project, it’s useful to outline how ethical consumption was approached in existing research when our project got underway. Existing paradigms of critical analysis shared certain assumptions. For sceptics, the growth of ethical consumption was often presented as an essentially middle class activity that substituted for, perhaps even undermined, more collective forms of solidarity and public action. And it was also often suggested that this form of activity was a way in which people were able to salve their consciences without making any fundamental commitments. In more positive accounts, often arising from fields of environment justice research, sustainability, and food studies, a stronger sense of ethical consumption as part of emergent forms of social movements could be found. But here too, there was a strong assumption that political mobilisation works through getting individuals to recognise that their moral implication in spatially extensive networks of production, distribution and exchange is mediated by their consumer choices. Analyses of ethical consumption therefore often tended to be at least implicitly consequentialist in their understandings of ethical action – they tended to assume that the burden of responsible individual and collective action depends on people being able to *know* the likely consequences of their actions, as well as having the practical competency to adjust their actions accordingly (see

1 This programme ran from 2002 to 2007 ([see http://www.consume.bbk.ac.uk/](http://www.consume.bbk.ac.uk/))

Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm 2005). In turn, critical analysis tended to hinge on demonstrations that either the acclaimed effects of ethical consumption did not hold up, or that self-identifying ethical consumers were hypocrites for not acting in a consistently 'ethical' fashion across all aspects of their lives.

In the mid-2000s, at the time we began our research on ethical consumption practices in and around Bristol, this set of assumptions sat comfortably within a broader paradigm for the critical analysis of 'neoliberalism'. In this paradigm, a touch of Marxist state theory sprinkled with a dash of ideas of 'power/knowledge' and 'governmentality' derived from Michel Foucault to bolster a functionalist narrative in which it was presumed that any shift from public to private provision of all sorts of goods and services necessarily went hand in hand with a series of concerted efforts to construct so-called "neoliberal subjects". The growth of ethical consumption activities was easily presented as the exemplary case of neoliberalization, in which markets were identified as both the objects and the mediums for action that might look like it had political content but was fundamentally privatized in form and content. It was this rapidly crystallizing theoretical orthodoxy that 'Consuming ethics' sought to interrupt, and over the course of our project as a whole our animating concern was to complicate the taken-for-granted terms of critical analysis to which ethical consumption was subjected.

In this light, 'Consuming ethics' proposed a two-pronged framework for the analysis of ethical consumption. We suggested, first, that there was an organisational dimension, in which campaigning organisations, policy makers, and businesses sought to facilitate the adoption of ethical consumption practices by consumers. We called this the dimension of "governing consumption", and suggested that there was a wide array of devices that sought to transform ethical *oughts* into practical *cans* – devices as seemingly banal as food recycling bins to donation by direct debit. And second, we proposed that there was a dimension we dubbed "governing the consuming self", by which we meant the forms of self-hood that ethical consumption practices enabled people to cultivate in their everyday lives. Importantly, we emphasised that this dimension was an inter-subjective process, not simply a matter of isolated subjects being confronted with top-down 'discourses'. Making up one's own ethical subjectivity, we presumed, was something that individuals did in the company of other people, such as kids and friends and colleagues at work, or fellow members of clubs and churches, or with their neighbours.

Our focus was on understanding the articulation of these two dimensions – we assumed that this needed to be examined and accounted for, not simply assumed in advance. As we developed our thinking in the course of putting this framework into practice, revising and adjusting it in

relation to the difficulties and discoveries of empirical inquiry, we became increasingly assertive about questioning the forms of agency involved in the development and growth of fair trade practices, sustainability initiatives, and alternative food networks. The argument we settled on, in no small part in response to the things we found out about how ethical consumption campaigns were actually conceived and implemented as well as how people reacted to injunctions to be “more responsible” as consumers, was that ethical consumption was not best thought of as an effect of consumer agency at all. It was driven by strategic interventions by NGOs, businesses, different parts of both national and local government, and it involved people finding new avenues for pursuing commitments, interests and values that they most often already had.

As our project developed, we became a lot more suspicious of the utility of concepts of ‘governmentality’ and ‘subject-formation’ that we originally used to present our thoughts in ‘Consuming ethics’. By the time we wrote *Globalizing Responsibility*, we had settled on the theme of problematization (see Barnett, Clarke and Cloke 2013), a minor theme in Foucault’s later work (see Barnett 2016). The idea of problematization directs our attention to the ways in which organisations, campaigns, companies, and people seek to manage and respond to the difficulties that arise in pursuing their particular goals and interests. It is an idea that helped us to capture the sense we had picked up that ‘top down’ strategic interventions around consumption were not strongly determinative of people’s conduct, but sought to bring into the open certain questions and possibilities for new courses of action. And in appealing to Foucault’s notion of “ethical problematization”, we sought to acknowledge the multiplicity of ways in which people reflect on their own conduct in relation to publicly circulating invitations to be responsible consumers. Along the way, we also adopted a more robust conceptualization of consumption derived from the field of practice theory, in no small part because of the influence of the broader *Cultures of Consumption* programme in shaping our own project. Thinking of consumption as something embedded in practices, rather than as a separate field all of its own (often conflated with ‘shopping’), allowed us to further specify the difficulties faced by both strategic actors and ordinary people in transforming routine activities into explicit fields of ethical and political mobilization.

It is worth underscoring the point that the original paper, ‘Consuming ethics’, and the final argument presented in *Globalizing Responsibility*, while unashamedly “theoretical” in tenor, were both concerned with developing conceptual frameworks with which to pursue further inquiry, and not ethical consumption but more broadly into processes of mobilisation, participation, and transformations of public life (see Clarke 2008). It’s worth, then, saying what we found out in the

course of the empirical work, which involved a range of case studies, using a variety of qualitative methodologies from interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis to participatory action research. Two key themes emerged from the empirical work we undertook. First, we found that ethical consumption goes on everywhere. It goes on in middle class neighbourhoods served by trendy “shabby chic” ethical high streets, and it goes on in relatively deprived social areas where the main retail outlets, perhaps the only one, is the Co-op. Secondly, we found that ethical consumption is an extension of political concerns into the ordinary spaces of everyday life – into the home, schools, and workplaces. This is how our informants talked about buying organic food or choosing fair trade coffee, but it is also how campaign organisations conceptualised the opportunities that consumer-oriented activism afforded them for mobilising support for specific issues. This was true, for example, of how members of faith groups described their commitments to global trade justice campaigns, as an extension of commitments already enacted through membership of local church groups; it was true, too, of how campaigns to promote fairtrade consumption had become focussed on transforming the procurement practices of local authorities, regional business, and significant public organisations. On the basis of these sorts of findings, we ended up making two strong theoretical claims. First, being an “ethical consumer” is not really an individualistic pursuit at all. It is embedded in all sorts of social networks. It is as members of church groups, or trade unions, or post-natal coffee groups that people learn about and put into practice various decisions about what, how and where to buy environmentally friendly, ethically sourced, organically grown, fairly traded goods and services. And moreover, these sorts of activities are often linked to broader forms of collective campaigning. The people who sell and buy fairtrade goods at the back of the church on Sundays are the same people who participated in Make Poverty History campaigns or lobbied their MPs about pieces of legislation. Second, we kept insisting that there is more to ethical consumption than shopping. The reason we were attracted to practice theory, in fact, was because we found that the campaigns and organisations we were doing research on (and with) had begun to shift their own conceptualizations of consumption and consumers very much in this direction as well. We found that there was a great deal of campaigning going on which sought to transform collective infrastructures of consumption, not least through changing procurement policies for major organisations and companies. The successful campaign to make Bristol into a Fairtrade City, which aimed to change whole systems of urban provisioning, was one example of this sort of shift that we analysed in detail.

What we concluded from all this was that if ethical shopping is not necessarily individualistic, and if there is more to ethical consumption than shopping, then it might be a good idea to recognise that this whole field might involve rather more than the simple image of consumers exercising their preferences in the market place. Few of the people we talked to who thought of themselves as “ethical consumers” were naïve enough to suppose that global systems of trade would be transformed just through consumer pressure. It was for most of them a way of raising awareness, of aligning their own commitments with the routines of everyday life, and of demonstrating to others that everyone could make a little difference. Likewise, the organisations and businesses that provide innovative pathways for people to consume more responsibly do not generally think of themselves as turning “unethical” consumers into ethical consumers, but rather as providing outlets for people’s existing energies and commitments. They saw ethical consumption campaigning as just one route to mobilising support for broader efforts of lobbying and campaigning, or of building alternative systems of production, distribution and exchange. In short, rather than a narrowly individualistic affair, a retreat from real politics, or mere consumerism with a good conscience, we ended up by thinking that ethical consumption should be best thought of as involving a range of local practices of global solidarity that combine imperatives of both *justice* and *care*.

None of us came to this project because we were primarily interested in ethical consumption per se, but because this was a topic that served as an entry point for various enduring intellectual and personal commitments. We approached ethical consumption from the direction of issues that, since working together, we have each continued to pursue in relation to other substantive themes: for example, Paul Cloke’s on-going work on the organisational spaces of faith-based ethical action and political campaigning; Nick Clarke’s research on the changing practices of political engagement; Alice Malpass’ research on embodied practices of well-being; Clive Barnett’s work on emergent forms of public action. And in acknowledging our own pathways through and beyond research on ethical consumption, we want to underscore the potential that the *Journal of Consumer Ethics* has for engaging across a whole series of debates in social science, the humanities, policy-making and nongovernmental politics. We will close by indicating four “big” issues for social science and social theory to which the research communities addressed by this new journal might usefully contribute. First, further research is needed into how discourses of “the consumer”, “choice”, and “responsibility” enable different actors (civil society as well as state and corporate) to speak for “the popular”. Here, research on ethical consumption has potential to contribute to wider debates on the emergence of new forms of “the political” in a seemingly anti-

political age. Second, further research is needed into the forms of mobilization, collectivization, and coalition building that are emerging across the diverse fields of contemporary consumption-focused activism. In particular, the degree to which recourse to consumer repertoires of activism, membership, and representation marks a shift in organizational form towards advocacy-based campaigning requires further investigation. Third, further research is required on the ways in which people engage with the multiple demands for them to act responsibly in relation to various global crises. In particular, research is required that focuses on how the capacity of citizens to engage with contemporary problematizations of personal and political responsibility is differentiated by their command of material resources, but also by the cultural capital that enables them to 'answer back' to demands to be 'ethical' and 'act responsibly', as well as the forms of associational culture to which they belong and which shapes capacities to transform embedded practices. Not least, this research will require further attention to the gendering of ethical consumption campaigns and the gendered social relations through which the forms of public action articulated through ethical consumption are embedded in everyday contexts. And finally, given the degree to which ethical consumption campaigning is often aimed at, and most effective in, transforming infrastructures and practices of collective provision, further research is required into the practical opportunities and legitimacy problems associated with attempts to change people's behaviour without them knowing it (see Barnett 2010).

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Revisiting 'The Myth of the Ethical Consumer': why are we still not ethical shoppers?

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"The myth of the ethical consumer – do ethics matter in purchase behaviour?" (Carrigan & Attala, 2001) appeared in the *Journal of Consumer Marketing* in 2001. In the article, we examined the context and nature of embryonic ethical consumerism, and studied young consumers in the UK to elicit their attitudes and behaviour towards ethical consumption, corporate social responsibility and corporate irresponsibility. Ethical consumption, environmentalism, political consumerism and social marketing had little voice in mainstream marketing literature at this time. Research by scholars (for example, Peattie, 2001; Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Prothero 1990) questioned the scale of green consumerism in the UK, attempting to identify and understand the needs of ethical consumers and pondering the weak relationship between what consumers said and what they did regarding responsible consumption. Few academics wrote about marketing ethics, and even fewer studied ethical consumer behaviour. In the UK, for example, the policy and practitioner landscape was also very different: no ban on smoking in public places (introduced in 2007), no charges for plastic bags (established 2014-15), or compulsory household recycling¹. Corporate criticisms focused on issues such as sweatshop manufacturing; the ethics of marketing tobacco, baby formula and sugary foods, or glamorising anorexic body images. In some ways, ethical consumerism in the UK and elsewhere in 2017 looks very different, but in others, we face the same complex and wicked problems, and seemingly insurmountable challenges to motivate consumers and marketers to act ethically. Responses since 2001 to the issues raised in the article regarding ethical consumption and marketing ethics, both within academia and practice, might appear woefully inadequate. Over the years scholars have tried to identify and define the ethical consumer, questioned the very nature and existence of the concept, speculated on the reasons for the seemingly intractable ethical attitude-behaviour gap, reflected on the role of ethical consumption within mainstream marketing and, as the nature and issues surrounding ethical consumption have broadened and deepened, increasingly questioned the agency of the ethical

¹ In 2001 landfill tax was £7.00 a tonne not over £80; as costs increased, this regulatory policy eventually drove household recycling rates from 12% (2001) to 44.9% (DEFRA, 2016; Vaughan, 2013).

consumer within a neo-liberal economy that has increased consumption at its core (Shaw, Chatzidakis, & Carrington, 2016; McDonagh & Prothero, 2014).

In 2001 our article highlighted several entrenched barriers to ethical consumption. These included: few commercial rewards to being an ethical company, and even fewer penalties to being an unethical one; competing stakeholder interests leading to corporate ethical paralysis; a consumer disconnect between production and consumption such that ethical consumers represented the minority, and most consumers were either informed and complacent, or uninformed and bewildered about consuming ethically. Consumer attitude-behaviour gaps (Hassan, Shiu & Shaw, 2016) persisted despite commercial research suggesting there was a market for ethical goods, while value-action gaps remained as companies 'greenwashed' their credentials (Peattie & Crane, 2005). Consumers said they would pay more for ethical goods, but would also buy cheap unethical goods; social responsibility featured little in their purchase decision (Boulstridge & Carrigan 2000). Consumers sought price, value, quality, and brand familiarity, driven more by personal than societal reasons (Ulrich & Sarasin 1995). Even accounting for some of the methodological missteps (Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2014) that might have impacted on the reliability of some early research, when we reflect on our knowledge and understanding of the ethical consumer in 2001, the ethical consumer in 2017 appears as mythical as ever. Even so, many scholarly, practitioner and policy shifts have taken place over the last few years, and I believe this should give hope for the future of the ethical consumer. For example, discourses of green and ethical economies, such as 'circularity' or 'alternative consumption networks' are more frequently articulated in mainstream policy. These highlight a growing spectrum of interpretations of ethical and green economies that stretch from ecological modernisation proposals to more radical degrowth change (Gibbs & O'Neill, 2017), some of which are discussed further below.

The Elusive Ethical Consumer: what we know, past and present

In 2001 the mainly North American or UK-centric research had an overarching bias towards green and environmental issues. Although sustainability is a recognised 'mega-trend' (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014), and environmental concerns remain at the core of ethical/responsible consumer behaviour, what it means to be an ethical consumer has grown, shifted and evolved to capture new and forgotten behaviours that tackle social and economic justice. Grassroots social movement organisations now target ethical consumer choices, and social network ties reinforce

commitment to their goals (Parigi & Gong, 2014). In some cases, traditional activist forms of participative protests (e.g. boycotts and rallies) have been replaced by non-contentious collective actions. The growing body of ethical consumer research illustrates this: we recycle (Gilg, Barr & Ford, 2005), reuse (Cooper, 2005), buy less (Scott, Martin & Schouten, 2014), buy green (Ramirez, Jiménez & Gau, 2015), buy Fairtrade (Andorfer & Liebe, 2012); downshift (Moraes, Carrigan & Szmigin, 2012); community garden (Bos & Owen, 2016); save energy (Rettie, Burchell, & Riley, 2012); celebrate and desire vintage (Turunen & Leipamaa-Leskinen, 2015); even repurpose waste through initiatives like cafés that serve junk food (Cadwalladr, 2016) and mend throwaway items (Repair Cafés, 2016). New ways of consuming, such as sharing, pooling, renting, borrowing and ideas of liquid consumption (Bardhi, Eckhardt & Arnould., 2012), the shared economy and experiences over products are moving ethical consumer research into new areas. These alternative spaces of consumption provide ethical choices that both reduce and rebalance consumption more responsibly, and challenge throughputs of excess consumption and waste. The 2001 article notes the work of Vance Packard and Ralph Nader, longstanding critics of the power imbalance between marketers and consumers, and early pioneers of the ethical consumer movement. Such criticism of the dominant social paradigm has grown across the research community (Carrington et al. 2014). Geels et al. (2015) suggest we are going forward from ‘reformist’ solutions that focused on pursuing green innovation and green purchasing, to embrace more ‘revolutionary’ approaches that radically critique the mainstream materialist and capitalist dominant social paradigm in favour of frugality, sufficiency and localism, and increasingly moving towards ‘reconfiguration’ that argues for transitions in socio-technical systems and daily life practices. As well understanding how knowledge that was forgotten can inform future ethical consumption, new technology is changing how we perform ethical consumption and connect communities, with initiatives such as Olio’s food sharing app connecting neighbours and local shops (<https://olioex.com/>), local currencies like the Bristol Pound (Ferreira, Perry & Subramanian, 2015) or the Questionmark fruit and vegetable provenance app that helps consumers protect workers’ rights (<http://www.thequestionmark.org/en>). Creative policy change supports ethical consumption choices, such as the Swedish government’s 2017 Budget initiative to cut tax rates on minor repairs to bicycles, shoes and clothing and provide tax refunds to consumers who repair their white goods (Anon., 2016) While we remain reluctant as ever to identify ourselves as ethical consumers (Davies & Gutsche, 2016), increasingly our actions suggest we are, albeit inconsistently (Szmigin, Carrigan & McEachern, 2009).

Just as the 2001 article was snapshot of UK consumers, scholarly work continues to emerge from the Global North (particularly Northern Europe), but there are new streams of literature that capture and acknowledge the (often very different) experiences of ethical consumers in other market contexts (McEwan, Hughes & Bek, 2015). The attitude-behaviour gap's persistence leads us to recognise the inadequacies of explaining the social behaviour of consumers in one culture based on another (Shukla, 2012). We are acknowledging the cultural pluralities of ethical consumers (Sankaran & Demangeot, 2011); global South consumers tell different sustainability stories to those found in the global North (Monkhouse, Barnes & Stephan, 2012). We concede prevailing standards of appropriate conduct within social practices and conventions are not necessarily conducive to the pursuit of ethical consumption (Cherrier & Belk, 2015). We now recognise the complex impact that context has on ethical consumer experiences, priorities and concerns (Devinney, Augur & Eckhardt, 2010) and not only are research agendas exploring these, but new business models that encourage ethical consumer behaviour are being shared and replicated in a trickle down, trickle up and trickle across manner (Atik & Firat, 2013).

Our 2001 paper speculated that catalytic events might nudge us towards greater responsibility in business and consumption: for example, the internet would expose wrongdoing and offer a platform for collective activism on a global scale (this was a pre-Facebook, Twitter and Instagram world). We reasoned a more informed consumer might make better ethical boycotting and buycotting choices. Twenty four hour news media reported many corporate scandal stories since 2001, but consumers seem no more inclined to boycott offenders or choose more ethically. For ethical consumers the power of negative and positive information remains inconclusive. But the global sharing of knowledge regarding corporate responsibility and irresponsibility has gained some traction among concerned consumers (Micheletti & Follesdal, 2007). Perhaps the biggest challenge for ethical consumers with this knowledge is how to navigate the complex and conflicted contemporary consumption landscape. As in 2001, consumers struggle to separate the authentic from inauthentic or ambiguous ethical claims (Annunziata, Ianuario, & Pascale, 2011). While label heuristics still matter for an often passive ethical shopper (McEachern, 2014), consumers still lack the ethical literacy to process information and trade off complex and sometimes conflicting criteria, and the opportunity and motivation to practice responsible consumption in their everyday shopping (Carrigan & Bosangit, 2016).

The Emergent Ethical Consumer: what we still don't know

Despite these ongoing challenges, research has helped us realise how complex ethical consumption decisions are. We now know that multiple factors influence consumer perceptions of corporate social responsibility (Eckhardt, Belk & Devinney, 2010), and the jostling of emotions that takes place within the consumer decision making process (Gregory-Smith, Smith & Winklhofer, 2013). Studies of the instrumental, relational and moral motives underpinning consumer behaviour highlight a multi-level, multi-agent conceptualization of consumer responsibility, and identify micro, meso, macro and supermacro levels of influence such as families, consumption communities, governments, corporations, non-governmental organizations, as well as personal motivations (Caruana & Chatzidakis, 2013).

We now accept that being ethically informed will not change most people's consumption behaviour, and this is driving new research streams that recommend policy/contextual changes and practice theory approaches alongside persuasion by education (Hegarty, 2016; Warde, 2013). The success of the carrier bag charge demonstrates how even a small charge of 5p can disrupt behaviour, and alter habits (Carrigan, Moraes & Leek, 2011; Whitmarsh, 2016). More fundamental lifestyle changes are needed to significantly impact on the global waste problem, but these small changes may create behavioural spillover that future research can investigate further (Thøgersen & Crompton, 2009).

In 2001 the paper highlighted how only some products captured the wallets of ethical consumers, for example, Fairtrade chocolate and tea. Today consumers still rarely scrutinise the ethical credentials of many products, but they are now willing to pay a premium for ethical chocolate, and there is a growing sector of producers, retailers and consumers who are trying to make, sell and buy more ethical offerings (Humphrey, 2016). The distance between production and consumption remains problematic to engaging ethical consumer action, but social movements are fuelling the growth of markets for local goods that create social change (Kurland & McCaffrey, 2016). Researchers and practitioners are trying to forge better connections between ethical consumers and their purchases (Cook, 2004); food and tourism (Lang, 2016; Sims, 2009) have been increasingly successful; less so other goods such as clothing or electronics (see Ian Cook's <http://followthethings.com/>). The desire to scale up local movements and initiatives such as the Bristol Pound (Ferreira et al., 2015) is challenging, and perhaps only suitable for certain projects – suggesting that ethical consumption needs both local and global action (Carrigan et al., 2011).

In summary, if we are to grasp why consumer actions persistently contradict their values, we need to develop and refine research approaches to better identify, understand and predict the

needs of the ethical consumer. We know consumer responsibility manifests itself flexibly, demonstrates ethical considerations that are product and situation specific, are subject to attitude-behaviour gaps and impacted by complex contextual influences. Motivating the ethical consumer requires appealing to ethical concerns that are already rooted in their daily practices. Investigation of the socio-spatial embedding of conditions in particular locations that encourage and shape new sustainable and ethical transitions should be pursued (Gibbs and O'Neill, 2017). We need to study whether protected, local communities of ethical consumption and practice can transform mainstream economies, and the struggles and tensions involved with doing so. This may help challenge deeply entrenched positions and views about economic growth. Ethical consumer research is replete with social acceptance bias; more creative research techniques and tools could reduce this problem through research that is grounded in real world observations (Thrift, 2007). For example, Askegaard & Linnet (2011) use phenomenology to bridge the gap between the broad nature of social theories and anthropological work where the research is embedded in the study setting. This approach, increasingly used to study the complex interactions of the everyday that incentivise or discourage ethical behaviour, sheds light on consumers' real, lived experience as a basis of knowledge. While big data and survey methods offer important macro level insight, qualitative approaches deliver micro level knowledge of the mundane repetitions and habits of social behaviours in peoples' lives, why they endure and where disruption can occur (Evans, 2011). This is where future research can add value, by greater use of techniques (on and offline) such as participant observation, assembling objects or documents that hold meaning and the compilation of audio-visual materials.

Consumer cynicism remains strong, selective ethics still operate, and we need more ethical consumer spillover across product categories. Greater choice editing at source (e.g. supplying 'ugly' not just flawless fruit and veg), better ethical retail context management (e.g. applying track and trace or 'blockchain' technologies to ethical food and clothing), and policy interventions will all help. Consumers want to believe their choices make a difference. Since 2001 there is evidence that the collectivities of ethical research, policy, practitioner, and regulatory actions are effecting change but there is still much to do. While it feels sometimes that we are no closer to identifying and understanding the ethical consumer, this may be because what we have discovered since 2001 is that the ethical consumer is multifaceted, fluid and elusive, subject to individual, contextual, cultural and emotional vagaries. Frustrating – yes – but rich grounds for future study in the next 15 years.

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From ‘follow the thing: papaya’ to followthethings.com

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What follows is a reflection on ‘Follow the thing: papaya’ which was first published in 2004 in *Antipode: a Radical Journal of Geography* (Cook *et al*, 2004). It takes the form of an interview about its making and reception, how the spoof shopping website followthethings.com emerged from this (Cook *et al*, 2011-date), and the approach this work has taken to academic research and activism in relation to consumer ethics. I asked the questions.

Where did your papaya paper come from?

It was an ethnographic study conducted across a number of connected sites in the UK and Jamaica where people grew, picked, packed, shipped, ripened, procured, sold and maybe ate fresh papaya. It was inspired by my failed attempts to make World Regional Geography interesting to first year undergraduates at the American university where I did my Masters degree. What did events around the world have to do with the students in the classroom? I struggled to find examples to show that their everyday lives were affected by and influenced what was happening elsewhere in the world (see Cook *et al*, 2007). Back in the UK, starting my PhD, I set out to study one example and that example ended up being one fresh fruit grown on two farms in Jamaica and sold in the major UK supermarkets at the time. I imagined students being able to shape trade relations like the ones I would study in various ways, within and outside the classroom and in their post-graduation lives. They could talk to people about the relations and responsibilities that they were studying. Many would end up in careers where they would have to manage such relations themselves. They needed to be prepared.

How would you describe it?

It’s as rich an ethnography as can be squeezed into a standard journal paper. Its intellectual arguments are ‘between the lines’. It responds to David Harvey’s influential (1990) appeal for geographers to “get behind the veil, the fetishism of the market’ to make powerful, important, disturbing connections between Western consumers and the distant strangers whose

contributions to their lives were invisible, unnoticed and largely unappreciated' (in Cook *et al* 2004, 643). It starts with a proposition: 'if we accept that geographical knowledges through which commodity systems are imagined and acted upon from within are fragmentary, multiple, contradictory, inconsistent and, often, downright hypocritical, then the power of a text which deals with these knowledges comes not from smoothing them out, but through juxtaposing and montaging them ... so that audiences can work their ways through them and, along the way, inject and make their own critical knowledges out of them' (Cook & Crang, 1996, 41). It then presents 'The Thing' - the papaya - and 'The Following' - 13 sections of descriptive writing, six of them about people: Mina the buyer, Tony the importer, Jim the farm manager, Philipps the farm foreman, Pru the fruit packer and Emma the fruit consumer. Referees described it as 'brave', a 'breath of fresh air' and 'almost unreadable'. It took off.

Why ethnography?

I learned to be an ethnographer at the University of Kentucky from one of its earliest and most brilliant advocates in Geography: Graham Rowles. He had spent years living and working with elderly people in both urban and rural settings in the USA (Rowles, 1978a&b). As a confused undergraduate in London, his arguments jumped off the page, moved me, caught me. His careful, detailed, empathetic portrayals of the lives of four people ageing in place took me into their worlds, and made me think of and better understand my grandmother's curtain-twitching behaviour. I applied to study with him. The Master's research I did there mimicked his, but with a small number of people who lived with visual impairments. Each chapter of my thesis, like those of Graham's book, presented one person's worldview from a combination of detailed participant observation and interview research at home and walking from place to place. The power of ethnography to evoke the lives of others, and the ways in which Graham wrote so honestly and vulnerably about what this research was like to do, what responsibilities you end up feeling towards your participants, and what they leave you and your readers with, was a brilliantly provocative contribution to the geography literature. I loved what it could do.

Why multi-sited ethnography?

Clifford and Marcus' (1986) *Writing culture* made waves and my Kentucky peers were reading and talking about it. We read it with Paul Willis' groundbreaking ethnography *Learning to labour: how working class kids get working class jobs*. The problem with Willis' half thick description, half theoretical argument, Marcus (1986, 186) argued, was that its ethnography 'makes the lads real,

but [its theory] reifies the larger system in which they live'. Yet, 'What is 'the system' for the lads', Marcus explained, is the middle class' 'cultural form' (*ibid.*). The kind of work that was therefore needed, Marcus and Fischer (1986, 91) argued, was that which took 'as its subject not a concentrated group of people in a community, affected in one way or another by political-economic forces, but 'the system' itself – the political and economic processes spanning different locales, or even different continents. Ethnographically, these processes are registered in the activities of dispersed groups or individuals whose actions have mutual, often unintended, consequences for each other, as they are connected by markets and other major institutions that make the world a system'. People were doing this, Marcus later argued (1995), by following people, plots, stories, allegories, lives, biographies, conflicts and things. Connecting worlds of production, distribution and consumption comprised 'circumstantial activism' (*ibid.*). This was how to do it.

What does that paper have to say about consumption ethics?

There are two sections at the end. One is about Emma 'The papaya consumer' who lives in London and doesn't eat fresh papaya. The other is about 'Papaya consumption' which argues that extracts of papaya, particularly the enzyme papain that it secretes when it's picked, can be found in all kinds of commodities like (her) beer, jumpers and toothpaste. Papain isn't commercially farmed in Jamaica, but in East Africa and Sri Lanka. So Emma doesn't have any direct connection or responsibility for what happens to Mina, Tony, Jim, Philipps or Pru. But she and they aren't the only actors. They told me. The world of fresh produce doesn't like a vacuum. Papaya plants change sex with the weather. The legacies of sugar, slavery and their race relations are everywhere. The argument is intellectual and empathetic. You can identify with any or all of its actors. It isn't didactic. It doesn't recommend what you should do. Responsibilities shift (Young, 2004). It doesn't offer a whole argument. That's impossible to assemble from multi-sited fragments. It gives you things to think with. It might affect you too. It's written to have a life beyond its publication, for academic and other readers. It ends with a question and an invitation: 'What can any 'radical' and/or 'sustainable' politics of consumption realistically involve? If things are so. Discuss' (Cook *et al*, 2004, 662-3).

Who was it written for and how would they find it?

Why spend time researching and writing academic papers that so few people get to read? I posted drafts online like Lancaster University's sociologists were doing. People found them, got in touch,

asked questions, invited me to do things. A *Manifesto for cyborg pedagogy* (Angus, Cook & Evans, 2001), for example, outlined a 'follow the thing' undergraduate module inspired by Paulo Freire's (1996) pedagogy of the oppressed and Donna Haraway's (1991) cyborg ontology. Students wrote first person accounts of their intimate, bodily, material entanglements with the lives of people who grew, for example, picked, packed and shipped the leaves in their morning cup of tea. An email from a geography school teacher said her class had become cyborgs. Could I offer them some advice? It seemed I could make a difference in the world by writing freely available academic papers for more than academic audiences. But how do you write in intellectually rich and accessible language? Develop 'a cinematic imagination geared to writing', Marcus says (1994, 45). Read about ways in which filmmakers, artists and others engage audiences in commodity followings in warm, affective, critical ways (see Cook & Crang, 1996; Cook *et al*, 2001). 'Follow the thing: papaya' is poetic, filmic writing (Crang & Cook, 2007). In 2009 it was made [freely available](#) online by *Antipode*. Loads of people have read it.

Who's Ian Cook *et al*?

That's the nom de plume I use for 'single-authored' publications. But nobody works alone. These papers aren't my solo creations. They're created out of conversations, collaborations, sharing ideas, making things together. Always. I'm not the only name-changer. Gloria Watkins writes as bell hooks, 'to construct a writer-identity that would challenge and subdue all impulses leading me away from speech into silence' (1989, 9). J.K Gibson-Graham is the collective authorial voice of Julie Graham and Kathy Gibson (e.g. 2006) which calls into question the 'research culture ... [which] interpellates academics as sovereign actors who are forced to compete in a veritable marketplace of ideas and influence' (Anon, 2002, 1332). Both work for me (see Cook *et al*, 2008-date). In 'my' papaya paper, the '*et al*' includes Mina, Tony, Jim, Philipps, Pru and Emma. Each of them, in turn, is an '*et al*' because they're composite characters who can say more with anonymity (see Crang and Cook, 2007). The paper's readers are in there too, making meaning by piecing together its deliberately unfinished contents. More people are in the acknowledgements and reference list. Then there's Haraway's cyborg ontology, the thing/body hybrids - including papaya and papain - that bring material geographies, relations and responsibilities into the '*et al*'. Nobody and nothing is outside (Cook *et al*, 2005)

How have things moved on since you wrote that paper?

I designed and now run the spoof shopping website followthethings.com (Cook *et al*, 2011-date). It showcases my ‘*et al*’ research on 80+ examples of ‘follow the thing’ work made by filmmakers, activists, journalists, students and others, across nine departments, from Fashion to Auto. It’s the recommended text and publication platform for students taking the module I mentioned earlier (see CASCADE, 2013). It’s so far had 300,000+ views from 90,000+ visitors in 190+ countries. Its [blog](#) and [twitter feed](#) have 2,000+ followers. The ‘follow the thing’ approach to studying international trade is embedded within the UK’s National Curriculum for Geography (Anon, 2014). We’ve produced a variety of educational resources including advice on how to follow things yourself (Cook *et al*, nd). We designed and ordered 5,000 followthethings.com reusable shopping bags, live tweeted their travels from their factory in China to our HQ, and gave them away (Cook *et al*, 2013). ‘With only modest resources’, Joe Smith (2015, 16) has argued, followthethings.com ‘play[s] sophisticated games with the tools of corporate marketing. The results give a rich account of, but simultaneously critique, the market and other realities that shape the experience of producing, consuming and disposing of products.’ It’s ‘IMDB¹ for Everything’ (Davis, 2013, np). I met George Marcus and gave him a bag as a thankyou.

So this ‘follow the thing’ approach is everywhere now?

Yes. It seems to be. It’s really hard to keep track of it all. Stolle and Micheletti (2013) argue that this area of research lacks a solid empirical base and, beyond single case studies, hasn’t provided much insight into its creation and reception. But followthethings.com documents, researches and analyses the diverse forms and impacts of work across this *genre* of cultural and scholar activism. We scour open access online sources for comments made by their makers, audiences and recipients. We edit and arrange them on each example’s webpages. We identify a) the tactics it employs to bring its subjects and audiences into relation, b) the ways in which its audiences respond to its content, and c) the impacts it is said to have had on its subjects, makers, audiences, corporations and others. Our analysis will, we hope, help to create a comprehensive vocabulary for ‘follow the thing’ critique that can shape future academic debate and activism (see Cook *et al*, in press), inform ongoing collaborative work with artists (see Crutchlow, Cook *et al*, 2016-date) and activists (see Ditty, Cook & Hunter, 2015) and encourage publics to ‘Be curious. Find out. Do something’ (Cook, 2015).

1 Internet Movie Database (<http://imdb.com/>)

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Reflections on “Political Virtue and Shopping”

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Political Virtue and Shopping was first published in 2003 and again with an epilogue in second edition 2010. That year an Italian translation also appeared. My Palgrave Macmillan editor later said that it was his most cited book – even across geographical space and disciplinary focus. The book focused on an accelerating societal development, political consumerism or the use of the marketplace as an arena for politics. My general curiosity about the topic goes back to the 1960s and the United Farm Workers’ grape boycott (Garcia 2007; pp. 53.54 in *Political Virtue and Shopping* 2010) that met me when going to the supermarket at that time. This was civic education in practice – just as it can be now. Outside stores boycott supporters passed out fliers about the unacceptable labour conditions of migrant farm workers in California; inside stores signs pointed to union member-picked grapes and lettuce and asked consumers to ‘boycott’ them. The boycott movement was supported by U.S. Senator Robert Kennedy, and its leader Cesar Chavez evoked Ghanaian non-violent tactics when he went on a hunger strike. All this made news. I wrote a paper on the boycott movement for my high school social studies class. Much later when doing research for two books, one on the Swedish farmers’ movement (Micheletti 1990) and the other on civil society and state relations in Sweden (Micheletti 1995), I learned that people in other countries also were turning to political consumerism. In the mid-1980s some dissatisfied Swedish farmers decided to promote more forcefully organic agriculture because they were dissatisfied by how pesticide and animal welfare was regulated in Swedish agricultural once it became clear that organically-labelled food was a money making venture. Also in these years, environmental groups decided to mobilize consumer power in their quest for stronger environmental regulations. They asked consumer advocate Ralph Nader for advice on cooperating with businesses to promote green production and succeeded in mobilizing consumers into some boycotts and into using their new green shopping guide (SNF 1998; see *Political Virtue and Shopping* 2010, 127), which sold out almost immediately after publication. Environmental activists openly admitted that they were surprised about the effectiveness that mobilized consumer choice could have in Sweden. These experiences led to other market-based efforts – and importantly a few green labelling schemes. Interestingly and different from today, what did not work well were efforts in changing consumer

lifestyles. Attempts to reuse and reduce consumption – that is, downsize it – by encouraging second-hand shopping, repairing goods, buying fewer goods and eating less meat did not prove successful.

Another inspiration for understanding the importance of political consumerism as a societal phenomenon was a national survey from 1997 on how Swedes participate in politics. The study was for a democratic audit report (Petersson et al 1998). Of all measured forms of participation, boycotting was the one that had increased the most between 1987 (ca 15 %), when it was first measured, and 1997 (ca 29%); ‘buycotting’ was not yet part of the standard survey questionnaire. (Later studies showed also higher levels particularly for buycotting in Sweden, a result partially explained by the prevalence of green labeling schemes in the country). At the time no big boycotts were ongoing, and we did not have a good understanding of what explained this enormous increase in ten years. For *Political Virtue and Shopping* I revisited these research materials, conducted new interview and document studies, did country and historical comparisons, and read much more theory. This research helped me construe political consumerism’s societal dynamics. As discussed in Chapter 1, among the important reasons are concerns about government dragging its feet on regulating industry’s use of chemicals and its inability to deal effectively with globalized challenges in the field of environmental risks and human rights. Today scholars consider labelling schemes (that is, ‘buycotting’ mechanisms) to be new regulatory tools highly fitting for our more globalized networked governance-oriented world. In short, concerned citizens were trying to use their shopping choices to fill a political responsibility vacuum left by government. Chapter 4 discusses the Swedish case and gives some revealing examples on this matter.

To theorize citizen engagement I formulated two ideal types – ‘collectivist’ collective action (the political action repertoire traditionally used by social movements) and ‘individualized’ collective action. The latter term has both inspired scholars and been an important source of their criticism of the book and the phenomenon itself. The term ‘individualized’ was misunderstood as meaning ‘individualistic’. My critics mixed up the term ‘individualized collective action’ with Ulrich Beck’s discussion of cocooning or fleeing from politics, and unfortunately did not associate it with his discussion on subpolitics, which concerns individuals and groups stepping up to take more responsibility for societal developments (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). And they argued that calling the phenomenon political ‘consumerism’ instead of political ‘consumption’ was a normative stance on my part for neo-liberalism and shopping as defining our role as societal beings. Some of these misunderstandings might just have been an attempt to create a strawman

argument to push a different thesis; but in other cases they say a lot about the scholarly critic's local setting where enhancing consumer choice was an intimate part of ideologically-driven rolling back the state. In the epilogue for the second edition I address these criticisms and emphasize that the term 'individualized' refers to individuals and collectivities complementing, challenging, and/or replacing "old school" political action (e.g., party and union membership) with newer or different societal participatory methods and problem-solving tools. If asked to write a third edition, I would put more stress on multi-level governmental use of consumer choice (for instance, through the boycotting and buycotting function embedded in trade and procurement policy) as part of their steering repertoire and how states across the world call on their citizens to think and act as conscious, ethical and climate-smart shoppers. Governmental lack of sufficient steering control – for whatever reason – over societal and environmental risks and general difficulty in mobilizing support for 'old school' regulatory policy illustrates why they do so. I would also relate this development to the discourse on responsabilization (that is, the state's turning of societal responsibility for solving common problems over to individuals and other 'non-state' actors) and how responsabilization might be understood as part of individualized collective action. Thus, rather than being a normative claim about how society ought to function, the concept of individualized collective action offers a theoretical understanding of the role of consumption in real-life developments at the individual, local, national, supranational and international level. For me, this concept dovetails with Iris Marion Young's philosophical contribution, the social connection model of responsibility for global justice (Young 2006), which theorizes about why older government-oriented models of political responsibility often fail us. In her writings, Young put responsibility for the global harms associated with the production and consumption of goods in the hands of each and every one of us, and importantly, assigned some actors, like corporations, more responsibility than others.

Another criticism of the book, other publications which I have authored and co-authored as well as other scholars' research on political consumerism is the field's 'northern bias' in its theorizing and empirical focus. This is a very important criticism that I agree with fully. With few exceptions my book and other research has focused on established democracies in the northern hemisphere. Empirically this research has generally only included the southern hemisphere as an object of political consumer action – as a geographic area producing goods that northern consumers boycott and/or buycott for, among other matters, to 'help' the people (workers, farmers, citizens) living in the Global South. I acknowledge this criticism in Chapter 5 but at that time there was not much research to draw on to discuss it much further. Fortunately this has

changed; scholars in different parts of the world are now conducting studies about the workings of political consumerism globally, and they are critiquing my and other theoretical understandings of it. Personally I am looking forward to reading new studies on the practice of political consumerism in Africa, Asia, Latin and Southern America, and Eastern Europe. Hopefully this research will offer further explanations for the varying levels of its practice in different geographical areas and perhaps even identify further forms not revealed in the studies of the northern world. Such investigations can enrich the study of the phenomenon theoretically and methodologically and address the claim that surveys are missing important social practices in the field.

Some critical readers of my book have identified me as a ‘true believer’ in the force of consumer power to help save the world. Some of them maintain that I have become adamant about the importance of political shopping in the second edition, perhaps because in its epilogue I identify two additional forms of political consumerism (discursive actions and lifestyle change) and discuss particularly how boycotting has become more mainstreamed and institutionalized globally. In the book *Political Consumerism: Global Responsibility in Action* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), Dietlind Stolle and I study how political consumerism as a form of social movement action is challenged by the mainstreaming of boycott choice, for instance when transnational corporations certify their goods as organic and fairtrade or when consumers are nudged by guilt-inducing mobilizing marketing to buy fairtrade chocolate for loved ones in holiday season. The tension between the marketing goals of making political consumerism (e.g., fairtrade coffee) a popular consumer commodity, on the one hand, and the ideological commitment that is rooted in civil society’s solidarity with workers globally, on the other, as well as the tension between self-regarding (self-interests) and other-oriented interests in political consumerism deserves much more research in the field of ethics and philosophy.

New research should also concentrate more on the presence of political consumerism in certain consumer-oriented industry sectors over others. It should not just cover the sectors where it is prevalent (such as food and wood products) but also where it is less successful – like electronics, toys and affordable clothing. What significance do industry-specific and consumer-specific characteristics have here, or even self-regarding versus other-oriented interests? Scholars should additionally delve more into investigating political consumerism’s effectiveness as a problem-solving venture both in terms of its actual outcome “on the ground” so to speak but also by developing theory and methodology for studying its effectiveness. In short: new scholarship should answer the question if there really is political virtue in shopping.

Another part of political consumerism should never be forgotten. It does not necessarily promote democratic ideals and development. Boycotting and buycotting has had and still has undemocratic roots. In Chapter 2 I discuss how it historically was used to promote discrimination. The best-researched case at the time was the ‘Don’t Buy Jewish’ consumer campaign of the 1930s in Europe and elsewhere (Encyclopædia Judaica Jerusalem 1971). I also write about how political consumer messages can confuse corporations when civic groups with diametrically opposing ideologies target the same goods or corporation in the same time period, as happened with The Walt Disney Company in the 1990s (see Best and Lowney 2009; *Political Virtue and Shopping*, 150). The company had to deal with calls for boycotts of the same Disney entertainment, clothing and toys from ideologically diametrically opposed standpoints – from fairtrade groups concerned about ‘sweatshop’ working conditions in the factories in the Global South that manufactured Disney products, from U.S. anti-ethnic and racial discrimination groups critical of Disney’s portrayal of ethnicity and race in its products and movies, and from Christian fundamentalist groups alarmed about Disney’s loose relationship with traditional family values and particularly when it comes to sexual orientation. Here the important point for political consumer research is boycott effectiveness: how is a corporation to respond to such diversified and contradictory demands forthcoming in political consumer action without provoking more irritation in consumer society?

There are also instances where an acknowledged good cause attracts bad, undemocratic or unwanted elements when using the market as its arena for politics. Here we might speak of politically dilemma-ridden and highly politically sensitive political consumerism. A case in point is the boycott and divestment calls against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, which many governments find difficult to handle. As noted earlier concerned citizens often turn to the market as an arena for politics when they consider government solutions inadequate. Here the Palestine-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) Movement wants to mobilize all kinds of consumers into market-based actions to compel Israel to comply with international law declaring the Israeli occupation settlements illegal. It wants Israel to leave these territories. The BDS movement creates perplexities for all kinds of consumers – both individual and institutional (e.g., procurement officers for public and private bodies) – due to the legacy of anti-Jewish boycotts and the Anti-Semitic campaigns in the 1930s and also because people with anti-Semitic sentiments can support it. While the U.S. Congress has condemned the movement as anti-Israel in orientation, the U.K. Royal Courts of Justice ruled that local councils can boycott Israeli settlement goods and divest in companies associated with the Occupied Territories if they have good ethical reasons for

doing so. The European Union has taken a different route. After long debates it decided to issue a formal interpretative notice declaring that products coming from Israeli settlements cannot be labelled as 'Made in Israel', and gives its member states primarily responsibility for enforcing Israeli compliance on how goods are labelled. Even retailers and supermarkets within the member states are called upon to help verify correct adherence to this policy. Such instances raise the question of the political consumerism's ability to handle and solve sensitive and long-lasting political problems. They also offer a more nuanced understanding of the scope and effectiveness of political consumerism's political virtue.

Researching political consumerism has been fun. The magnitude of the book's global response took me and my editor by surprise. The book gave scholars working in the field a 'research identity' and sounding board to contextualize their research, and me the opportunity to meet and learn from so many interesting scholars from different generations, countries, and disciplines – even if some of them have been highly critical. Currently I am following my critics and furthering the study of political consumerism in an Oxford Handbook on Political Consumerism, edited by Magnus Boström, myself and Peter Oosterveer. The handbook, commissioned by my book editor who is now at Oxford University Press and rooted in the overwhelming response to *Political Virtue and Shopping*, will include over forty chapters written by scholars from different geographic areas and disciplines. An entire section is devoted to theoretical and research design perspectives; other sections discuss political consumerism's strong and weak industrial sectors, geographical spread and practice, and importantly, its democratic paradoxes and challenges. Hopefully this volume, scheduled for publication in 2018, will receive the same enthusiastic response as my book, and find its way into classrooms across the world. It is also my hope that the Journal of Consumer Ethics will contribute with interesting insights and viewpoints to the academic and public debate on the suitability of the market as an arena for local to global politics.

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Re-reading 'Voluntary Simplicity and Ethics of Consumption'

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'Voluntary Simplicity and the Ethics of Consumption' (Shaw & Newholm, 2002) was published in the journal *Psychology and Marketing* in a special issue dedicated to 'Anti-consumption Attitudes' in 2002. The paper explored consumer concerns for both the extent and nature of consumption choices, drawing on findings from two qualitative studies of known ethical consumers. The paper has reached nearly 400 citations, making a reflection on this piece a timely endeavour. In revisiting the paper we believe the basic premise remains convincing. In their various ways, we argued, our respondents, who self-identified as 'ethical consumers', all spoke of restraint to their consumption. It seemed, however, there were many different ways to narrate and enact 'ethical consumption' and simplicity making us wary of simple definitions. We thought this seemed of interest, in part, because we drew on our two independently conducted studies to arrive at the same conclusion. Nevertheless, in retrospect we find some confounding as well as confirming factors. We frame these below around a consideration of history, product choices and political importance. Firstly, in terms of history, our paper begins with the contextualisation of the phenomena, 'ethical consumption' and 'voluntary simplicity', as a "growing awareness" among consumers. This is not how we would now present our argument. Since our subsequent work on the histories of consumption ethics (Newholm, Newholm & Shaw, 2015; Newholm & Newholm, 2015) it has become clear that some people have always considered the way they consume *and the amount consumed* to be matters of considerable deliberation. In 2002 (Shaw & Newholm) we argued: "It is suggested that those who begin thinking of their consumer choices in ethical terms are likely to consider these practices in terms of sustainable futures...". Being aware of a history of ethical consumption we might now say that whilst it seems likely that the unsustainability of consumer culture will trigger voluntary moves towards simplicity among some, the notion that excessive materialism is an impediment to a flourishing life has a long history (Trentmann, 2016). Thus, the conjunction within consumption ethics between compassionate purchasing and voluntary simplicity is far less novel than our 2002 paper might have suggested.

We worked with what seems in retrospect a very limited bibliography both in terms of scope and sometimes appropriateness. This, we think, is partly because academic writing on consumption ethics only blossomed this century. It is gratifying in a way to be surprised by the contrast between the narrow literature resources we had then and present cross-disciplinary abundance.

It is also good to see a fit between what we were reporting and new work in other disciplines. The philosopher Peter Wenz's (2005) virtue theory proposing a 'principle of anticipatory cooperation', for example, proposes consumers take "actions that deviate from the social norm in the direction of the ideal that virtuous people aspire to for themselves and others but which do not deviate so much that virtue impairs instead of fosters flourishing." This seems to chime with the experiences we were reporting in 2002 (Shaw & Newholm): "Indeed some holding ethical concerns actually restrained [cutbacks in consumption] in some of their personal relationships". Similarly, a clear concern of John Woolman in the 18th Century was that his Friends would not understand his distinctive purchases and his simplicity (Newholm, Newholm & Shaw, 2015). Some two-and-a-half centuries later the anthropologist, Cindy Isenhour (2012), reports her 'beyond the mainstream' respondents *needing* to seek "like minded friends" to avoid these misunderstandings. The uneasy connection between individual consumption simplicity and human social relations is undoubtedly one warranting further study.

We are also inclined to think, however, that had we been considerate of a history of ethical consumption in our 2002 literature search we might have found further work that would have strengthened our case. David Craig in his 2006 book explored John Ruskin's¹ 19th Century work on consumption. According to Craig (2006), Ruskin's advice to consumers was to ask:

"first, what condition of existence you cause in the producers of what you buy; secondly, whether the sum you have paid is just to the producer, and in due proportion, lodged in his hands; thirdly, to how much clear use, for food, knowledge, or joy, this that you have bought can be put; and fourthly, to whom and in what way it can be most speedily and serviceably distributed."

The prior part of Ruskin's imperative addresses what we would now call 'ethical consumption'. The latter part addresses 'voluntary simplicity' in requiring a justification of the purchase through a frugal judgement. Ruskin uncritically presents these parts as constituent of the excellence of

¹ We are aware that Ruskin's concern with the value of frugality was by no means the first voice doing so but we select it because it relates more closely to what we would now recognise as consumption and simplicity.

consumption practice. Thus, both the historical practice and development within moral economics of consumption ethics in terms of considered consumption *and* restraint were far better established than we had appreciated at the time of writing.

Secondly, in terms of product choices, although we were writing our paper only 15 years ago, some of the consumer practices under the heading ‘Maintained Levels of Consumption’ have now moved on and, as such, our examples are dated. We suspect this is because much has come onto the market to facilitate this approach for consumers as a means to address ethical concerns. We are struck, for example, by the difference between what we had found from our studies in the 1990s and Isenhour’s (2012) very sophisticated ‘prestige posh’ in Sweden, published a decade later. We reported that “Some consumers look to technological solutions for more sustainable [less unsustainable] consumption choices. This behaviour would include buying some green products such as catalytic converters on fuel-economic cars, clockwork radios, superefficient refrigerators, and laundry balls to replace detergents.” (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). Among these “technological fixes” were energy efficient appliances, where

“One respondent [from our studies] had investigated a special range of [kitchen] appliances with exceptionally high environmental credentials. These had proved to be exceptionally expensive and so he had bought an ordinary refrigerator with a good specification. Because he could well afford the exceptional product², why he did not is of interest. He said he could not justify spending on objects at the cost of his charitable, people-centred giving.” (Shaw & Newholm, 2002)

At the time of our research in the late 1990s some participants were certainly making use of energy ratings displayed on new kitchen appliances and we may assume from the above quote that rather higher rated market ‘solutions’ to environmental issues were also available.

What we were reporting, however, seems markedly different from Isenhour. Those practising ‘conspicuous green consumption’ “replacing light bulbs or by purchasing eco-labelled products” (Isenhour, 2012) and, more specifically the ‘prestige posh’ purchasing a new “top-of-the-line standing mixer, [...] state-of-the-art video projection system [and] advanced mobile phones[;] items that will last a long time.” (Isenhour, 2012). As in our 2002 paper, this supposed product longevity is where the interesting restraint to their consumption exists.

Although no direct comparison should be made between findings from qualitative work conducted with relatively affluent consumers in the UK and Sweden, it suggests an interesting longitudinal study would be to follow ‘techno-fix consumers’ through time. Isenhour reports,

² The respondent’s wife had a professional position and he worked as a Chief Schools Inspector.

however, one of her ‘prestige posh’ respondents questioning his own strategy. “Yes, that is part of my rationale but I don’t know if it is true because people that have expensive, good quality electronic things, they are also the ones who buy a lot and change them a lot.” (Isenhour, 2012). Empirically, we should ask, whether or not it is the case that ultimately the well-meaning ‘prestige posh techno-fix’ consumer project is counterproductive in environmental terms. Are some variants of the project more promising than others? Many ‘alternative’ products, clockwork products and laundry balls, remain marginal markets so is there a difference in trajectory between ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream’ capitalised products? What might have been ‘super-efficient’ in the late 1990s would be considered inefficient now and be superseded by new market offerings. How do consumers who espouse the ‘techno-fix’ strategy address this conundrum?

Finally, our paper gained attention less through its central argument, that we were reporting an empirically derived coincidence between our data sets showing simplifying narratives to be common among self-selected ‘ethical consumers’, but more so because of its political importance. At a time when Fair Trade was being mainstreamed (Low & Davenport, 2005; Fridell, 2009), ethical consumption as a project was being associated with neo-liberalism as a ‘responsibilization’ (Littler, 2008; Lekakis, 2013; Johnston, 2008) of the consumer through choice in the marketplace. The pejorative association of ‘ethical consumption’ with the neo-liberal concept of ‘the market’ will, in part, result from a narrowed view of the former around choice between products: the ethical/unethical, environmental/damaging, harmful/harmless, etc. The (ethical) consumer is responsible *only* for making the right purchase choice. Because of this narrowing of the term to market transactions we began to use it less in our writing and only specifically where we referred to purchasing products. We then spoke of consumption ethics as a wider term that could include abstention and frugality as well as consumption of ‘ethical’, alternative, second-hand products etc.

The ‘responsibilization’ thesis itself raises many awkward questions. Was it not the nascent neo-liberal project that during the 18th and 19th centuries ‘de-responsibilised’ the consumer as its economics swept away alternative concepts? (Slater, 1997) Didn’t the wizards of neo-liberalism tell consumers to ‘just do it’? Is neo-liberalism to be taken as a monolithic project now set on passing culpability for unsustainability to the individual when much of its marketing tells us not to worry, the corporation has a plan A because there can be no plan B? We should treat this thesis with some caution.

In a series of considerations of the relationship between what he elegantly refers to as the *good* and the *simple*, Kim Humphrey (2010) says, “The immediate answer is, as Shaw and Newholm

reasonably contend, ethics and frugality rolled into one.” Ethical consumption can hardly be a servant of global finance if it advocated simplicity.

“Together, [Humphrey, says] the simple and the good can thus constitute a formidable response to a world geared to consumption, but what is also reinforced is the fundamental weakness of both these dominant forms of ‘anti-consumerism’; their propensity to sideline the question of structural socio-economic reform brought about by collective effort that is not mediated through individualised acts, but effected through purposeful interconnection and collaboration.”

We agree this is a weakness. It is, however, clear that the politically active are not immune from ethical consumption (its arch critic George Monbiot (2013) is striving to be vegan) and, as Clive Barnett et al. (2010) argue, those seeking to consume ethically often engage in ‘purposeful interconnection’.

Evaluations by academics with interests in political movements of the practices of consumption ethics effectively co-opt ‘consumers’ into their schema and pronounce them to be competent or, more usually, deficient practices. This is, we think, a quite legitimate critique within the parameters of political discourse. Since the practices of ‘excellence in consumption’ can boast hundreds, perhaps thousands of years of development (Newholm, Newholm & Shaw, 2015), however, we suggest more respect be accorded to the principled lives that have constituted, and presently extend, this good and simple³ history.

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Using big data to understand consumer behaviour on ethical issues

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The Consumer Data Research Centre (CDRC) was established by the UK Economic and Social Research Council and launched its data services in 2015. The project is led by the University of Leeds and UCL, with partners at the Universities of Liverpool and Oxford. It is working with consumer-related organisations and businesses to open up their data resources to trusted researchers, enabling them to carry out important social and economic research.

Introduction

Over the last few years there has been much talk about how so-called “big data” is the future and if you are not exploiting it, you are losing your competitive advantage. So what is there in the latest wave of enthusiasm on big data to help organisations, researchers and ethical consumers?

Data growth

There is better and more detailed data breakdown and more new forms of data than ever before. This includes sales data, loyalty card data, social media, product sensors, new monitors and mobile phone data. There is lots of this data, often in real time and there are many ways to analyse and model it. This is nicely summarised in the famous “four Vs” of big data from IBM (volume, velocity, variety and veracity) (IBM 2017).

We think there are ten opportunities to use big data for companies, organisations, researchers and ethical consumers interested in the ethics of behaviour and products.

(1) Gaining greater detail behind global sustainability performance indicators. For example energy use by using smart meters on production lines, in retailers, on products or in people’s homes can produce a better understanding of energy use in the system.

(2) Accessing supply chain data more readily. There is an opportunity from being able to access data from global suppliers up and down the supply chain more readily, in a timelier fashion and with better accuracy. This will help to make better decisions over product/service changes

knowing the associated sustainability implications. As climate change impacts global supply chains, this data may help adaptation and resilience of supply.

(3) Gaining an insight in supply chain logistics and customer transport habits. There is now the ability to use mobile phone data to identify patterns in transport networks, giving the opportunity for better planning for more efficient use of fuel and reduced congestion. This may also provide consumers better opportunities to change to cleaner forms of transportation.

(4) Predicting changes in behaviour from social media. This is one of the most talked about aspects of big data and yet the most technically difficult. Much social media data is unstructured and in picture, pixels or abbreviated language. But there are opportunities to see how individuals react to an emerging sustainability issue or a new technology.

(5) Social media is a good way for people to identify up and coming sustainability issues from their own stakeholders. These may be key local NGOs, community leaders, political leaders, suppliers, competitors, employees as well as customers. Identifying opinion formers is vital for filtering the volume of social media.

(6) Consumer behaviour with products and services. As companies try to influence consumers to reduce the environmental impacts on the use phase of products and services, getting feedback on the effectiveness of these interventions is important for future strategy.

(7) Transparency to customers and NGOs by companies. Access by consumers to the data behind product eco-labels, or working condition audit results from the factories producing their products, is important for confidence. Better presentation, accuracy and timeliness of this is an advantage.

(8) Better marketing or targeting of greener products, services and corporate sustainability programmes. Being able to better segment and directly contact potential customers with personalised promotions is already being developed. This can help in the sustainability arena as well.

(9) Interaction with consumers and stakeholders in the shared or collaborative economy. The growing ability to share resources, between companies and consumers has been facilitated by social media. Entrepreneurs are already in this space with apps allowing sharing of food leftovers or power tools. There are great opportunities for this to be further developed reducing the material flow through society using different business models.

(10) Growing emphasis on smart cities, combined with the development of “mega cities” where the majority of the world population may live. Smart energy, water, waste and transport grids are just one area, but the buildings being able to heat and cool more smartly is another opportunity.

Don't get lost!

There are some difficulties with big data that users of big data need to be aware of.

Firstly, getting lost in the enormous amount of data is easy, so having objectives or research questions is essential. Secondly, a few big corporations have been quick to jump on correlations between different data sets without common sense kicking in quick enough to identify that there cannot be a causation. Finally, there are the ethics of the privacy of individuals and communities, which need to be protected even if the data is publicly available.

Overall there is much here for people to work on and to improve the sustainability performance of company operations, products, services, supply chains and even customers. However, as much data as possible needs to be open access for consumers, researchers, local communities and innovators for big data to have the biggest benefit for people and planet.

Ethical consumer markets data

Consumer Data Research Centre (CDRC¹) and Ethical Consumer have teamed up in 2014 to produce the annual 'Ethical Consumer market report 2014' and to share data and information resources. The time series data on UK consumers' spending on ethical products across sectors such as food, fashion, finance etc. for more than a decade is a valuable input for researchers working on ethical consumerism. CDRC has made the data open access² and is using the same information directly or indirectly in research and dissertations.

At CDRC, a team of researchers from Leeds University Business School (LUBS) and the School of Earth and Environment (SEE), University of Leeds is working on identifying the drivers and barriers for the consumption of ethical/sustainable products. The team is also investigating the influence of socio-demographic characteristics and ethical attitudes on the consumption of sustainable products, the implicit values of ethical/sustainable characteristics of products. A glimpse of some of the research and findings from CDRC team can be seen below.

Examples from the food sector

Examples of the types of research being piloted using data from the food sector by CDRC include the consumption of milk and egg products. The results clearly indicate that not all the sustainable

1 CDRC is an ESRC-funded centre run by the University of Leeds, University College London, University of Liverpool and University of Oxford, see www.cdrc.ac.uk.

2 <https://data.cdrc.ac.uk/dataset/ethical-consumer-markets-report-2001-uk>

products are considered the same by consumers, and consumption behaviour varies across sustainable product categories.

i) A linked data analysis was carried out by combining sales data of organic milk and free range eggs from a retailer with over 300 stores across the UK, green and ethical attitude data from CDRC's data partner, and socio-demographic and deprivation data from open sources. The analysis revealed that, in general, the consumers with deeper green and ethical attitudes are the most likely consumers of sustainable products. Deprivation has a negative effect on the consumption of sustainable products. Price, as expected, has a negative effect but the impact varies across products. Convenience stores have significant negative effect on the consumption of sustainable products. The influences of socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity etc. seem to vary by product categories.

Deeper green and ethical attitudes have a significant positive influence on the consumption of organic milk. Deprivation and Convenience stores have significant negative effect on the consumption of organic milk. Our analysis suggests that female consumers, consumers aged between 25 and 44 years, families with children between 11 and 17 are more likely to purchase organic milk. Families with children under 11 are less likely be organic milk consumers. With regard to free range eggs, eco-friendly green and ethical attitudes, deprivation and convenience store are the only parameters that have an influence on the purchase of free range eggs. While eco-friendly green and ethical attitudes have a positive influence the rest have a negative influence. Surprisingly or not, none of the socio-demographic characteristics has shown a significant effect.

ii) A further analysis of consumers' willingness to pay more for ethical/sustainable products indicate that the implicit value of free range eggs is 50% more, and the implicit value of organic eggs is 141% more compared to the enriched caged eggs. With regards to organic milk, the average implicit value of organic milk across all the available sizes is 33% more than conventional milk.

iii) In a separate analysis, we have also figured it out that with in the UK, there are regional differences in the preferences of consumers towards ethical/sustainable products. We found out that consumers in Wales prefer 'local' free range eggs compared to private (retailer) brands. On the other hand, consumers in England prefer private (retailer) brand free range eggs over 'local'.

Example from the energy sector

We have interviewed about 1000 energy consumers and asked whether they would take measures to reduce the consumption of energy in order to reduce their carbon footprint towards reducing global warming. Consumers were offered a carbon permit scheme to help them achieve their targets. The research revealed that about 70% of the consumers were willing to reduce their carbon emissions/energy usage when there is a scheme. Analysis suggests that the demographic factors affecting a consumer's probability of reducing emissions were: if there are children in the household; if the consumer is single, or male or highly educated. The attitudinal factor that affects the consumer behaviours the most is, unsurprisingly, whether the consumer believes there is an urgent need to tackle climate change.

Conclusions

Big data can help organisations, researchers and ethical consumers understand the ethics around consumer behaviour and products. The opportunities to link different types of data is exciting but must be research-question-led to avoid digging for non-existent causal links. The methods and access to data is still a barrier but open access is key to solving this. Big data will probably only help in filling in the details of our knowledge on ethical consumption and on products, but this can only help our decision making.

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Book Review

Robert Crocker (2016) “Somebody Else’s Problem: Consumerism, Sustainability and Design”

Reviewed by: Daniel Welch¹

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Consumerism is problematic. It makes us acquisitive, materialistic, inauthentic, socially competitive, indebted, lazy and obese—and it’s destroying the planet. That much we know. At least that is the common view we see endlessly rehearsed in contemporary media—in magazine articles, documentaries, Hollywood blockbusters, and NGO campaigns—as well as in everyday discourse. But what is consumerism? Consumerism is problematic in this other sense. As Robert Crocker notes at the beginning of *Somebody Else’s Problem*, it has never attained much conceptual coherence. Is it simply the modern expression of innate human acquisitiveness and competitiveness—the Cro-Magnon in the mall thesis? Is it, as sociologists typically have it, a “material-cultural accompaniment of industrial mass consumption” (p.3). Does it denote the shared cultural anxieties of variegated global “cultures of consumption”, as some historians of consumption suggest? Is it the hegemonic imaginary of the regime of capital accumulation, as critical political economy has argued for 170 years? Or is it the psycho-social motor of our unsustainable industrial economy, as Robert Crocker would generally have it?

Sustainable consumption scholarship is largely divided between those employing a broad, non-normative conception of consumption, encompassing the appropriation of goods in social practices, and those who are untroubled by informing their understanding of consumption with their normative distaste for the values and mores of contemporary consumer society. This distinction is often replicated in an emphasis, on the one hand, on structural constraints (material and social)—such as norms, the habitual character of behaviour, infrastructural lock-in and the obduracy of incumbents—and, on the other, an emphasis on agency, collective action, and cultural values.

Robert Crocker falls squarely in neither camp—and this makes for an interesting read. Crocker, who teaches the history and theory of design and design for sustainability at the University of South Australia, begins this eminently readable and erudite book by noting how, in the context of

sustainability, 'consumerism' immediately invokes an individualised "blame game", operating as a "moral, judgemental, ideological term' (p.2). Such individualising of consumer responsibility, he notes, tends to obscure the structural aspects of environmentally unsustainable systems of provision. Most consumption, Crocker acknowledges, is made possible through various dominant systems of provision that tend to lock consumers in to practices and behaviours. But Crocker is more concerned with unearthing consumerism as "a state of mind and way of life—an effective ideology—justifying and supporting this regime of ever-increasing productivity" (p.207). For Crocker this ideology functions primarily through an individualism of escalatory perfectionism, social emulation and competition, "deception" (akin to commodity fetishism) and sunk-cost fallacies, with enormous psychic, social and environmental costs arising from the rapid cycle of economic and material throughput such an ideology demands, and its dependency on "post-cautionary production and design".

The book seeks to answer three questions: "firstly, what are the psychological, social and material origins of contemporary consumerism from a historical perspective? Secondly, what are the dynamics that make today's consumerism so escalatory, expansive and increasingly destructive? And thirdly, what are the main principles and strategies that might slow this seemingly unstoppable trajectory and return us to more sustainable forms of consumption?" (p. 206).

The first part of the book addresses the question of origins. It explores the historical process through which the "democratisation of luxury" has taken place. After some preliminaries, it takes as a starting point Hogarth's *Rake's Progress* (1735), the cautionary tale of a parvenu's seduction by luxury and social emulation, and his eventual sorry demise in debt, ill health and madness. Crocker notes: "Hogarth deftly weaves together the three dimensions of consumerism...its moral and psychological basis, in the consumer's emotive commitment to possession and ownership; its social and comparative drivers" and its negative social and mental consequences (p. 37). Hogarth was certainly an extraordinary prescient social observer. However, writing in the mid 18th-century, that he should appear to be in possession of a full account of the psychology of the consumer and the ethical malaise of consumerism should give us pause for thought. If the essential character of consumerism arrived so early and has remained fundamentally unchanged through the revolutions of mass production, mass enfranchisement and mass consumption, would it not challenge the close association of consumerism with the specific conditions of our contemporary, environmentally unsustainable, socio-economic arrangements? (Unless the claim is that current socio-material arrangements appeal to the worst aspects of a much more general

psychology of lack; a claim that does have many adherents). And if our contemporary anxieties concerning the pathologies of consumer society rehearse so closely the 18th-century's moral condemnation of luxury (see Hilton, 2004), despite such changed material and social circumstances, surely that suggests that no response to those anxieties will offer much critical purchase on our specific condition? Another side to this would be to challenge the periodisation that associates the rise of 'modern' consumer society with mass production. Glennie and Thrift (1992; cf. Trentmann, 2009) have argued that the characteristics of consumer society usually associated with the social dislocations of the later 19th and early 20th-centuries could be found in the artisanal urban setting of 18th-century Britain. Crocker does acknowledge such work, but it is unclear quite what the implications of such a re-periodisation would have for his account of the problems of consumerism. It would seem to be radically at odds with most normatively inflected understandings of consumerism as late modern consumer culture. Perhaps he does well not to tie himself to a definition of consumerism, allowing consumerism to stand unapologetically for what is problematic in that culture, whilst acknowledging more nuanced historical and sociological accounts than normative denunciations generally allow.

Crocker continues his history of the democratisation of luxury in the context of early modern global trade, through adaptive imitation in design and technical advances in production allowing substitution of cheaper processes and materials (Chapter 2). He explores the logic of imitation, substitution and authenticity in design and consumption. While this process widens and democratizes the market "in turn it intensifies and accelerates the cycle of manufacture, purchase, use and discard, and compounds its environmental effects" (p. 54). Crocker's thesis is that the fundamental role played by imitation in human behaviour (in the mode of Gabriel Tarde) is harnessed in consumerism in a circuit between design, consumption and production "as a continuous circle of adaptation and substitution based upon imitation, a 'directed practice' whose aim is to encourage more consumption" (p. 57).

The first section of the book continues with a welcome joining together of the stories of the development of design and of mass consumption (Chapter 3). Here William Morris as an exemplar of how "[v]ision and ideology in design is transformative because it reveals what might exist, and this can be influential in shaping beliefs and evoking intrinsic values in others" (p.71). Beyond the celebration of artisanal values, however, there is a perhaps more ambivalent role for the designer, where, for Crocker, the designer's vision or ideology and the consumer's understanding of "the good life promised by consumption itself" collide as "two imagined worlds of desire"(p.75). The section concludes (Chapter 4) with an acknowledgement that most consumption is made possible

through various dominant systems of provision, which tend to lock in consumers, and where ‘sunk costs’ often calcify socio-technical change, except to the benefit of incumbents, in a societal ‘sunk-cost fallacy’. Here he explores the development of the car as quintessential of such systems.

The second section explores the “dynamics that make today’s consumerism so escalatory, expansive and increasingly destructive”. Here we arrive at the “more mobile, technocratic consumer democracy” of post-war affluent society, where consumerism became seen not only as the key to economic prosperity but also to peace and democracy (p. 98). But while he acknowledges the post war generations’ positive sense of consumerism as prosperity for all—access to goods as a corollary of the social democratic and Keynesian compromise—ultimately for Crocker the “consumer as citizen” is a myth. This is the world of consumerism proper, the period of “dynamic nexus between cheap energy, industrial expansion and rising levels of consumption” (p.12), where “continuous choice, of self-evaluation and social comparison” dominate, and through which “design and marketing must continuously ‘cue’ consumerism” (p. 102). Here we find an escalatory logic of comparison and competition carefully managed by designers and marketers—heirs to Wedgewood’s “engine of emulation”.

While Crocker notes the role played by other dynamics his account does tend to be dominated by a focus on social comparison—‘invidious comparison’ as Veblen had it—as the primary dynamic of unsustainable consumption. There has of course been much work in consumption scholarship seeking to counter the tendency to give to social comparison and conspicuous consumption centre stage in understandings of consumption. As Trentmann (2009) notes, even when foregrounding the communicative aspects of consumption over the utilitarian or hedonic we should be cautious not to reduce communication to a logic of emulation and competition. Furthermore, sustainable consumption scholarship has sought to develop accounts that acknowledge other escalatory dynamics, such as the development of standards (some of which Crocker acknowledges).

The book’s third section seeks to address the main principles and strategies that counter the escalatory logic of consumerism. Crocker argues that Jevon’s Paradox is alive and well (Chapter 8). The demonstrable links between greater efficiency, lower prices and increases in consumption mean that ‘eco-efficient’ or ‘low-carbon’ products and systems will in no way be adequate for sustainable consumption: practices and values must change too. Here he draws on Sen’s definition of needs in terms of the realization of our capabilities, and lauds the “custodial consumption” of his father’s generation—thrifty and frugal, displaying “stewardship” towards possessions—whilst acknowledging a turning back of the clock is anything but simple. In Chapter 9 he deals with

credit and debt, and the increasingly dominant subjective experience of harriedness, and goes on to discuss the role of values in consumption. I have some suspicion of accounts of “extrinsic” and “intrinsic” values, as deployed here. I wonder if the terms “nasty” and “nice” values would serve as well. However, my suspicion is most pointedly directed towards the assumption that often comes with such accounts, that values as the primary drivers of action can operate as a general model of behaviour. Crocker does not fall into this trap, noting that “[h]owever important such norms, beliefs and their associated values might seem, the social and material contexts of our lives...tend to determine what we do in practice” (p. 173). The final chapter of this section examines what Crocker calls “post-cautionary” design and product development—“an established system of innovation, design and development, mass-production and distribution that treats the environment as ‘somebody else’s problem’” (p. 185)—in contrast to the precautionary principle as a model for sustainable design.

Somebody Else’s Problem is erudite but amenable to the general reader. While well informed by consumption scholarship, Crocker’s style is often anecdotal and impressionistic, weaving together, for example, for an excursion through “Technology and Acceleration” (Chapter 6), the Whole Earth Catalogue, Star Wars, Apple’s famous ‘1984’ ad for the Macintosh and IKEA bookcases. While this makes the book very readable, it occasionally somewhat detracts from cogency. And there is little room for ambivalence. *Deception* plays a key role in his account, operating much as commodity fetishism: concealing the psychic, social and environmental effects of our consumption. But don’t we also live in a time when our consumption is problematised as never before?

Crocker concludes with laudatory “Principles to live by and design by” which I have much sympathy with. But it is unclear to me how these principles scale up to address systemic socio-technical transformation. For Crocker consumerism drives the engine of demand that in turn drives the market. But while I concur that “the individual consumer’s goals and values have been progressively reset to the terms, rhythms and needs of the market” (p.14), I would argue that it is not consumerism itself that is the problem but the underlying system of capital accumulation, which for now finds consumerism suitable to its needs.

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Book Review

Deirdre Shaw, Andreas Chatidakis and Michal Carrington (eds.) (2016) **Ethics and Morality in Consumption: Interdisciplinary Perspectives.**

Reviewed by: Alex Hiller¹

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Ethics in Consumption: Interdisciplinary Perspectives is edited by the organising team behind the seminar series of the same name, many of whose presenters have also contributed to this book of edited works comprising 13 chapters. The aim of the seminars was to connect the range of contemporary concerns in the social sciences around ethics, consumption, commercial practices and the role of individual and social values and actions. Likewise, the editors state their intention to pursue this aim in the book in order to increase understanding of ethical consumption from a broader range of literature in order to address the complex and multifaceted nature of the ethical consumer movement as it has matured. As the editors note, other collected works on the subject have attempted to link different disciplines (such as consumption studies, geography and political science in Tania Lewis and Emily Potter's excellent *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*, or in Rob Harrison, Terry Newholm and Deirdre Shaw's seminal *The Ethical Consumer*), but this should not diminish the scope and diversity of this book which further adds to and expands these debates in drawing on and linking a variety of perspectives rooted in a range of subject areas including (but not limited to) psychology, cultural studies, politics, history, anthropology, economics, politics, theology, geography and the built environment.

The book is split into two sections, which also relate to two of the seminars: consumption ethics and the individual, and consumption ethics and society. The editors, in the introduction, position these sections in response to the ongoing focus on the role of the individual decision maker in consumption ethics, and the 'social embeddedness' of consumption ethics, acknowledging that the roles of consumer and citizen are not mutually exclusive. Here the oft-cited 'trade-off' between and micro individual choices and needs and macro societal concerns is implicitly addressed, but the second section also draws on how societies 'interact' with ethical

consumption the histories, virtual and physical spaces, and social or spiritual motives underpinning ethical consumption, revealing some novel perspectives on the subject.

In section one (consumption ethics and the individual), the individual is considered from a range of perspectives. Kate Soper sets the scene well in her treatise for an 'alternative hedonism', querying what levels of consumption are necessary for human flourishing. This is followed by Karen Wenell's exploration of the 'supramoral' and religious motivations underpinning ethical consumption, and Martha Starr's review of the economic research on the subject from both supply and demand-side. Significantly, the latter includes consideration and emphasis on the social dimension of ethical consumption and its role in broadening its adoption, reflecting current debates in the marketing and consumption literature especially around social identity and social practices. Judith de Groot, Iljana Schubert and John Thøgerson then provide an excellent literature review on ethical consumption from a psychological perspective, challenging some of the orthodoxy around the consumer as rational decision maker that is sometimes prevalent in this (and economic perspectives) on consumers. They also helpfully provide some reflections on applications at the end of each section, focusing particularly here on social marketing campaigns thus adding a further dimension to the work. Finally in this section, Marylyn Carrigan and Carmela Bosangit similarly give a thorough account of the marketing literature on responsible marketing and consumption, highlighting many of the problems and criticisms that have been levelled in recent times. They take good account of the challenges that marketers can face in making more 'responsible' decisions in difficult situations, and propose pragmatic solutions for both consumers and marketers in navigating the 'deep moral waters' of the marketplace.

In section two (consumption ethics and society), ethical consumption is first placed in a historical perspective by Terry Newholm and Sandy Newholm, reminding us that ethical consumption is not a 'new' phenomenon as is sometimes claimed. Their fascinating discussion itself takes in a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives, covering social movements, politics, literature and individual motivation and morality in service of their argument to restore a 'lost' consumption history in providing insight into current debates. We then turn to geography with Dorothea Kleine, who provides an overview of the key concepts of space and place, advocating a relational view of spaces and places and the linkages between them, essential in a globalized economy and society. The sociological view is provided by Kim Humphrey, who notes that in sociology 'consumption' generally begins from a negative frame of reference, but in taking in its (and ethical consumption's) various critiques, argues for the possibility that it can be considered as a site of politics and citizenship, despite the challenges in 'grasping' the 'ethical' in ethical

consumption. Humphrey's identification of the dichotomy of ethical consumption possibly being both an element of social transformation as well as an ethic of consumer capitalism is neatly followed by Peter Luetchford's anthropological analysis, which reminds the reader that much of what is presented in this book and other literature is presented from a largely Western perspective, and that further intercultural anthropological perspectives in research are required. Lauren Copeland and Lucy Atkinson then pick up some of the strands in the earlier chapters in relation to political consumption and civic engagement, posing questions about the maxim of 'shopping for a better world', and in a novel chapter, Peter Newton and Denny Meyer focus on the built environment (and individuals' attitudes towards it) as both an enabler and barrier to sustainable consumption and lifestyles. The section finishes with Kathryn Hegarty's discussion of education for sustainability within (predominantly higher education) curricula, and Jo Littler's identification of two key aspects of cultural studies which can provide insight into ethics in consumer culture; firstly, its inherently interdisciplinary nature, and secondly the need for a conjunctural analysis (or understanding the power dynamics at play). This provides an appropriate finishing point, the previous chapters having to some degree worked in service of these features.

The editors' concluding chapter pulls together many of the identified areas for future research throughout the book, which provides both a helpful summary and stimulation for those wanting to take a more cross-disciplinary path. Here the editors aim to respond to a number of key questions that arise throughout the book: what is ethical consumption; who is the ethical consumer; what do ethical consumers do; and, is ethical consumerism genuinely progressive? Here they draw on perspectives within each chapter to demonstrate how the contributors have responded to these questions and to identify where further work needs to be done. Indeed, the identification of future avenues for research both here and in the dedicated subsection of the conclusion is invaluable for academics and students in the field, and a very welcome addition to the text. What is striking upon completing the book and as is noted here, in defining 'ethical consumption' there is a diversity of language used to describe the acts of and motivations which underpin it, but also a commonality between them which can act as a starting point in bringing these disciplines together under future research agendas.

The reader is borne in mind throughout, and the editors add real value to the chapters presented through contextualising the work (as would be expected) in an introductory chapter, and also through 'signposting' in each chapter to related themes and ideas throughout the book, and finally by the provision of a concluding chapter which provides a number of areas for further

research. Often edited collections of works can lack a coherence outside of a unifying theme, but this does not apply here, where some thoughtful structuring and narrative on the part of the editors bring a sense of cohesiveness and completeness to the book. Similarly in terms of style, whilst the collection of chapters as a whole is 'academic' in nature and approach, the style throughout is accessible for a variety of audiences from academics and students to those working in industry, policy and to more ambitious 'lay' readers with an interest in the subject. Many of the chapters not only provide original perspectives and insights into specific issues, but also provide concise yet thorough overviews of the literature in the different fields. This is particularly helpful to those who come to each subject from particular disciplines, and a real strength of the book is in helping to develop the understanding and knowledge of the reader to understand how the theory is structured and developed across these subject areas. However, the chapters have sufficient depth that readers from within each discipline will find something of value. The comments and signposting by the editors throughout further helps the reader to make the connections between the different chapters and disciplines, and lends the sense of coherence mentioned previously.

Clearly the individual chapters could be critiqued from individual perspectives, and there are certainly issues presented that are worthy of further debate. In answering questions about what ethical consumerism *is*, the book could possibly have benefited from a contribution rooted in moral philosophy. Also, whilst the various criticisms and limitations of ethical consumption that have emerged over the last ten to fifteen years or so are reflected in many of the chapters here, and the editors question whether ethical consumption is genuinely progressive in their concluding comments, these criticisms are not always dealt with 'head on', and are instead often alluded to or left open to question. However, these are minor points which do not diminish an important, original and superbly edited book which will enhance and broaden the perspective and knowledge of anyone involved in research or practice in ethical consumption and ethical consumer markets or spaces. Overall this is valuable and important addition to the growing literature on the subject of ethical consumption, and its wide-ranging nature and detailed and insightful editorial style mark it out as distinctive in the field. It will be of interest to a diverse audience with an interest in ethical consumption from different disciplinary backgrounds (and indeed achieves the editors' aim, setting a marker than ethical consumption *can* only be understood from a broad base), and is accessible and thought-provoking, directing readers to a much wider literature set in each field, and drawing out suggestions for both application and future directions in research.

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News in Consumer Ethics

UK: Modern Slavery: Consumer Perspectives

It is estimated that up to 60,000 people are currently enslaved in the US, and that at least 1,243,400 people are modern slaves across Europe⁴. Many of these people are victims of human trafficking and are enslaved in industries such as domestic work, agriculture, restaurants/food service, and the sex trade, with women and girls representing the largest share of forced labour victims⁵. In contrast to traditional and overt forms of slavery, modern slaves are often recruited and controlled with psychological and economic forms of coercion⁶. These covert and non-material methods of intimidation and control can work to render modern slaves invisible to our eyes. Focusing on the ethics of production, consumption and supply chains, recent anthropological and geographical schools of thought point to the tyranny of distance between sites of consumption and production in enabling social inequities and environmental degradation between privileged consumers in

4 Global Slavery Index

(<http://www.globallslaveryindex.org/>)

5 International Labour Organisation (ILO). "ILO 2012 Global estimate of forced labour Executive summary."

6 Dando, C. J., Walsh, D., & Brierley, R. (2016). Perceptions of psychological coercion and human trafficking in the West Midlands of England: beginning to know the unknown. *PloS one*, 11(5).

the global north and disadvantaged populations in the production sites of the global south (e.g. Kleine 2016; Lutchford 2016), calling for the distances between production and consumption to be bridged. In situations of modern slavery, however, many of these enslaved people are working and living amongst us – in our local communities. In contrast to the global North-South divide, modern slaves are often physically intimate in the daily consumption lives of Westernised communities. They wash our cars, pick our vegetables, clean our houses, polish our nails, prepare our food, and provide sexual services. Despite this physical – and often intimate – proximity, we fail to see them or their plight. These localised enslaved people remain invisible even when the distance between production and consumption has been bridged. We term this paradoxical invisibility in situations of intimate proximity *oblivious consumption—concealed production*.

This modern slavery *oblivious consumption—concealed production* paradox raises an important question: how can we, as affluent westernised consumers, remain blind to the plight of enslaved people when we are interacting with them in everyday consumption lives, and how can this invisibility shrouding modern slaves in our communities be removed? We call for a multi-stakeholder approach to responding to this challenge that enmeshes researchers, industry, communities and governmental bodies. Towards this outcome we

are running a series of seminars and studies to bring these stakeholders together, beginning with an ESRC supported seminar in London on Friday 21st April

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/business/research/researchevents/management/ethicsinconsumption/seminarsandevents/consumer/>

UK: ESRC ECRA Glasgow Collaborative PhD scholarship on clothing

It has long been acknowledged that everyday consumption practices of Western societies are environmentally unsustainable. Clothing is important as evidenced by a global garment industry valued at around US \$1.7 trillion and employing approximately 75 million people (Fashion United; International Labour Organisation). There are significant environmental costs from resource inputs, manufacture, use and disposal of clothing. Purchase and use of clothing has a significant carbon footprint from emissions and water use. The Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow has been awarded a prestigious Economic and Social Research Council funded PhD Scholarship in collaboration with the Ethical Consumer Research Association (ECRA) for a project entitled 'Closing the Loop: Driving Circularities in Clothing Consumption'. This PhD will commence 1 October 2017.

This research will engage with key stakeholders to build the critical insights currently pertinent

but neglected in shifting consumers towards more sustainable consumption practices. This research seeks to address the following research questions:

- How do consumers understand clothing acquisition, (re)use and disposal?
- What are the current barriers to participating in these practices?
- How do consumers respond to, manage and maintain more sustainable approaches to clothing consumption?
- How can these consumer insights shape consumer and retail practice?

The scholarship will run for 3 years and covers a PhD researcher stipend at the Research Council recommended rate, which is £14,296 for 2016/17. It will also cover tuition fees.

Applicants are required to make two applications: one for a place of study for a PhD in Management at the University of Glasgow; the second application is for the scholarship. Both applications must be complete by 17:00, Monday 3 July 2017.

UK: Southampton University and Sustainable Haircare

Within Southampton Business School at the University of Southampton there has been an ESRC grant-funded project called "Embedding Sustainability in the Hairdressing Curriculum - Sustainable Solutions for the Hair & Beauty Sector". This follows on from a previous ESRC

funded project: 'Engaging Hairdressers in Pro-environmental behaviours'.

As part of this project, a new 'Sustainable Stylist' and 'Sustainable Salon' certification have been developed with industry partners (Habia, VTCT) and the All Party Political Group on the hairdressing sector.

To make this work, they have developed an online salon training programme and associated sustainable stylist/salon certification which was launched at an event in Southampton on April 5th this year.

The certification addresses issues like low-energy lighting, energy-saving technologies (e.g. hairdryers), renewable energy suppliers, water-saving technologies, advice to consumers about sustainable hair practices and products, and using products containing sustainable palm oil. More than 20 workshops have already taken place at colleges around the country, and a similar number are planned in the future. More information is available at the project website: <http://ecohairandbeauty.com/>

AUS: Consumers and tax avoidance

Professor Richard Eccleston is Director of the Institute for the Study of Social Change at the University of Tasmania and has written widely on international tax issues. He is currently leading a project 'Paying their fair share? Corporations, community activism and the new politics of tax justice'. This is planned to culminate in the publication, by Oxford

University Press, of a collaborative book of chapters addressing the issue.

He writes: "Communities the world the over continue to suffer from the consequences of the global financial crisis. While we continue to face significant challenges, there is some cause for cautious optimism. In many cases the condemnation of world leaders did translate into action and, as a result, banks are better regulated and the most egregious forms of tax evasion are coming to an end.

Yet we can't be complacent as much of the progress which was made during the acute phase of the crisis is being undone. Trump is dismantling the Dodd-Frank Act and the prospects of international cooperation and coordination both in Europe and beyond seem to be diminishing by the day.

What, then, can be done to promote a more equitable and sustainable world in an environment in which national governments are increasingly unwilling or unable to act?

Now, more than ever, citizen and consumer activism and other forms of private governance are an important way to help ensure that firms act ethically. While acknowledging that there are countless firms whose claims to act ethically or sustainability are little more than a symbolic gesture in public relations, there are also examples, such as environmental certification schemes, where consumer and activist campaigns have made a real difference in terms of changing corporate behaviour for the better.

The key here is to create robust and objective means of reporting corporate behaviour so that consumers and investors alike can make informed decisions which will help hold corporations to account. One positive outcome of the financial crisis and its aftermath is that there is much greater awareness of the extent of corporate tax avoidance and the fact that it denies governments in the developed and developing world at least USD 500 billion per year.

Creating awareness of the problem is a start, and the fact that most world leaders have given an undertaking to tackle the problem is heartening. However, it is necessary to be eternally vigilant as powerful forces are constantly trying to undermine the implementation and enforcement of measures designed to improve the integrity of the corporate tax regime.

This is where transparency and promoting awareness among consumers and investors is critically important.

Yet there are real challenges. For a start, all corporate tax avoidance strategies are designed to conceal where and how much tax a large MNC actually pays.

Second, the tax strategy of a firm is both abstract and contestable. Whereas with appropriate standards and independent oversight it is possible to certify that a timber product, for example, has been produced sustainably, it is arguably much more difficult to

demonstrate that a large corporation has paid their 'fair share' of tax.

Academics and activists have also made a lot of progress in outlining what a fair and sustainable corporate tax system might look like. For example, reporting economic activity, profits and taxes paid on a country by country basis is the foundation for a fair corporate tax system.

The greatest challenge is making this data freely available so any interested party can assess the tax strategy of large firms. While the OECD is now committed to so-called Country by Country reporting, sadly large firms will not have to disclose this information publicly.

Fortunately there are other ways to skin a cat. In the UK activists have established the Fair Tax Mark certification scheme whereby firms which do publicly disclose their tax affairs can apply for certification.

Another important initiative is the Open Data for Tax Justice scheme which aims to develop an open database outlining the tax strategies of large corporations which any third party can use.

While both of these initiatives are in their infancy it seems clear that they will help provide the tools to enable consumers and investors to make ethical decisions which will play an increasingly important role in holding large corporations to account."

AUS: Children more ethical than their parents

In September 2016, Kate Neale was awarded her Doctor of Philosophy for her PhD thesis *Children and Ethical Consumption*, which examined the ways children learn about and practise ethical consumption. Ms Neale, from Southern Cross University, interviewed children between the ages of eight and 12, and their parents, in Brisbane, Sydney, and across the New South Wales north coast.

Speaking to ABC News North Coast, she said the children and adults often had different ethical priorities. "Parents were very concerned about the health and wellbeing of their family, but children took a much more altruistic perspective about being helpful and kind. The children were concerned about looking after the welfare of animals, and they were also really concerned about the working conditions of overseas workers in factories. I was surprised that kids knew so much about the welfare of animals, factory farming, and overseas working conditions, and I was a little bit surprised that parents were as conscious about their health and wellbeing but weren't really thinking about translating that into ethical consumption."

Ms Neale said, overall, the children were much more aware of global issues than some adults gave them credit for. "Kids are seen as impulsive and irrational, the nagging kid at the checkout is a pretty common thing that we think of when we talk about kids as consumers.

I did my research around the time of when there was a massive factory collapse in India and the kids were really aware of this issue and that was something they were really concerned about. Interestingly, when I spoke to those parents those particular issues were the ones they thought they needed to protect their children from – that they were too shocking, age-inappropriate, or big ticket concepts that kids wouldn't be able to get their heads around. Yet I had those children telling me they had those concerns."

Ms Neale also said that the consumer behaviour of some parents was also being influenced by their children's ethics. "In some instances, kids were coming home and saying 'I learnt about palm oil cultivation, or we learnt about fair trade'," she said.

Ms Neale concluded by saying that "Children are consumers in today's market, they're wanting to purchase their own products, they're getting pocket money or some disposable income, but they also influence a lot of parents' purchasing decisions. They're also consumers of tomorrow, so it's really important for us to understand how they're being socialised as consumers because that will give us an idea of what sort of adult consumers they'll be."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-22/study-shows-children-are-ethical-consumers/7868104>

NZ: Consumers embracing minimalism

According to the website www.stuff.co.nz, a study at Otago University in Dunedin New Zealand, into consumer attitudes and choices running since 1979 has identified a marked increase in the numbers of so-called "progressive" consumers who make buying decisions based on their impact on the environment and other people. In the past decade this progressive consumer group has more than doubled in size to the point where one in five of the study's 2000 subjects share the view. Meanwhile the more hardcore "greens" cohort is steady at 8 per cent.

"The strength of that change, and how mainstream those concerns and attitudes are becoming, was surprising," says lead researcher Leah Watkins. "The biggest segment now is defined by progressive characteristics.

Essentially they are very socially minded. They are defined by this idea that they are non-materialistic, they are very concerned with the environment. They tend to be politically left."

Accompanying the growth of the progressive consumer is the view that business should act responsibly, and not simply focus on profit.

Watkins believes the 2008 global financial crisis and its long-term impact have played a role in that.

The web article went on to reference a successful new business start-up in Auckland which was helping people to declutter, and the

influence in New Zealand of the Japanese decluttering author Marie Kondo (who has sold 4 million books). Two American bloggers, Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, known as "The Minimalists" to their 4 million readers, were also apparently popular.

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/well-good/inspire-me/89181063/Why-Kiwis-are-embracing-minimalism>

USA: Conference on The Good Consumer: Consumption, Ethics, and Subjectivity

In March 2017, Brandeis University Boston hosted a conference called "The Good Consumer: Consumption, Ethics, and Subjectivity". The event was a cross-departmental collaboration including the English Department, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the Mandel Center for the Humanities, and the Brandeis Departments of Comparative Humanities, Psychology, Theater Arts, and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies.

The aim of the conference was to "rethink modern subjectivity through the lens of consumption, whether it be of food, luxury goods, or the media. In the process of consumption, the consumer and the consumed interact and perhaps trade roles, an act entailing moral and ethical dimensions. We seek to explore these dimensions, asking the question,

“Is consumption a ‘good’ interaction between the self and the other?” This topic is particularly relevant today, in light of the prominence of consumption and of concerns about its ethics.”

USA: Purdue University study on Exploring Relationships between Ethical Consumption, Lifestyle Choices, and Social Responsibility

Research at Purdue University in Indiana and published in May 2016 has drawn a connection between lifestyles choices and demographics of consumers and how they view not only their own social responsibility in their buying decisions but also that of corporations. The study on "ethical consumerism" brings attention to how consumers' attitudes regarding socio-ethical issues might align with their expectations for corporate social responsibility, or CSR. "Collectively, this analysis suggests that a wide array of ethical concerns are considered by many U.S. consumers in their current purchasing behaviours and that the values underlying their actions may indeed hold implications for consumer perceptions of and support for corporations and their CSR initiatives," the researchers wrote in their report "Exploring Relationships between Ethical Consumption, Lifestyle Choices, and Social Responsibility."

The research was conducted by Nicole Olynk Widmar, associate professor of agricultural economics in the College of Agriculture; agricultural economics master's student Carissa Morgan; and Candace Croney, associate professor of comparative pathobiology and animal sciences in the Colleges of Veterinary Medicine and Agriculture.

Their study builds on existing research involving consumer social responsibility behaviours. The researchers conducted an online survey of 1,201 U.S. consumers in April 2015, targeted to be representative of the U.S. population in gender, age, income and geographic region of residence.

Women, younger respondents and more educated respondents were more likely to value and support environmental protection aspects of social responsibility in their consumption behaviours, the researchers found.

Women and younger respondents also were more sensitive to animal welfare concerns, as were vegetarians and vegans, who also strongly supported environmental protection through their consumption behaviours.

Those who travelled, volunteered or engaged in charitable giving also reported more highly valuing the environmental, animal welfare, corporate responsibility and philanthropic dimensions of social responsibility.

All demographics reported avoiding companies that used advertisements that were deceptive or depicted minorities negatively.

The research was published in the May 2016 issue of the journal *Advances in Applied Sociology*. The full report is available at: <http://www.scirp.org/Journal/PaperInformation.aspx?PaperID=66443>

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Ethical Consumer Research

Association (ECRA)

ECRA is a not-for-profit multi-stakeholder co-operative based in Manchester UK which exists to:

- encourage sustainable behaviour across the corporate sector through market pressure
- empower individual consumers to take action on issues of concern to them

- lead international discussion and research on the potential of ethical purchasing

It publishes a popular consumer magazine and website at www.ethicalconsumer.org

Key content from the JCE will be highlighted on a regular page in Ethical Consumer magazine.

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Aims and Scope

JCE aims to improve and broaden knowledge of consumption ethics both theoretically and in its application to current ethical concerns in the market and human environmental unsustainability.

To provide a space for discussion where all terminologies in this space are welcome; this would include but not be limited to sustainable consumption, political consumption, ethical consumption and responsible consumption.

It also aims to encourage debates around key issues such as the limitations of ethical consumption movements, the role of new media, and geographical comparisons.

It aims to be actively interdisciplinary with a developing engagement beyond academia to consumers, civil society and business.

JCE publishes discussion papers and commentary on topical issues as well as longer more traditional academic articles. Academic content will be peer reviewed in the usual way. JCE also publishes news, books reviews and meeting reports.