

Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Exploring the Myth of the Ethical Consumer

Bachelor Thesis

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<p>Sustainability is becoming a more and more important topic for businesses today. This thesis explores the place of the consumer in relation to ethics and the factors that influence them. The author shows the relationship existing between governments and their effect on the “ethical” consumer. Then the author contends the existence of the “ethical” consumer, while trying to define their values. The author concludes that even if certain “ethical” consumers take into account “ethical” values, the actions are not enough to be truly sustainable. Finally, the author examines the future of sustainability, and ways to decrease the impact gap created by consumers in general.</p>	
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1. Introduction to sustainability

The Cambridge Dictionary defines sustainability as “the idea that goods and services should be produced in ways that do not use resources that cannot be replaced and does not damage the environment, therefore continuing over a long period of time” (Dictionary.cambridge.org, n.d.). Sustainability is synchronic, because it must sustain the present needs, and it is diachronic, because sustainable development must endure (Lipietz, 1997). Sustainability as we know it today was first introduced in 1987 in the “Brundtland Report” (Activesustainability.com, n.d.), a document created by UN countries with the goal of creating an “agenda for change”. This was not the first use of the word “sustainable”, however it was the first use of sustainability as fulfilling “the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Activesustainability.com, n.d.). This definition ties our survival to the planet’s survival, however sustainability does not have to be just related to the environment. In 1944, John Elkington coined the term “triple bottom line”, as a way of saying that sustainability included economic, social and environmental factors (Hosey, 2017). For this paper, the author will focus on the environmental factors relating to sustainability.

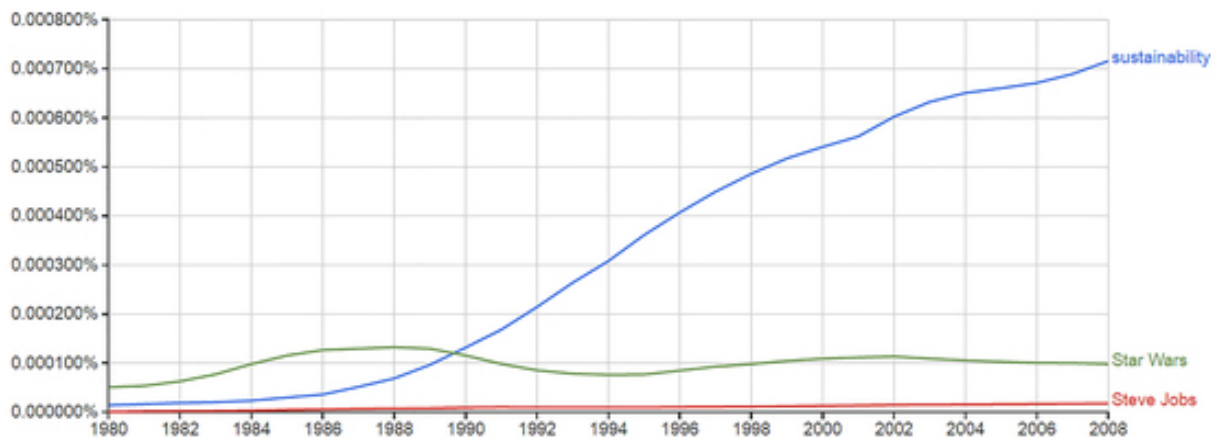


Figure 1: A Look into the Google Searches of Sustainability

Sustainability has not always been a hot topic. However, over the past thirty years, since the Brundtland Report, sustainability has been gaining more and more attention.

From this chart taken from Google Ngram Viewer, one can see that from 1984-1988, a slow growth occurred pertaining to the research of sustainability. After 1990, the number of people searching for sustainability greatly increased. One can see that terms like Star Wars (STAR WARS © 1977 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), and Steve Jobs have stayed steady over these years. However, one must take into account many elements when looking at this chart. First, it only goes on until 2008. Secondly, Steve Jobs died in 2011, which most likely led to an increase in searches after his death that one cannot see. As for Star Wars, one movie was released in 2002, then the next was released in 2015, so searches in between are probably not as important as they would be if one examined the data until today. Still, this chart provides an important visual to the increase of the popularity of the term sustainability versus other very famous terms. Just because people research sustainability, however, does not mean they are being more sustainable. In this next part, the author will examine the recent increase in sustainable terms, market activity, and company activity.

Today, 30% of consumers say that they are concerned about the origin of their product, and 74% say they would pay 5% more for those who are creating the product to be paid fairly (Young, Hwang, McDonald, and Oats, 2010). Unilever released a study that 33% of consumers prefer sustainable brands (Unilever Global Company Website, 2017). This does not stop just with non consumption products, but in the food industry as well. According to the Ethical Consumer Market Report (2017), there has been a 30% increase in vegetarian food products sold in the UK. McDonalds recently released vegetarian and vegan burgers in Sweden, Norway and Finland. Consumer's feel today as if they have the power to change, and to demand what they want. One in five consumers have boycotted a company, after negative press. Only one in four went back to using the brand, and even so they used it less often (Yougov.co.uk, 2017).

This new wave of "sustainability" has had an effect on the consumer, leading to a new types of consumer, for example, the "ethical" consumer. This paper has the goal to explore ethics in consumption, and try to define this "ethical" consumer. Britannica Dictionary describes "ethical consumerism" as a type of political activism "based on the premise that purchasers in markets consume not only goods but also, implicitly, the process used to

produce them" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). However the "ethical" consumer remains a mystery to quite a number of companies, and many doubt its existence. This is explored in more detail in the Literature Review.

2. Topic Importance relating to Companies

Since this rise in “ethical consumption”, companies have started to adapt. However even 10 years ago, companies were not excited about sustainability. In 2009, Harvard Business Review released an article describing how business executives need to stop considering sustainability as a business “obligation”, and how it is the best change for innovation (Nidumolu, Prahalad, and Rangawani, 2009). Companies’ attitudes towards sustainable consumption/production have slowly been changing, either by force or voluntarily.

In 2016, Accenture, an Irish consulting company, and UN Global Impact, took a survey of 1000 CEOs from around the world, and interviewed 75 in depth to understand how sustainability affected their businesses. The goal was to see what barriers prevented CEOs from making their company sustainable, and which ones made it a priority. After Accenture completed this study in 2013, they found that $\frac{1}{3}$ of European CEOs see investing in sustainability as a downspout, a loss of time and money (Berthon, 2013).

Now companies are feeling more pressure to fulfill their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). According to the University of Edinburgh, Corporate Social Responsibility is practiced when a company conducts itself ethically relating to the economy, the environment, and social aspects (The University of Edinburgh, 2019). Accenture redid the study in 2016 and found that 80% of CEO’s believe that demonstrating a commitment to a societal purpose is a differentiator in their industry, and 89% are stating that sustainability has real impact on their industry (United Nations Global Compact, 2019). This shows a great increase in the importance of “sustainability” in these CEOs’ minds in a period of only three years.

The question is, is this change voluntary or forced by these “ethical” consumers? In recent years, companies like Adidas, Apple, Nespresso, and more have been making changes to become more “sustainable”. Adidas sold 1 million shoes with “ocean plastic”. Apple has recently reinforced its recycling plan for old iPhones. Nespresso has created a project to rebuild the coffee community in South Sudan after the war (The Straits Times, 2019). However one could argue that these changes are only coming from companies fearing be-

ing caught up in a scandal about their Corporate Social Responsibility. H&M is an example of one company that was caught in a sustainability scandal in 2017, when they were accused of burning unused clothes. This was also right after they had released their grand "recycling scheme". Since then, the number of stores that H&M has planned to close has doubled to 170, and its sales have grown only by 3%. "H&M is pushing sustainability hard, but the image of the burning clothes will not go away either, as the saying goes there is no smoke without fire" (Farmbrough, 2018). Another example of a sustainability scandal is Volkswagen. Volkswagen intentionally lied and manipulated the emission control of their cars, polluting not only the environment, but those driving their cars. This led to the dismissal of their CEO, Audi's R&D, and Porsche's engine developer (Dans, 2015). The Volkswagen case is more extreme than H&M, because they were breaking the law. However, it shows that companies that are shown to be unsustainable can experience a backlash.

2.1 Sustainability as a trend

So is sustainability just a phase, or is the "ethical" consumer here to stay? The research all points to the same answer: that sustainability is here to stay. From the marketing sector (Johnson, n.d.), to the finance sector (Hinchberger, 2019), companies and consumers alike are acknowledging this trend and its immense growth. The US sustainability market was predicted to grow by 50% in 2014 to \$60 billion (Johnson, n.d.). In the finance sector, \$22.9 trillion assets were managed under "responsible investment strategies", which is an increase of 25% from 2014 (Hinchberger, 2019). So if sustainability is not a phase, and is here to stay, who are these consumers who are pushing this movement? This is the purpose of this paper.

3. The "Ethical" consumer

The term "ethical" consumer has been around since the 1970's, with many articles being written about consumers attitudes towards the practices of businesses and marketers (Lumpkin, Rawwas, and Vitell, 1991). The term "ethical" consumer was first popularized by the Magazine Ethical Consumer, in 1989. This magazines goal is to "make companies more sustainable through customer pressure" (Ethical Consumer 2019). The definition of an "ethical" consumer is quite general and can vary. According to the Guardian, an "ethical" consumer purchases products that were ethically produced and created no harm to the environment (The Guardian, 2001). Ethical Consumer Magazine proposes that the "ethical" consumer is a consumer who "votes" with their money for products and practices that are sustainable.

To define this "ethical" consumer, one must first take apart its components and analyze them separately. So to start this paper, one must search the definition of "ethical" and "consumer". According to the Cambridge dictionary the definition of a "consumer" is one who "buys goods and services for their own use" (Dictionary.cambridge.org, n.d.). According to Cambridge dictionary, the definition of "ethical" as "relating to the beliefs of what is morally right and wrong" (Dictionary.cambridge.org, n.d.). This is where the complexity lies in the definition of the "ethical" consumer: how does one define what is morally right and wrong? One could write a whole other thesis on this topic, so for the sake of clarity, in this paper, a product/service is "ethical" if it is in accordance with "ESG". "ESG" in finance are investments that include ethical, social and governmental factors when investing (Msci.com, n.d). To put it frankly: ESG is "sustainable" investing. This is similar to the "ethical" consumer, who is "voting" with their money to support more "sustainable" products.

3.1 Culture affects on "Ethical Consumers" and Businesses"

Another aspect that influences how one defines what is "morally right and wrong" is culture. "Cultural norms affect perceived ethical situations, perceived alternatives, perceived consequences." (Hunt and Vitell, 1986). In 1993, Vitell, Nwachukwu, and Barnes explored not just if culture affected ethics, but how. Using the seven dimensions of Hofstede, they

explored how professional, industry, organizational, and personal culture can affect a businesses and their perception of ethics. (Barnes, et al., 1993). Hofstede's (1984) seven dimensions include:

- Individualism vs Collectivism
- Power Distance Dimension
- Uncertainty Avoidance
- Masculinity vs Femininity
- Short term vs Long term
- Time Perspective
- Indulgence vs Restraint

Barnes et al focused on the first four dimensions, creating propositions on how these factors could affect a business. For example, in countries with "high power distance" (e.g., France), companies may consider formal industry norms more important than informal norms (Barnes, et al., 1993). This means that superiors in French companies have a large influence on their employees. This is just one of the many examples given in "The Effects of Culture on Ethical Decision-Making: An Application of Hofstede's Typology" (Barnes et al 1993). However none of these propositions have yet to be tested, although Barnes et al recommend that it be tested through a survey.

Barnes et al spoke about businesses and ethics, so what about consumers? Belk, Devinney, and Eckhardt (2005) conducted hour-long in depth interviews with consumers around the world to gain more knowledge about how culture affects consumers. They concluded that "some consumers can bring ethical factors into their choices, but are unlikely to do so without help". The cultural influence was "less than expected". However they also saw that the "better ethical behavior on the part of the business can influence ethical behavior on the part of the customer" (Belk et al. 2005). If one looks at this in relation to the Barnes et al, study above, it may seem that culture has a higher effect on businesses than "ethical" consumers, because in the end, consumers preferred to have a good product at a good price, and were ill informed about the sustainable aspects at hand (Belk et al. 2005). So this begs the question, does the "ethical" consumers even exist? Do their actions even matter?

5. Literature Review

This leads to the main topic, the existence and definition of this mysterious "ethical" consumer. As pointed out by Belk et al. (2005), while there is "little doubt" of the existence of the "ethical" consumer, there is more debate about the possible size, or characteristics of the group. Websites and Associations like EthicalConsumer.com and GetEthical.com push the idea that any consumer can be an "ethical" consumer. These sites are not really "scholarly literature"; however, they are where consumers would be likely to go to find information about "ethical" purchases. On EthicalConsumer.com, the site proposes for the consumers alternatives to "save and live". They also provide a rating system for companies to rate how "ethical" they are. However to see the details of this rating system and how they came to this conclusion, one must subscribe to their magazine. As for a less well known site, GetEthical.com, they too propose that the consumer "make a positive difference to the society and environment" (Lockhart, 2019).

As for some more concrete studies, Auger et al. (2004a, 2004b) conducted a study examining consumer choices with subjects like child labor, and environmental issues, and found the "clusters of responsible" consumers that do exist. Another study was conducted on self-proclaimed "ethical" consumers in the UK (Young, et al. 2010). The purpose of this study was to determine the decision process of this self-proclaimed "ethical" consumer. The study concluded that the price to purchase what the "green consumers" considered "ethical" was very high in time and cost. This was a great barrier, and the study concluded that "green advice", like given on EthicalConsumer.com and GetEthical.com was not enough. Finally, each "green consumer" had their own definition, priorities, and way to "consume green". As seen below in Figure 1, this is the process proposed by Young, et al. (2010).

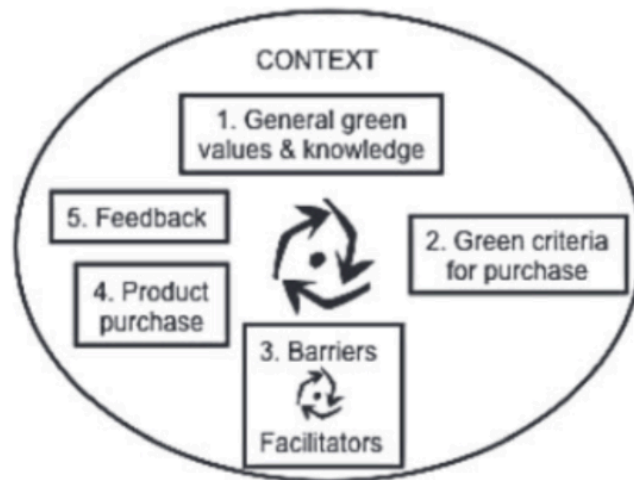


Figure 2: Green Consumer Purchasing Model

Roberts (1996) conducted a study to better define the “ethical” consumer, however he used a sample of only 18 respondents with similar demographics. Auger and Devinney (2005) completed another study, which was a survey relating to “ethical” consumers. However surveys have almost nothing to do with actual behavior. If someone asks if someone wants to buy an “ethical” product, if there is no real barrier of price or time involved, as it is on a survey the consumer is more likely to say yes.

To conclude, these are just a few of the examples of studies that have been completed over the years about “ethical” consumers. There are two central problems when talking about these studies. First, most of them start with the premise that the “ethical” consumer exists. Either they do not cite previous studies confirming the existence, or they use unreliable sources to prove that the “ethical” consumer exists. This unreliable source is the second main problem: surveys were one of the most common ways to interview people about their consumer behaviors relating to sustainability. However, if a consumer is being asked to choose the “ethical”, or what may be seen as the “right” product, without any real barriers (i.e. time, price), they are sure to say yes. Except that this does not show their real behavior in everyday life. This is what makes the “ethical” consumer so difficult to define.

Some have picked up that the "ethical" consumer has not been properly defined. Through a decade of research, and three large studies, the authors Auger et al. explored if the "ethical" consumer existed, the attitude-behavior gap, and took culture into account. This became the book *The Myth of the Ethical Consumer* (Auger, et al. 2005). This book came to the conclusion that the "ideal" "ethical" consumer cannot exist, because it would mean living a life without tradeoffs, and in life there are always tradeoffs. Throughout this paper, the author will be using this book as a guide to describe the past and future of the "ethical" consumer.

Other sources, do not doubt (or do not care about) the existence of the "ethical" consumer. George Monbiot of *The Guardian* says that "Ethical shopping is just another way of showing how rich you are" (2007). He states that if we were swapping damaging goods for less damaging ones, then it might work. However what is happening is that "ethical" consumers are simply creating another market for "less" damaging products that is not "hindering the growth of the first". In this case, the idea of the "ethical" consumer" existing as a political statement of "changing the world with your wallet" cannot exist. This concept is the core of an article written by Michael Hobbs (n.d).

So, does the "ethical" consumer exist? The answer is yes and no. There are those who purchase "responsible" products, but most consumers are inconsistent. The real problem is not if the "ethical" consumer exists or not, but that even if everyone were an "ethical" consumer, it is not the change we need. In this paper, the author will discuss the political change needed, the ideal "ethical" consumer, if it is possible to have one, and where we as a world will need to go in the future to survive.

6. Introduction to Political Economy

As previously mentioned the goal of the “ethical” consumer is to reject products that are detrimental socially, economically, and environmentally. In this chapter, the author will discuss the role that the government might have in “sustainable” development. After completing a basic introduction about political ecology, the author will explore

- Those who believe that the government has a role, and how it should act
- Those who believe that the government does not have any role and should not interfere

Political economy, according to Cambridge Dictionary, is the study of the economy and its connection to the political system (Dictionary.cambridge.org, n.d.). The term “Political Economy” is quite broad. In this paper, the author will be focusing more on “Political/Scientific Ecology”, or the relation of a species, the environment, and the activities (Lipietz, 1997). The only species on the planet to fall under the definition of “Political Ecology” (or Political Economy for that matter), are humans. Species can be divided into two groups:

- Social
- Political

Social groups are species that divide work. Some examples of this are beavers creating dams, bees creating honey, and ants working together to carry food etc. Any one of these animals alone would not be able to survive, so they must work together. Humans are programmed to not be alone, and if each human only worked for himself, the world we live in today would not exist. The second element is political, meaning that there is a community, living together. An example of this could be wolves, who have a pack and a hierarchical organization. Humans, however, are the only species to combine these two elements. Humans divide work, and create organization in communities, which makes us unique (Lipietz, 1997).

“We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all”. This was stated by Pericles, a influ-

ential leader in Athens, Greece, who lived from 495-429 BC (Models of Democracy 2006). Lipietz retakes this statement in his article, "Sustainability: History and Horizons" (1997), to explain that if humans do not take care of the relationship with a species, the environment, and the activities, then all actions will be unsustainable. Not only is it unsustainable, but it is actually detrimental. However, Lipietz argues, that "no one is obliged to take on sustainability" (1997). Since sustainability, and ethics, as spoken about previously, are subjective, there is no way to obligate people into being sustainable, since their definition of sustainability could be different from others.

The example used in this article (Lipietz, 1997) is that of the Christian rule "thou shalt not kill". In the light of sustainable development, this would turn into "thou shalt not kill today, or do anything to risk the life of someone several generations later, nor at the end of the world". One can see that a highly complex situation arises. If one were to "do unto others as you would have done unto you" but relating to "progress", then one would have to think about what others would want us to do unto them in the future. This brings up an impossible situation in a social and political aspect. As Lipietz mentions, "What would the future generations not have me do to them today?" One does not even know what might be considered a "better" life in the future.

However, humans seem to have some basic values that we could apply to create a better sustainable world socially and politically.

- Autonomy
- Solidarity
- Responsibility

First, autonomy, the belief that each person should have the right to make his own choices about his own life. The second, solidarity, is that no person must be left behind in the search for sustainability. Finally, responsibility, "what is good to us today, must be good to us tomorrow". These values through political economy, could be the key to the challenges that humans will face in the future (Lipietz, 1997). However, there are some conflicts between these values. First, autonomy and solidarity, there is a conflict of balancing individualism, freedom, and creating a community in which no one is left behind. Second, if each

person is individual, how does one measure the responsibility of each person and the effects of their actions on others.

7. The Role of the Government in Sustainability

In this chapter, the author will explore the possible ways that institutions could intervene to contribute to sustainability. The author will answer questions like:

- What changes are being made currently?
- Will sustainability ever be more important than profit?

The main source for this chapter was the very detailed book *The Political Economy of the Environment* by Simon Dietz, Jonathan Michie, and Christine Oughton (2001) and Milton Friedman's book *Capitalism and Freedom* (2002).

7.1 The Main Problem

Environmental policy is challenging for economics, because most of the main factors have no market prices, or many failures (Dietz et al, 2001). The goal of most environmental policy is to change consumer behavior. The main theory about consumer behavior, is that consumers are fully rational and consistently behave to maximize their opportunities. This is called neoclassicism or "rational-man" economics. While this is a good tool for analysis, it is unrealistic for government policy, as the theory is based on the assumption that consumers are consistent, and in reality, consumers are not.

So if consumers are not "rational" or "constantly maximizing their opportunities", what are they? Are they "ethical" consumers? And how can the government create policies that will be functional?

7.2 Policies and Sustainability

Governments have been for a while now trying to affect firms through policies, to make them more sustainable. (Dietz et al, 2001). However if they use mainstream economics models, it is not always very efficient. Not all policies, seemingly good on paper, will work out in the real world. Let's take the example of the QWERTY keyboard (Dietz et al, 2001).

The QWERTY keyboard was invented to slow fast typewriters down, since fast typing jammed machines (Davis, 1985). However, soon after, employees got used to using type-touch QWERTY system. This meant that any company that wanted to either switch to or from a QWERTY system, would have to include the cost of either retraining or re hiring new employees.

Companies may be facing similar market constraints or problems, but they will not always react in the same way. In the QWERTY example, there will be some companies that (i) adapt the new technology or (ii) revert to the old technology. Not knowing in advance how the firms will react obviously makes policy making more difficult.

There are some, however who are against the government's intervention in social responsibility. For Friedman, "The use of political channels, while inevitable, tends to strain the social cohesion essential for a stable society" (Friedman, 1992: 23). "Such legislation clearly involves interference with the freedom of individuals to enter into voluntary contracts with one another" (Friedman, 1992: 111). Laws try to help, but according to Friedman, impeach individual liberties. Possible policies may improve environmental impact, but may restrict possible opportunities that the companies could have. For Friedman, this is a huge restriction in the free-market and on individual rights.

Friedman is also against the belief that institutions have a "social responsibility", for him institutions are not "people/individuals" therefore do not have a responsible conscience. For him, "this view shows a fundamental misconception of the character and nature of a free economy (Friedman, 1992: 133). Claiming that businesses have a "social" responsibility is one more step towards socialism. This is because Friedman believes that every man should have the power of his own money, and that if a manager is spending other people's money on social projects unrelated to profit, he is misusing their money (Friedman, 1970). This "involves the acceptance of the socialist view that political mechanisms, not market mechanisms, are the appropriate way to determine the allocation of scarce resources to alternative uses" (Friedman, 1970). If the manager uses his own money, Friedman sees no objection. However, politics should not define how money is spent in a free market. His main argument for this is because "one man's good is another's evil" (Friedman, 1970). As

previously mentioned, there is no way to define “right” and “wrong”, and this can vary depending on culture, or other factors. For Friedman “there is one and only one social responsibility of business--to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud” (Friedman, 1970). The role of the government is only to enforce the “rules of the game”, not to influence it.

7.3 Is Profitability All We Care About Anymore?

In Chapter 1, the author examined if companies hesitated relating to making their businesses more “sustainable”, because of the change that followed. It used to be “common knowledge” that imposing sustainable policies on companies would definitely increase costs, reducing profits. For example, if a company wants to make its supply chain more sustainable, it may have to pay workers fair pay, or source its materials from a different supplier. In the mind of a manager, these changes may be seen as expensive. However “the chief obstacle with which they have to contend is when they want gradually to increase their production, does not lie in the cost of production...but in the difficulty of selling the larger output of goods” (Dietz et al, 2001: 46). The main problem is not the price margin, but the ability to sell the goods. This goes along with the “Porter Theory” created, in 1995, by Porter and van der Linde. The Porter theory is that by imposing sustainable policies that encourage innovation, they would encourage competitiveness (Dietz et al, 2001). Goldstein completed a study that showed that environmentally and profit increasing can go “hand in hand” (Goldstein, 2002).

Nevertheless, this is still not “common knowledge”. An example of this is government’s reluctance to implement constraints relating to global warming. Governments believe that some firms may not be able to afford the restrictions, or that it will reduce innovation. “The view that the control of externalities always implies a trade-off between environmental protection and profitability” has been challenged by theories like the Porter Theory (Dietz et al, 2001).

While sustainability can increase profitability, will companies ever prefer long-term sustainability to profits? According to Michie and Oughton (contributors to *The Political Economy of the Environment*), “there is now substantial body of empirical evidence from behavioral and experimental economics that shows that managers do not necessarily operate as predicted by the profit-maximizing model of instrumental rationality” (Dietz et al, 2001: 45). This means that managers do not only consider profit when measuring the success of their companies. So who is to blame for the lack of sustainability within companies? Consumers? Governments? Companies? This is unclear, however policies based on the assumption that sustainable measures increase costs will be based on false premises.

7.4 How to Create Efficient Policies for the Consumer (Behavioral Economics)

The author has now examined the relationship between the government and sustainable policies. Nevertheless, the goal of an efficient policy is not only to change the organization’s actions to become more sustainable, but those of the consumer as well (Dietz et al, 2001: 74). In Chapter four of *The Political Economy of the Environment* (Dietz, et al. 2001), with contributions from Emma Darnay and Hiten Shah, they outlined seven principles that policy makers need to understand to create a policy to make consumers more environmentally friendly. After analyzing these seven qualities, the author will continue into the next part by analyzing the ‘Ideal Ethical Consumer’. These seven qualities are:

- Other people’s behavior matters
- Habits are important
- People are motivated to ‘do the right thing’
- People’s self-expectations influence how they behave
- People are loss-averse
- People are bad at computation
- People need to feel involved and effective to make a change

7.4.a Other People’s Behavior Matters

From our infancy, our surroundings teach us how to dress, act and speak. This “social learning” is how humans subconsciously learn how to behave by observing others (Dietz et al, 2001). The previously explained ‘rational-man’ theory assumes that consumers define

their wants independently, and that they understand all the alternatives. In the short-term, this theory can work, however not in the long-term. Understanding long-term consumer preferences requires an understanding of their social learning (Dietz et al, 2001). Social “copying” can also influence consumer behavior. An example used in the book is, if someone honks at me when I pull out at a junction, at the next junction one might wait until the car passes. Consumers copy and learn from other people’s behavior.

Relating to governmental policies, this means the need to focus on medium-longer term policies. An example of a short-term immediate effect policy, is a speeding ticket. While this puts into effect an immediate punishment, if the person realizes that the chances of being caught for speeding are low, they will continue to speed (Dietz et al, 2001). A medium-long-term policy is a policy that would change the social norm. An example of this succeeding is in the US through banning public smoking (Dietz et al, 2001). This created a social norm that smoking was “private” and “antisocial”.

7.4.b Habits are Important

“The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken” (Johnson, 2005). Daily routines quickly become ingrained, and can be difficult to break. For the ‘rational-man’ some choices ‘out of habit’ may not be possible as the ‘rational man’ is supposed weigh the utility of all the choices (Dietz et al, 2001). However, sometimes, in the real world, habits may outweigh the utility of something. Imagine getting a coffee at the same coffee shop every morning, suddenly there is a new coffee shop that opens up. A ‘rational-man’ would analyze every coffee/size/price to find the most utility, but most would stay in their comfort zone at their habitual coffee shop.

It can be difficult to change people’s habits to become more sustainable. A good solution is for the government to simply reinforce good habits. An example of this is recycling. How we throw things away can become a habit, and if there are more cues like “colored bins”, or “visible recycling facilities”, it could make it easier for consumers to make recycling a habit.

7.4.c People are Motivated to ‘Do the Right Thing’

"In cases where we are naturally motivated to 'do the right thing' we feel bad and have a guilty conscience when we fail' (Dietz et al, 2001: 81). When people do the "wrong" thing in a situation, they might feel that they need a way to make it right. In some cases, creating a fine for a "wrong" action, can allow the person to justify their acts. For example, if someone goes over the speed limit, they might pay a fine and consider that they have "payed their debts to society" so it is ok they went over the limit. A 'rational man' would only consider the financial costs and benefits. So, he would avoid any type of fine. Consumers are not often like the rational man, because paying a fine can reduce their guilt of the "wrong action committed".

For example, in a child day care, the workers started fining the parents if they came late to pick up their kids, thinking that this would decrease the number of late parents. They found that even more parents came late, because the fine made them feel like they had "paid" to come late, and this reduced their guilt (Dietz et al, 2001).

Policy makers should consider "how people perceive the behavior they are trying to change" (Dietz et al, 2001). If the behavior is normally considered "shameful", putting fines into place may be counterproductive, as paying the fine might reduce the person's guilt.

7.4.d People's Self-Expectations Influence How They Behave

People do not like when people's opinions of how they are, do not correspond with their values or expectations of themselves (Dietz et al, 2001). The more public the commitment, the more that the person will change their behavior to match the commitment, even if there are less benefits. A 'rational-man' would not pay attention to self-regard or commitment, as he would only analyze the utility of the choices. Real-life consumers do not react like this. In the US, when voters were asked one day before the election if they were going to vote, they all said yes, and this appeared to increase the chances of them voting by 41% (Greenwald et al. 1987).

Policy makers should take into consideration if it would have an impact to have consumers make a public commitment. Some examples of this could be encouraging written commitments, inviting members to meetings, and encouraging smaller businesses first to make commitments.

7.4.e People are Loss-Averse

People would rather take no risk to win, and high risk to not lose (Dietz et al, 2001: 86). The 'rational-man' would say that people are equally loss adverse as they are to winning. The example is that the 'rational man' would take as much risk to win or lose 100\$. However, this is untrue for the consumer.

For policy makers, this means that they must analyze the 'willingness-to-pay' or 'willingness-to-accept'. If people have the 'right' to that object then policy makers should look at 'willingness-to-accept'. However if the policy makers are looking at an improvement, they should look at 'willingness-to-pay'. Since it is hard to create a unanimous 'willingness-to-accept', policy makers should compare the risk of fines, etc compared to rewards.

7.4.f People are Bad at Computation

People are generally bad at computation and estimating probabilities (Dietz et al, 2001: 88). This is one of the reasons that the consumer does not conform to the 'rational-man', as the 'rational-man' would take the time to calculate every possibility and utility, and a normal consumer would not.

A simple example is this:

'A bat and a ball costs \$1.10 in total. The bat costs \$1 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?'

Most people would answer 10 cents, this is incorrect. If the ball costs 10 cents, then the bat (that costs 1\$ more) would cost \$1.10 and the total would be \$1.20.

Policy makers should make sure that both the punishments and rewards are salient to the consumer. They should remember that immediate losses overrun long term rewards. An

example of a good example is The Royal Mail. They offered their employees that took no sick days the entree in a lottery to win a car or a holiday (Kwan Yuk and Gilies, 2005).

7.4.g People Need to Feel Involved and Effective to Make a Change

Finally, people need to feel like they are making a difference to make a change (Dietz et al, 2001: 91). People do not like feeling helpless or out of control. The 'rational-man' needs as much information and as many choices as possible to make the best decision, but consumer behavior shows that this is not the case. People feel overwhelmed by too much information and too many choices. Policy makers should try to target certain consumers with certain information that is relevant to them. Consumers do not always want more choice, they may want the solution to be presented to them. However, it is even more efficient if the consumer is encouraged to create a solution with an expert.

Taking these elements into consideration assures that the policy will not be a waste of time and money, and make it a long term effective solution. Obviously, consumers are at the heart of consumption, and to influence them to make a change can be very important. In this next chapter, the author will examine who they are, what motivates their purchases, as to better influence this mysterious "ethical" consumer.

Now that the author has discussed the role (existent or not) of the government in sustainability, and how to create effective sustainable policies for consumers, the author will go more into detail of the identity of this consumer. Understanding the identity of the "ethical" consumer is crucial to understanding the sustainability trend. However, before diving into the identity of the "ethical" consumer, one must ask the question: Does the "ethical" consumer exist?

8. The Existence of the "Ethical" Consumer

"What a man believes upon grossly insufficient evidence is an index into his desires- desires of which he himself is often unconscious. If a man is offered a fact which goes against his instincts, he will scrutinize it closely, and unless the evidence is overwhelming, he will refuse to believe it. If, on the other hand, he is offered something which affords a reason for acting in accordance to his instincts, he will accept it even on the slightest evidence. The origin of myths is explained in this way." Bertrand Russell (2005).

As previously mentioned in the introduction, there are some authors that have decided to contest the originally generally accepted existence of the "ethical" consumer. Devinney, Auger, and Eckhardt (1997) decided to answer the question "Do consumers even care?". This took them through 10+ years of research that led them to question even the existence of the "ethical" consumer. The existence of the "ethical" consumer had not been studied as much as their "preferences", "behavior" or how to market to them. "The difficulty in understanding the complexity of ethical consumerism resides in the failure to grasp more clearly and consistently what is it that motivates individuals socio-politically..." and that "socio-political environment embodied by notions of the "ethical" consumer is unclear and under-researched" (Cotte, 2009). There is also an "oversimplification" (Auger et al, 2005: 2) of the "ethical" consumer, as previously examined, there are many elements to an "ethical" consumer. Not only is the definition of "ethical" variable per person, but "sustainability" can refer to many things like environment, labor laws, and more.

It is common to say that the proof that "ethical" consumer exist is the rise is "sustainable"/"fair trade"/"organic" products, that are provided by companies. While it is true that there has been a rise in the purchasing of these types of products, (30% in vegetarian products in the UK According to the Ethical Consumer Market Report (Denyer, 2017), one cannot always link this to a rise in sustainability. According to The Myth of the Ethical Consumer, when large corporations start to provide "fair trade" products, for example, it does "not imply anything about consumer desires, because the corporation is making the choice and not the individual" (Auger et al, 2005: 3). It is too simple, to argue that

the "ethical" consumer exists, because people are "good-doers", when it is really based on consumer behavior (Auger et al, 2005: 4).

After conducting the research, the authors of *The Myth of the Ethical Consumer*, came to the conclusion that the "ethical" consumer is a myth. Their research will be explained further, however it is important to understand what a myth is. A myth is a "tale believed as true, usually sacred,.... With extra-human, inhuman, or heroic characters" (Bascom, 1965). The "ethical" consumer could be compared to this "extra-human character", as expecting a consumer to conduct themselves "ethically" all the time every day is a pretty unattainable task (Auger et al, 2005: 4). The "ethical" consumer is an idealized projection that the regular consumer may look up to as a role model, but may never may achieve.

There are five arguments where the authors of *The Myth of the Ethical Consumer* clearly define their position about what are the aspects of an "ethical" consumer. These arguments are not with the goal to destroy the myth, but to "bring science to bear on those parts of the myth that can be considered representative of a truth" (Auger et al, 2005: 9). For this thesis, these five arguments will allow as the backbone for explaining "ethical" consumer behavior, and explaining who is the "ethical" consumer if they do not exist.

First, *The Myth of the Ethical Consumer* is not claiming that values do not play a role in their purchases. However, for the classic "ethical" consumer, values are the primary concern. In real life consumer behavior, values/ethics are just one of many elements. This will be explained in further detail when explaining what values ethical consumer take into consideration, and their behavior gap.

Secondly, they are not claiming that consumers are unaffected by the context they are in. Certain consumers may be affected by their context more severely than others, and the question is more about how intensely this affects them, and if it defines them as a consumer. Auger et al (2005), give an of this example on page 7. A experiment called the Stanford Prison Experiment was conducted. Randomly selected individuals who screened as "normal" on physiological tests were randomly assigned the roles of "guards" or "prisoners". After some time, all but 10% of the participants started to react "in accordance"

with their role. Guards were more disciplinary, abusing prisoners physiologically as well. Prisoners rebelled violently and non violently. These individuals were clearly affected by the context they were put in, and it was impossible to determine who would react in what way (Zimbardo, 2007).

Third, they do believe that consumers can and do act “ethically” and be sensitive to “ethical” products. However, according to the *The Myth of the Ethical Consumer*, their efforts are not founded in academic research on ethical consumerism. The consumer’s actions are more rooted in specific product choices, but this does not translate into the rest of their values. For example, if someone always purchases “fair trade” products, this does not mean that they will always purchase other “sustainable” products, which might be relating to child labor or other.

Fourth, as previously shown earlier, culture has little to no effect. It is commonly assumed that Europeans are more socially aware (Auger et al, 2005: 8), however this is untrue. People tend to behave similarly, culture not affecting their actions. Culture tends to affect how they understand their actions, but not the specific actions they take.

Finally, there are two main problems with previous research of the “ethical” consumer. It is either too general or too specific. The study could be too general, which makes it inaccurate as the context plays a role in consumer behavior, or it could be too specific, which would make it inaccurate to create a general assumption with the results.

To conclude, while *The Myth of the Ethical Consumer* rejects the existence of this “unrealistic” ethical consumer, they do not reject the existence of values, culture, and wanting to be more “green”. In the next chapter, the author will explore the types of consumers, and sustainable consumers that exist, in so explaining more in detail the identity of this “ethical” consumer.

9. Who is the "Ethical" Consumer?

Before defining who the "ethical" consumer is, one must define the general types of consumers. Even though it is difficult to define the different types of consumers, The Myth of the Ethical Consumer authors have created four archetypes of consumer behavior that are based on the five previously mentioned assumptions.

9.1 The Archetypes of the Consumer

First, there is the consumer as a rational informed processor. This theory is similar to the previously discussed theory of the "rational-man" (Dietz et al, 2001). The consumer is in "search of those products and services that best meet his/her needs at the price s/he is willing to pay" (Auger et al, 2010). One might say that the consumer is searching the highest utility. However, in Auger et al's (2005) the theory of the rational informed processor, the consumer is constrained by the market and their own values. This is unlike the "rational-man", who would be able to explore every possibility existing and compare.

Second, a consumer as a quasi-rational reactive purchaser exists. This is very similar to the rational informed processor, however the consumer is more affected by their moods, or other stimuli of which they may not be aware. In this situation, a company would not only look at the wants, and needs of the consumer, but also how it affects the purchasing environment. An experiment is to smell of fresh bread when one goes to a supermarket, while the supermarket is still seeking to fulfill the wants and needs of the consumer (to obtain food), they are affecting the environment to push the consumer towards a certain product.

Third, there are consumers who are quasi-rational co-producers of value. This considers consumers as not only purchasers, but as creating value on the side through presenting a lifestyle. Companies must be able to not only react to the wants and needs of the consumers, but react to the consumers' actions. An example of this is the influencer movement. An influencer is someone who has "influence", usually on online platforms. Influencers can be well known, because of the type of life that they try to create. Companies'

products are not necessarily completing the wants and needs of the influencers, but they are allowing them to create that lifestyle.

Finally, the consumer could be an actor for the adaptive unconscious. This theory is that the consumer makes their decisions, unknowingly, based on their unconscious. This unconsciousness is built up over a long period of time (Fodor, 1983). This means that consumers' actions are based on "feelings" and "instincts". The companies must be able to create then an emotional reaction with the consumer (Auger et al, 2010).

These four consumer types have direct implications for the "ethical" consumer. If the "ethical" consumer is either a rational informed processor or a quasi-rational reactive purchaser, this means that their actions are meaningful and intentional. Relating to an "ethical" consumer, this could mean that the consumer is intentionally choosing the "ethical" product, and that this is in their wants or needs. However, if the consumer falls into one of the final categories, the consumers are creating their decisions of less "rational" values. Especially the actor for the adaptive unconscious, these consumers do not have a "voice" as they are basing their actions on no reason (Auger et al, 2010).

To conclude, these types of consumer archetypes are difficult to analyze and apply, as it is impossible to read into the mind of the consumer. However the "rational" archetypes are easier to analyze as one can walk the interviewer through their logic, they may nevertheless be unaware of outside bias. The "non rational" consumers, would have to rely more on physiological responses, and emotions.

9.2 The Archetypes of the Ethical Consumer

Now that the archetypes of the consumer have been presented, to understand the identity of the "ethical", the archetypes of an "ethical" consumer must be presented (Lumpkin, et al, 1991). Forsyth (1980) has created four ethical "types":

- Situationists
- Absolutists
- Subjectivists

- Exceptionists

First, there are the "situationists". Situationists are those who "reject moral rules while asking if their actions yield the best possible outcome". These individuals would even use deception if it was the best possible outcome.

Second, there are "absolutists". Absolutists believe that their actions are only moral if it "leads to a positive outcome". This means that they are not searching the best outcome, but the most positive one. It is difficult to create an example with situationists and absolutists, because one can not always know what the "best" possible outcome is for the consumer, or the "most positive" outcome would be for the consumer. This is why the next type of "ethical" consumer was created.

Third, subjectivists base their moral values on what they think is right and wrong and their "feelings". They do not take into account the values of others, and think for themselves. In ethical consumption, this is the category most consumers might fall into. As previously mentioned, ethicals differ per consumers, so when purchasing a product subjectivists would take into account their own personal morals. For example, a consumer might consider fair trade more important than buying organic products, so they would always chose the fair trade product.

Finally, exceptionalists believe in morals, but they believe that there are always exceptions so it is not obligated to follow them all the time. An example of this is in ethical consumption is a consumer that does their best to be "ethical", and sees it as important, but can find a way to excuse themselves. If an exceptionalism is faced with the choice of buying a more expensive sustainable product or less expensive non sustainable product, they might excuse themselves from purchasing the more expensive sustainable product.

10. The Values of the “Ethical” Consumer

As previously defined, an “ethical” consumer, is a consumer that does not only purchase the product, but the process behind them (Britannica, 2019). This is usually relating to problematics like the environment, human and animal rights, or personal health. However, consumers are more complicated than just basing their purchases on one criterion. Consumer behavior can be difficult to understand, and irregular. In this chapter the author would like to analyze the core values of an “ethical” consumer, to understand better their behavior, then the author will take a case study of over 120 interviews to conclude.

10.1 Diving Deeper into the Root of (“Ethical”) Consumer’s Values

In *An Exploration of Values in Ethical Consumer Decision Making* (Shaw et al, 2005), there were three types of studies completed: a focus group, a questionnaire, and in depth interviews. These studies were completed with the goal of understanding consumer values when grocery shopping. Grocery shopping is a huge opportunity for “ethical” products, because food products envelope the three main problems faced by “ethical” consumers; animal rights, the environment, and health. In this section, the author will analyze the top three most important, and the top three least important.

10.1.a Important Values

The top three values were equality (97%), health (91% and protecting the environment (91%) (Shaw et al, 2005). The first value was equality, which is based on a universalism value type, which includes justice, equality, and care for the weak. In “ethical” consumerism, this is relating to work environments, fair wages, and fair trade. This “exploitation” has become more and more important to consumers, because of high media coverage. Fair trade is more appealing to these consumers, because they see that as the producers not getting “ripped off” (Shaw et al, 2005). Multinational powers are mostly negatively seen by consumers, the negative influence of capitalism was also dominant.

The second value was health, which includes physical and mental health. Consumers were shown to try to take care of their body, but also “ethical” aspects came into play. Elements like animal welfare, organic, and non-modified foods are seen as more healthy. These types of food are said to “taste better and are healthier for you”.

The third value is protecting the environment. Consumers expressed the importance of protecting the environment for future generations. This included not only the process of how the food was prepared, but also the influence of the packaging. This shows a want for “ethical” consumers to purchase products that are good for the environment, however this does not promise that they will actually purchase these products.

10.1.b Unimportant values

The first value that consumers did not see as important is power. Power in this case would be exerting control, or superiority based on their choice of products in the grocery store. These values are in contrast with the previously mentioned important values of equality and protecting the environment. A second unimportant value is tradition. In *An Exploration of Values in Ethical Consumer Decision Making* (Shaw et al, 2005), the definition of tradition is explained through Schwartz (1992: 10) as ‘respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one’s culture or religion imposes on the individual’. Shaw et al explain that ‘tradition’ can be seen as less important, because of the decrease of ‘traditional’ religion in the first place in society. Consumers may be influenced more by society’s trends, than tradition.

10.1.c Conclusion

In examining the “ethical” consumer’s values, one can see that their base values and motivations fit into the “green” definition of an “ethical” consumer. However, now the author will examine how these values are put into physical practice through the studies done in *The Myth of the Ethical Consumer* (2010). Finally, the author will examine if these previously mentioned values are the same when the consumer is actually making a decision vs responding in an interview or survey.

10.2 Case Study: The Myth of the Ethical Consumer

The study was completed in three parts and used DCE to complete the study. DCE is discrete choice experimentation. DCE "allows for the modeling of the decision process of an individual in a particular context via the comparison of trade-offs between the discrete components underlying the choice" (Auger et al, 2010: 73). DCE is used to extract the maximum information about the decision making process with a minimum of influence and choices. The goal of this study was to discover "whether or not there exists a group of individuals - socially responsible consumers - who will be willing to purchase products with specific social features... when face with a price for doing so" (Auger et al, 2010: 73).

As mentioned, the study was completed in three parts, the first part individuals were divided into 50:50 groups and offered materials relating to either athletic shoes or bath soaps. The consumers were asked about the last purchases that they made for these purchases to study product recall. The second stage was that participants received a fake newspaper article that included information about both the functional and social features of the product. Not every participant received the same amount of information, there were eight different options.

Finally, the participants were asked if they would either "consider" or "purchase" whichever of the products based on the information they received.

- "Considering" meaning that "the athletic shoes described were attractive enough for the consumer to consider them in their list of choices" (Auger et al, 2010: 75).
- "Purchasing" showed that the consumer would "buy the athletic shoes instead of or in addition to their current athletic shoes the next time they purchased athletic shoes" (Auger et al, 2010: 75)

The first question that was posed by Auger et al (2010), is "Do social features even have an effect on the consumer? If the answer is no, and the values stated in the previous section do not impact their actual decision making, and all other questions relating to CSR become irrelevant. Through their studies, they concluded that social features can have some effect on some consumers, but that price had the most effect. They also concluded

that there is no lack of information, and that adding information about the sustainability of the product does not influence the consumer.

The second sub-question that the researchers asked themselves was, "Will the consumer sacrifice functionality? This means, will a consumer sacrifice the functionality of a product for the social aspect? In previous chapters, the author has shown that consumers are complex, and not as simple as the 'rational-man' theory would like to believe. Through the DCE method, there is some chance that the the importance of one individual feature may be overstated (Auger et al, 2010). It is important to compare how consumers will choose products based on social features, if the product meets the needs of consumer. This is because if individuals are forced to make a choice of either (A) good functionality, bad ethics or (B) bad functionality, good ethics, they will almost always (75%) chose (A) good functionality and bad ethics.

After comparing the relationship between functionality and social aspects of a products, Auger et al completed a second study relating price and other characteristics of the product with social aspects. They completed a study similar to the first, except they changed soap for AA batteries. They also compared more in detail product attributes (price, brand, material, weight, etc). Their results revealed two main conclusions.

Their conclusion is that all social attributes do not have an equal effect on the consumer. Some consumers are more worried about child labor than environmental causes for example. If a company focuses too generally on multiple social subject, this could be poorly seen by the consumers. Secondly, as previously mentioned functionality plays a huge role in the decision making of the consumer, along with price and brand. The social aspect usually does not have more importance.

So if the social characteristic of a product has less effect on the consumer than functionality, price and brand, should there be a separate segment for "ethical" products? The main problem with segments that would be full of "social" products - in this case "social" athletic shoes or "social" batteries is that, as mentioned, consumers do not worry about the same causes. One consumer may be very passionate about child labor, and so they will purchase

"social" athletic shoes, however they may not care for the environment so they will buy normal batteries. This inconsistency makes it difficult for companies to predict the impact of their product. It also raises the question, if ethical consumers are so inconsistent (buying "green" in one category but not another) are their efforts helping their cause?

11. The Inconsistency of the "Ethical" Consumer: Are their efforts valuable?

In this chapter, the author will explore how the values of the "ethical" consumer are put into play, and will present research showing the efficiency of the changing of lifestyles of the "ethical" consumer. For this, the author will analyze the study done by Csutora (2012).

11.1 Behavioral Gap

Predicting how a consumer will act in a real store can be a difficult feat. In fact, most pessimism about the "ethical" consumer, is based on the proof of their inconsistency (Irwin, 2015). Companies see consumers as having one value base, and acting in a rational manner. As shown in previous chapters, consumers are "neither fully rational nor completely selfish, and that their tastes are anything but stable." (Irwin, 2015). This can cause a problem in testing a product, as consumer tend to not act the way that they say that they will. According to Jain (2012), one must confirm their hypothesis through asking them, but prove it through testing them. This behavioral gap makes it extremely difficult to analyze any type of consumer behavior. Auger, Devinney, and Eckhardt (2010) explore the ways methodology increases the perceived behavioral gap in four ways.

The first methodology issue that increases the perceived measure of behavior gap is incentive compatibility. Incentive compatibility is how much the form of the study forces participants to reveal their "true" answer. With studies in simple formats, like surveys, it is common that participants will change their answers to what they think is the "correct" answer. The participant could do this for many reason; to appear a better person, conform to social norms, or not have any consequences. This is especially crucial to CRM and "ethical" products, because people have a strong pressure to appear "good" or "green". An example of this is Durex's yearly survey relating to the number of sexual partners. Durex, a preservative company, presents the difference between male number of partners (13), and female (7). However, Auger et al (2010) point out that outside homosexual activity, it is impossible for the total number of partners had by females and male be different. There could be many reasons why these participants lied about their true results; they could feel

guilty about their number, trying to feel more productive, or do not remember the true number. However this fatal methodological error ruins the results presented by Durex.

The second issue is a comparability problem. When posing simple questions, like in surveys, it is difficult to measure the results. For example, if a consumer is asked how often they buy organic products with the choices "sometimes", "never" or "very often", how can one measure the response? Is buying organic 4x a week "very often" or just "sometimes"? It is impossible to know into the mind of the participant, unless these elements are specified. Another problem is with the definition of words. Auger et al gives the example of a "boycott". Is it a "boycott" when you only stop buying the product for a while, or never buy it again? Does a "boycott" have to be related to a social/political problem, or can it be based on poor customer service for example? The lack of a common understanding of this word makes questions like "have you ever boycotted a product before?" difficult to reply to through simple question surveys.

The third issue is inferences of importance. This was touched on a little bit by the author earlier, it is when the participant is able to infer through the questions of the survey, what might be the best or most acceptable answer (Schwarz, 1999). People tend to be well informed about certain "ethical" topics, and would probably be able to infer which answer is the "right" one in a survey relating to "ethical" products.

Finally, the fourth issue is the abstract nature of the context in which the research is being conducted. Auger and al take for example a study done in Thailand during the AIDS epidemic. The survey showed that Thai men knew and understood the importance of being safe, however, other studies showed that AIDS was on the rise. It was discovered the Thai men did not mention that they purchase alcohol before going to brothels etc, which impaired their judgement, and led to unsafe sex (Belk, Ostergaard, and Groves, 1998). This context was not mentioned during the survey, which affected the responses.

These four methodology issues mentioned above show that one must "use caution when addressing socially laden issues, build methodological approach that recognize the link between theory and method and interrogate the phenomena of interest with different lens-

es" (Auger et al, 2010). If one does not do this, then it is impossible to correctly measure the consumer behavior, and the behavior gap will seem to increase. Now that the author has analyzed the constraints inflicted by the methodology, the author will analyze the consumers' impact.

11.2 Impact Gap

Once consumers do decided to conduct themselves in a more "ethical" manner, what is the impact? This is extremely important as if "ethical" consumer's actions have a gap between the intention and the impact, one could argue that their actions are pointless. An example of this is the fact that the rate of recycled post waste by recycling companies is always way lower than that in consumer surveys. Either, the consumer is being misleading about how much they recycle, as mentioned above (the behavior gap), or there is an impact gap. This means that the recycled material is not reaching the recycle plant (Csutora, 2012). Sometimes the impact gap can be caused by misinformation, or trends within the sustainable world. An example of this is vegetarianism, consumers tend to become vegetarian for (i) the animals, (ii) the planet, or (iii) their health. However, even if the consumer reduces emissions through not eating meat etc, they could be counterbalancing their own efforts through buying high impact exotic fruit, hummus, etc (Csutora, 2012).

11.3 B-I-G (Behavioral Impact Gap)

This brings one to question the efficiency of the "ethical" consumer. Are their actions even making a difference? This is the definition of a B-I-G problem. A B-I-G problem is when the behavior is completed, but the impact is lacking. Csutora (2012) lists some examples of B-I-G problems which will be mentioned here:

- "Green feats are often partially offset by increased use of high footprint items. Imported organic or exotic food is a disputable alternative to non-organic local food."
- "Saved money from energy efficiency or other savings generating environmental measures may create income effect and increase further spending on the same items. (re-

bound effect). A hybrid or electric car may raise the feeling of driving being not polluting, thus may induce more drives.”

- “Consumers may choose easy-to-do, but marginal actions in the target field or act only occasionally in the expected manner. They do recycle in order to feel “green”, but oppose changing their diet or reducing their car use, although the latter are more influential determinants of total footprint. Most “environmental awareness” campaigns allow for this kind of modest self-deception, as political acceptability overrules ecological wisdom.”

So when an “ethical” consumer attempts to conduct themselves in a “green” manner, often the effort is counterbalanced by other actions. This is shown in the graph below, one can see the correlation between what the “ethical” consumer sees as the impact of their actions, and the actual impact.

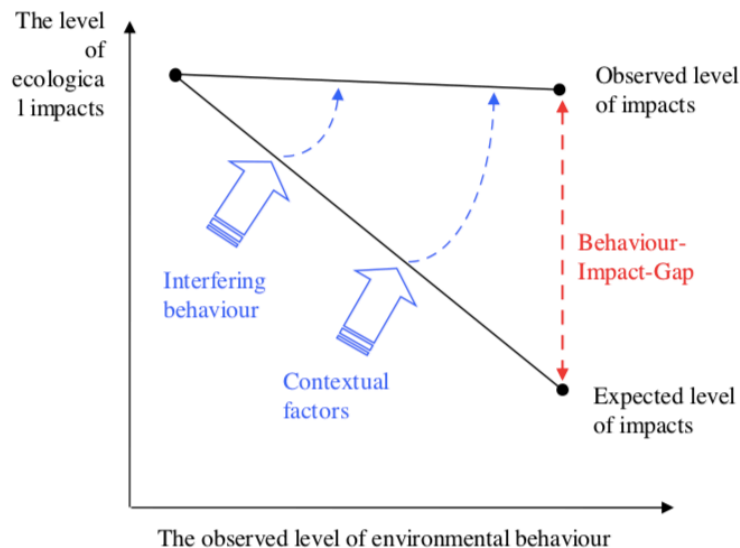


Figure 3: The Observed Level of Environmental Behavior

11.4 How to reduce these BIG problems?

As mentioned in the previous section, the best way to understand consumer behavior is not to ask them, but to watch them to see what they actually do. Auger et al (2010) conducted multiple studies to understand the motivations behind “ethical” consumers, and the

reasons that they justify social (non) consumption. They found that consumers have a great respect for authority, in "ethical" consumerism this is most strongly attached to the government.

Another interesting point that came out of their study, was the fact that there was low misinformation about the subjects. One could say that there are B-I-G problems, because consumers do not have the right information about what is actually sustainable. Auger et al (2010) found that this was not the case. Participants of the study showed deep knowledge of child labor, counterfeit products, environmental issues, and animal testing for example. According to Auger et al (2010), the problem was not the lack of information, but the lack of choosing to not act upon it.

Consumers chose not to act upon this information because they "are unwilling to engage in costly social search and verification when the benefits from that search have only a marginal impact on the use value of the product/service in question" (Auger et al 2010:135). This goes along with Vogel's (2005) claim that "consumers will only buy an ethical product if it doesn't cost more, comes from a brand they trust, and has the same level of quality, performance, and endurance as the less social alternative". This suggests that the "ethical" consumer is something that participants understand the goodness of and idealize, however are easy to talk it away when it suits them.

12. Conclusion- Who is the "Ethical" Consumer?

As shown in this section it is impossible to define specifically the "ethical" consumer. However, this does not mean that consumers do not ever have "ethical" values that effect they purchasing behavior. Price seems to be the most influential constraint when concerning product choice, even when consumers consider themselves "ethical".

13. Ethical Marketing

13.1 What is it?

Ethical marketing is the act of “applying ethics to the marketing process” (Haynes, 2017). As previously mentioned, applying ethics can be difficult as everyone has their own perception of what is right and wrong (Marketing-schools.org, 2019). This is why ethical marketing has no strict set of rules, but has some values that are core to being an ethical marketer. To be ethical in marketing, the campaign must be socially, environmentally, and culturally responsible, and the company must be consistent and transparent throughout (Haynes, 2017). Consistency is very important in ethical marketing, because even if a company releases one “ethical” marketing campaign, however they either (i) do not fulfill their promises or (ii) release other “unethical” campaigns, it is unethical.

Having ethical marketing practices is difficult to define for every company, however here are some general guidelines:

- Marketing professionals abide by the highest standard of personal ethics.
- The privacy of the consumer should never be compromised.
- Marketers must comply with regulations and standards established by governmental and professional organizations.
- Ethics should be discussed openly and honestly during all marketing decisions

While the guidelines for how to be an “ethical” marketing company are more fluid, there are some clear examples of what is unethical. Some examples of unethical advertising are:

- Puffery – When an advertiser relies on subjective rather than objective claims, they are puffing up their products. Statements like “the best tasting coffee” cannot be confirmed objectively.
- Stereotyping Women – Women in advertising have often been portrayed as sex objects or domestic servants. This type of advertising traffics in negative stereotypes and contributes to a sexist culture.

- Children in advertising – Children consume huge amounts of advertising without being able to evaluate it objectively. Exploiting this innocence is one of the most common unethical marketing practices.

Ethical Marketing is just one of the many components that affects not only the “ethical” consumers, but consumers in general. Consumers are becoming more and more knowledgeable about the practices and products of companies. This has also made them more skeptical. Ethical marketing can build a strong loyalty relationship, even with “normal” consumers (Marketing-schools.org, 2019).

14. Barriers to Ethical Consumption

This paper has explored the characteristics, behaviors, and motivations of the “ethical” consumer. The author has also spoken about how governments and companies can take advantage this growing sector of consumers to protect the environment and increase profitability. It has been examined the controversy of the definition of the “ethical” consumer, and the author has come to the conclusion that there is no direct definition of what an “ethical” consumer is, as there are too many variables. The “ethical consumer is multifaceted, fluid and elusive, subject to individual, contextual, cultural and emotional vagaries”. (Carrigan 2017.:17). This does not mean that people do not take their “ethical” values into account; on the contrary, consumers are more and more aware of the effects of their consumption. This does not guarantee however that they will follow the purchasing logic of the ideal “ethical” consumer. This paper will now explore the barriers that prevent or discourage consumers to purchase ethically.

14.1 Policy

The first type of barrier that reduces ethical consumption starts before the product reaches the consumer. Government policies and regulation play a key role in what types of products are produced, how they are produced and at what price. Even when governments decided that it is profitable to create some more sustainable laws, sometimes their policies are not effective, as discussed in Chapter two. One could also argue that it is not the government's place to interfere with sustainability laws (or business in general), and that businesses will sort it out themselves (Friedman, 1992).

14.2 Behavior

The second type of barrier is on the consumers' side, this is when a consumer is presented with an “ethical” choice, but does not choose it. There are many sociocultural, political, motivational, and lifestyle aspects that could affect the consumer, but through examining multiple studies, the author has come to the conclusion that price has the highest purchasing effect (Auger, Devinney, & Eckhardt, 2010; Dietz, Michie, & Ooughton, 2001).

Even the most committed “green” consumer takes into account the price of the product. One can see this effect with the decrease in use of plastic bags once the 5p tax came into place in England (Carrigan, Moraes & Leek, 2011; Whitmarsh, 2016). According to Gov.com (2018), plastic bag sales have been down by 86% since the 5p tax on plastic bags came into play in 2015.

14.3 B-I-G

The final type of barrier to a better “ethical” consumption is the behavioral impact gap. This is when a consumer purchases a “green” product, but is either deceived by non ethical marketing, or balances out their “good” purchase with other “unethical” actions.

As Caruana & Chatzidakis (2013) greatly summarize, “studies of the instrumental, relational and moral motives underpinning consumer behavior highlights a multi-level, multi-agent conceptualization of consumer responsibility, and identify micro, meso, macro and super-macro levels of influence such as families, consumption communities, governments, corporations, non-governmental organizations, as well as personal motivations” (Carrigan, 2017). “Ethical” consumer must be examined on all the levels possible, and while researchers want to have a black and white answer, behavioral consumption is not black and white.

15. The Future of “Ethical” Consumption

15.1 In Research

Through these three barriers, “ethical” consumption seems out of reach. However a key characteristic that came through in all the research was that consumers want to feel like they are making a difference (Carrigan, 2017; Dietz, Michie, and Oughton, 2001; Auger et al 2005). Professor Carrigan (2017) from Coventry University, presents multiple solutions that could be used to encourage consumers to become more “ethical”.

The first step is really to continue studying the “ethical” consumer through their behavior, in just the past 30 years so much rich research has come from this subject, and while it is still impossible to give a one sentence definition of the “ethical” consumer, it is “rich grounds for future study in the next 15 years.” (Carrigan 2017). For these studies to dig deeper into understanding the “ethical” consumer, they must see “ethical” consumer behavior as a process (Papaoikonomou and Valverde 2011). “Ethical” consumption should be studied more over time, as most people who want to become more “ethical” take small actions slowly. This would also allow for the researcher to overcome bias, and understand what is influencing the consumer behavior.

15.2 In the World

According to Carrigan (2017), consumers need to see more “ethical spillover” in their daily lives. There are three examples:

- “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)”
- “Policy interventions will help all”

Environmental impact can be either come from upstream or downstream. An example of an upstream environmental change is the town of Modbury, England. Modbury became the

first plastic bag free town, because the local retailers banded together and decided to refuse to give out any more plastic bags. This forced the town to start bringing their own bags. Although this initial act was done only by local traders, it started a momentum that reached the British government, and the UK made an agreement to reduce plastic bag use by large retailers. Their targets were reached by decreasing plastic bag use by 48% (Carrigan, Moraes & Leek, 2011).

An example previously mentioned is an example of downstream effects, the 5p tax on plastic bags was a regulation that caused consumers to reduce their use of plastic bags. While, as spoken about in the Political Economy chapter, policies can be the most long term solution, one must be careful to take into consideration the society that one is implementing the policy too as to get the right effect.

Examples like these of efforts being made by consumers and governments show that sustainability is one of the most important topics of today. The goal of this paper was to examine and understand the "ethical" consumer, but ended up concluding still without a definition of the "ethical" consumer. This however is not necessarily a bad sign, as all consumers are complex, and the more research that is done on this topic, the more sustainability can be put in the front light.

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