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Ethical consumption: Identities, practices and potential to bring about social change

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Abstract

In recent decades, individuals as well as businesses – mainly those living and operating within advanced capitalist systems – have become increasingly aware of the social context of production and, thus, of the impact consumption has on the environment, animals and other fellow humans. Such reflexivity is echoed both in spheres of production (e.g. corporate social responsibility policies) and consumption (e.g. labelling schemes such as fair-trade and organic). Under these conditions the ‘ethical consumer’ was born. While, however, the concepts of ethical and political consumption have been around for some time now, our understanding of what it really means to be ‘ethical’ as a consumer today is still very fuzzy.

In contrast with previous studies which ascribe *a priori* certain meanings and criteria to the ethical consumer concept, this study follows a bottom-up approach that provides space for individuals to express their own views on ethical consumption. To cater for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, the research is designed as a case study within a specific geographical location; Partick, Glasgow. This study makes use of primary data generated through 20 in-depth interviews with self-identified ethical consumers, 10 interviews and 15 questionnaires with managers of grocery shops operating in the area, as well as 112 questionnaires completed by the public in a street survey.

The findings challenge our conventional understanding of ‘ethics’ in the context of consumption; being ethical as a consumer extends beyond simply purchasing ethically marketed products and services, to include various lifestyle choices. Consumers raised concerns about the degree and nature of change that conventional ethical consumption can achieve. Utilising insights from this research, the study draws a conceptual distinction between the “ethical Shopper” (representing the side of ethical consumption that is hegemonically market-driven) and the “ethical Consumer” (representing its creative, pro-active, agency-driven counterpart). It is suggested that the latter allows consumption as a tool for social change to reach its full potential, since it escapes the fabricated ‘ethics’ of the market. Feeding back to the theoretical frameworks of ethical and political consumption, this study highlights the class and taste bias built into the (very expensive) idealized model of ethical lifestyle and, thus, calls for the inclusion of different types of consumer action such as downshifting, file-sharing, or even collective shoplifting, which have been –until now – neglected.

Declaration

This is to certify that that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signature:

Date:

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Abbreviations

CE- - Common Era

CSR- - Corporate Social Responsibility

DIY- - Do it yourself

ECRA- - Ethical Consumer Research Associations

CES- - Consumer Ethics Scale

EU- - European Union

NGO- - Non-governmental Organisation

NIMBY- - Not In My Back Yard

NSM- - New Social Movements

POS- - Political Opportunity Structure

RDCs- - Regional Distribution Companies

SMO- - Social Movement Organisation

SPSS- - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

STOP- - Stop Tesco Owning Partick

Prologue

During my undergraduate studies (1999-2004) in Business Administration and Management at the University of Piraeus, I had the fortune to be part of a small anarchist group of activists who operated in Athens under the name “Brutus of Advertising”. The groups’ main activity was to re-appropriate advertisements placed at huge billboards across the city of Athens (see Picture 1-1). In particular, we would ‘mess about’ either with the writings or the images of an advertisement, so as to distort the original message and replace it instead with a political motto, a statement – something that I later found is termed ‘culture jamming’. To my knowledge, this was the first organized action in Greece of this nature.



Picture 1-1: Culture Jamming in Athens 2003. Clockwise starting from the top left: Cigarettes Ad: Change *packet-Life!*, Mobile phone Ad: Do you miss the game? *Live it through your mobile* / *We miss daily confrontation* / *We miss class struggles*, Car Ad: *Your life has overtaken you*, Home and kitchen store Ad: from 7,500 Euros *and instalments Until Death*.

It was mainly through my involvement with this group that I gained interest in marketing; an interest that inspired me to further my formal education and undertake a master's course in International Marketing, at The University of Strathclyde here in the UK. My settling in Glasgow in 2004 exposed me for the first time to the idea of 'ethical consumption'. The Fair-trade label on the packaging of coffee in my local supermarket was something I had never encountered before. I had to find out more about this 'new idea'.

Towards the end of my masters' course, I had to choose a topic for my dissertation – and that's when I first saw these two words 'ethics' and 'consumption' being put together. In particular, I came across the 'Consumer Ethics Scale' (CES) developed by Muncy and Vitell (1992), and which I decided to use for my dissertation. A completely different approach on the 'ethics' of consumers, that of ethical consumerism, was the topic for a one-plus-three scholarship at the department of Marketing in Glasgow Caledonian University, which I was successful in securing the following year.

Story cut short; well into my second year of PhD I ended up leaving my scholarship and moving to the department of Sociology in the University of Edinburgh to continue my PhD there. Although this has been a difficult decision for me, I feel it was necessary in order to have the adequate support but also the opportunity to discuss the phenomenon of ethical consumption from a perspective which I felt was more interesting, than the narrow marketing-oriented approach I felt compelled to follow if I was to continue 'belonging' to the specific discipline.

The report you are reading is but one upshot of my journey in exploring ethical consumption. Other outcomes include two academic conference papers, an internet blog (which I created in order to publicise my research and its findings), an interview at a BBC Radio Scotland talk show (where I was invited to present my findings and take part in a debate on ethical consumption), and finally, a public event¹ I organized back in 2010 (where I had the opportunity to present findings and get feedback).

Finally, there are also a handful of poems that I've written and which were inspired by knowledge gained throughout this journey. They are to be published in the beginning of 2015 by Haramada publishing. An excerpt from one such poem is included in the next

¹ For a description of this event see Appendix 1, page 286).

page. I, too, see poetry as an ‘ethnographic statement’ that is missing from social sciences in general and wherein the researcher “*uses a rich linguistic code and different structures to express certain crucial areas of field experience that have not been communicated in professional monographs and articles*” (Prattis, 1985, p. 280).

I think I have provided enough hints on where I come from – and I don’t mean just my nationality, so that the reader can at least get a feeling of my personal biases, and particularly those which I am incapable of identifying myself.

Throughout this journey, there have been more than a handful fellow wayfarers, who have supported me in their own unique ways. I would like to thank them all, one by one, but the list is quite long, and the printing of a thesis expensive... So I will only go for those who I feel deserve to be acknowledged in this particular report the most: **Jan Webb, Hugo Gorringe** and all **Participants**. It was an honour meeting you.

Happy reading!

I saw the first of the seven curses of the King
Spreading like an oil-spill
wiping out everything that is merely living.
And I saw the Lernaean Hydras,
consistent in their corporate social responsibility,
To suck with the power of a million Dyson
The Waste from their commercial accidents
In order to clean the sea from the sweat
And the blood of slaves
So as to prevent the models of Marie Claire
from staining
the swimsuit
for their photo-shoot
 ...
While the most brilliant minds of my generation
where born illegal immigrants out of need.
And with false papers, wonder around the already 'won' fields of the Working Class.
They walk full of sweat
In thatched eight-hour shifts
which are at risk from the burning sun of August.
They are head-hanged from the loop of the thirteenth salary
which exceeds in the 'sell-out' price the thirty pieces of silver which is the basic salary
And they rest only for a few seconds
next to dirty lakes of labour 'solidarity'
expropriating, in the form of armed robbery,
Personal space-time
from the Bank of Coins and Greed.

[Excerpt from the unpublished poem "The seven Curses of King Nihil"
 Komninou 2012]

Στη Δέσποινα, την Ρομφαία, και την Αμφιλύκη
(To Despina, Romfea and Amfiliki)

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter aims to introduce the topic of this research and to provide an overview of the structure of this report.

In order to familiarize the reader with the subject under investigation, a short discussion on the concept of ethical consumerism is offered first. This is followed by an argument in favour of researching the specific phenomenon, its importance and relevance to contemporary debates on social change, ethics and consumption. The discussion continues with a presentation of the aim of this thesis, the research objectives and major findings and arguments. The potential users and/or audience for this report are then identified and avowed. The chapter ends with a succinct presentation of the remaining chapters.

1.1 What *is* ethical consumption?

The *italics* in the title above are on purpose – so is the question mark. To gain an understanding of ethical consumption was the main reason I undertook this particular research project – in other words, it is its *raison d'être*. This thesis provides one interpretation of ethical consumption.

Before undertaking this research journey I, like Banbury et al. (2012), wondered: How deeply embedded are we in our economically constructed life patterns and to what extent our consumption choices and levels of activism remain within the system?, eager to find a different answer that they did i.e. “*No matter our sensibilities for justice and nature's struggle, these problems are beyond our reach*” (p. 503).

1.1.1 Birth and use of the term

It is not very clear when the ‘ethical consumer’ as a term appeared for the first time in the public realm, it may be argued though that it was popularised as the title of a UK consumer magazine. In 1987, three graduates with experience in environmental, human rights, and animal rights campaigning respectively set up the foundations of what would be later named as the Ethical Consumer Research Association (ECRA). It started off as a ‘voluntary, occasional, research project’ in Manchester. With the objective to raise funds so as to support their research operations, the association decided to publish a magazine, the “*Ethical Consumer*”, the first issue of which was launched in March 1989. The magazine was well received by the UK public, as it appears to have managed to attract 5,000 subscribers in its first year¹.

A few years later, in 1994, consumer ethical concerns made their appearance also in the realm of commercial market research. It was that year when, according to Newholm and Shaw (2007), Mintel (a London-based market research firm) while undertaking research on green consumers in the UK realised that there was a wider spectrum of moral

¹ All information on ECRA and the Ethical consumer magazine, is taken from the magazine’s website (<http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/aboutus/20thbirthday/ourstory19892009.aspx>) [Accessed on 06/06/2013]

concerns influencing consumer behaviour than environmental issues. It was from this point onwards that next to the green consumer another one, the ‘ethical consumer’, began to be acknowledged and validated by market research as a separate – and rather promising – consumer segment.

This new term did not stay only within the market research reports. Since then, ‘ethical consumer’ and ‘ethical consumption’ are increasingly used in academic, business, governmental and civil society discourse and literature. It is important, however, here to note that the term doesn’t appear very popular outside its country of origin, i.e. the UK.

1.1.2 Describing ethical consumption

The term itself, ethical consumption, suggests that there is a *qualitative* difference from what is considered as the norm or ordinary consumption. In particular, the difference rests on the assumption that ‘ethical consumers’ are somewhat different from other consumers because they incorporate issues of morality and ethics in their decision making. That, however, implies that ordinary consumers do not involve morality in their decision making, something that has already been debated, for example by arguing that consumption is “*suffused with moral rhetoric and ethical concern*” (Barnett et al., 2005, p. 21).

The distinction between an ‘ethical’ and an ordinary consumer becomes clearer when we consider what is suggested as ‘ethical’ by those who adhere to this distinction. In their yearly reports on the ethical consumer markets, The Co-operative Group (one of the largest commercial organisations in the UK that uses the ‘ethical’ discourse to attract its customers) define ethical consumerism as the “*personal allocation of funds, including consumption and investment, where choice has been informed by a particular issue – be it human rights, social justice, the environment or animal welfare*” (in the last page of The Co-operative Ethical Consumerism Report, 2012). In a similar manner, other commercial market research reports on ethical consumption (for example Key Note, 2012) also explain ethical consumption in terms of sales of ‘ethically’ marketed products and services. Following the disciplinary paradigm within which these concepts originated, existing academic studies have also often limited such difference to the idea of purchasing products and services marketed as ‘ethical’ – and primarily those participating in labelling schemes

such as organic and fair trade – and/or the avoidance of ‘unethical’ framed corporations and products.

Ethical consumption, hence, appears to be not so much about the idea of including morality in our decision making as consumers, but about adhering to particular issues of ‘ethics’ – usually dealing with environmental concerns, human and animal rights, and expressing them mainly through the purchasing of commonly perceived ‘ethical’ goods and services (although other practices such as recycling, campaigning and downshifting have also been included sometimes under the ethical consumerism umbrella term).

Of course, such interpretation of the meaning of ‘ethics’ in consumption has not been left unchallenged. As Barnett et al. (2011) illustrate, under the concept of ethical consumption one may find a variety of objects of ethical concern coupled with a plethora of diverse practices. This study shares Barnett et al.’s (2011) claim that “*what counts as ethical consumption is itself open to some debate*” (p. 15).

1.1.3 The politicisation of ethical consumption

Ethical consumerism as a concept is very close to that of Political consumerism. These two concepts seem to have originated from – and thus to a great extent are still embedded in – different disciplinary paradigms; ethical consumption seems to be primarily related to a business-oriented disciplinary paradigm, whereas the political consumerism concept has developed within the political studies discipline. Scholars, such as Shaw (2007), have already used theoretical frameworks drawn from political consumerism to help explain ‘ethical’ consumers.

The concept of political consumerism draws on the observation that consumer choices and the rising politics of products constitute an increasingly important form of political participation that exists parallel to conventional party-centred and national-state level politics (Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti et al., 2004). Political consumerism literature stretches the connection between consumer and citizen (Follesdal, 2004), uses consumption as a metaphor for voting (Bennett, 2004; Shaw et al., 2006; Shaw, 2007), and sees the market as an arena for politics (Micheletti, 2003). Political consumerism has formally been defined as:

“the consumer choice of producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices. It is based on attitudes and values regarding issues of justice, fairness, or non-economic issues that concern personal and family well-being and ethical or political assessment of favourable and unfavourable business and governmental practice. Regardless of whether political consumers act individually or collectively, their market choices reflect an understanding of material products as embedded in a complex social and normative context which may be called the politics behind products” (Micheletti et al, 2004, p. xiv-xv).

The above definition indicates the closeness of these two concepts. Their use in an interchangeable manner, however, should be done with caution. For example, it is not very clear whether the use of 'ethical' consumption by primarily UK based scholars – as has been also well spotted by Clarke et al (2007) and Barnett et al. (2011) – is coincidental or not. Moreover, concepts of political consumerism incorporate both 'ethics' and 'politics' behind consumption practices and lifestyles.

This study focuses primarily on the 'ethical' discourse in consumption. Nonetheless, since ethical consumption is about change, this study incorporates the concept of political consumerism as a means to understand the political aspect (the politicisation) of ethical consumerism.

1.2 Why investigate the phenomenon of ethical consumption?

Over the last few years, availability of ethically marketed products has exploded through, for example the proliferation of ethical labelling schemes such as Fair-trade in various product categories, as well as the introduction of fair-trade and organic products on the shelves of big retailers, such as supermarkets in the UK. The following figure illustrates the market value of ethical consumerism in the UK using data from the yearly Co-op Bank reports (2000 to 2012).

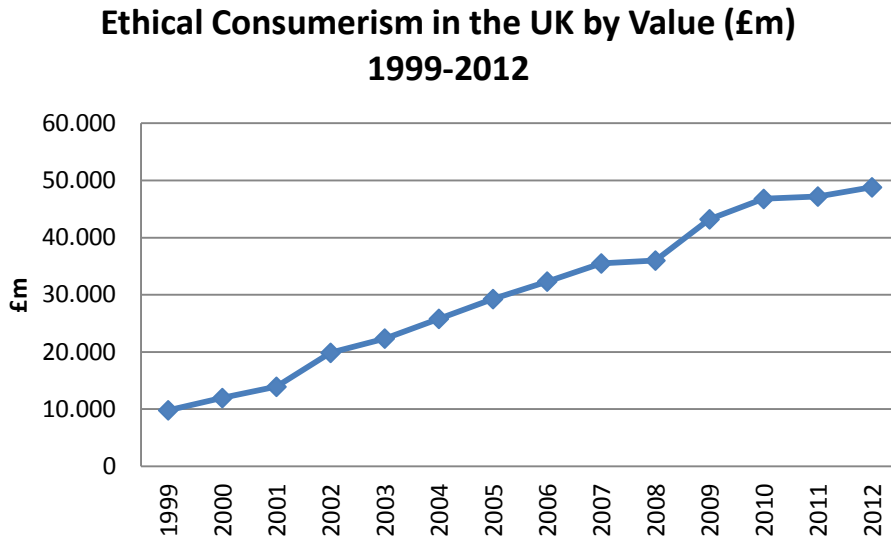


Figure 1-1: Ethical Consumerism in the UK by Value (£m). [Source: Co-op Bank reports 2001-2013]

The ethical consumer market is expected – by both the business and academic world – to maintain its growth in the years to come. In their latest report on green and ethical consumerism, Key Note (2012) [a UK leading provider of market intelligence and one of the few – along ECRA, Co-op Bank and Ipsos Mori – non-academic organisations who conduct research on ethical consumerism in the UK market] anticipates an increase in the value of the market of ethical consumerism in the UK in the next three years, although its rate of growth is expected to slow down marginally (see Table 1-1 in the next page).

In the same report, Key Note also identifies the following ‘trends’ (Key Note, 2012, p. 128-9) which are expected to boost ethical consumerism (defined here as the value of ‘ethical’ products and services) in the near future:

- Supermarkets and grocery retailers will continue to expand their lines of organic and Fair-trade products.
- Retailers will continue to reduce their carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions in order to become more ethical and environmentally friendly, thus appealing to consumer concern regarding these issues and encouraging customers to make environmental improvements to their own carbon footprint.
- More initiatives will be established by the UK government and campaigning

organisations are likely to help consumers to reduce their own emissions at home.

- Continued efforts to reduce emissions by reducing the amount of cars on the road will increase in the future, e.g. by encouraging consumers to opt for car sharing schemes, public transport or walking and cycling.
- The popularity of clothes-swapping events and purchasing clothing from charity shops will increase, buoyed by the rising interest and fashionable qualities associated with vintage clothing.
- Organic beauty products and toiletries are likely to become more widely-used.

Forecast by Value (£bn), 2013-2016				
	2013	2014	2015	2016
Value (£m)	59,600	64,900	70,700	76,700
<i>% change year-on-year</i>	9.2	8.9	8.9	8.5

Table 1-1: KeyNote's forecast for ethical consumerism in the UK. [Source: Key Note 2012, p. 15]

Similarly, expectations of a thriving ethical consumerism are also apparent within academia. In a review of previous literature into ethical consumerism, Newholm and Shaw (2007) report the following factors that literature indicates to have contributed to the increase of ethical consumption: increased media coverage, increased level of information, greater availability of alternative products, the changed conditions of consumption and the increasing understanding in the consequences of consumer choices. These factors are expected to develop further, and along with them, ethical consumption is thus, likely to continue expanding – although it is important to remember that predictions for the future is a risky business. While, however, the ethical consumer market seems to be expanding, scepticism about ethical consumerism is also growing. Much like the environmentally responsible consumer “*who has been ‘produced’ by*

the business media” (Fontenelle 2013, p. 339), doubts are rising on the extent to which the birth of the ‘ethical consumer’ isn’t just another marketing device to sell more products.

According to a Mintel press office article, recent research on green consumer habits suggests that they might be motivated to go green to improve their image, as roughly one in five (19%) survey respondents say they believe it’s important for others to perceive them as being ‘green’. Moreover, among those who feel it’s important to be perceived as green, 24% admit to having purchased a green product just to show others that they are environmentally conscious (vs. a 9% average) (Mintel, 2013). If being perceived a ‘green’ or ‘ethical’ consumer is a matter of fashion, there is always the danger of it becoming ‘unfashionable’ sooner or later. Hence, important questions on the ephemeral nature of such behaviour arise.

Moreover, there is some concern about the inequality and class distinctions that the practicing of ethical consumption in some way implies. It is often the case that consumers are asked to pay a premium price for ‘ethically’ marketed products and services. This automatically excludes people in low incomes from having the option to use their power as consumers in the same way that people of higher income can afford. Reactions and criticism based on this problematic aspect of ethical consumption have been numerous. In his newspaper article titled “It’s time for a Primark shoppers’ revolt against the snobbery of ethical consumerism”, Brendan O’Neill (2011) proclaims that “*by elevating spending prowess, ethical consumerism rehabilitates an old-style, borderline aristocratic divide*”. He goes on explaining that:

“In a sense this is precisely what draws the frustrated chattering classes towards the politics of ethical consumption. Sick of being put on a par with poor people in the grotesquely equal world of democracy, of being lumped in with a demos that includes Primark women in ill-fitting leggings and burger-eaters with busting guts, they gravitate instead to a political realm where your wallet and your adherence to the Observer Guide to Ethical Shopping instantly make you superior to the less ethically attuned masses. It’s time for a Primark-clad revolt against this revolting snobbery.”

Debates on the extent to which ethical consumerism can actually tackle the issues that it promises to address are also emerging. Bradshaw et al. (2013) convincingly point out that “*Contemporary consumption [...] is both responsible for causing the global recession, through its*

excesses, and also responsible for overcoming the consequences of these excesses through yet more consumption!" (p. 212). To sum up, sales of ethically marketed products and services have been increasing and are expected to keep on increasing in the next years. There are several aspects of ethical consumerism, however, which raise doubts on both the nature and meaning of ethical consumption, and ultimately its potential to deliver what it promises. The latter is of great importance, as it is very relevant to the current international debates on sustainability, which provides the study of ethical consumption with some 'urgency' (Newholm and Shaw, 2007). Moreover, as far as academic interest is concerned, the study of ethical consumption appears to be 'maturing' in terms of developing themes, theories and debates (Newholm and Shaw, 2007), and it is at this point exactly, it is argued, that contributing to this area through research is essential.

1.3 What is this study about then? (or Aims and Objectives)

Academics and market researchers arbitrarily ascribe individuals the label of a 'consumer' and the accompanying framings of being 'ethical' and/or 'political'. The outcome of such a top-down approach is an understanding of an ethical consumer as engaged with specific practices for specific reasons. What is certainly missing, is an understanding of how individuals choose to frame themselves, their consumption practices and the type of change, if any, they attempt to pursue through their consumption. And by 'consumption', I don't not necessarily mean 'purchasing'. This detail I find particularly important at a time when 'consumption' is increasingly becoming a space within which contemporary individuals are both empowered and enforced to construct their personal, social and political selves.

Considering the above, this **thesis aimed (a)** to explore, through primary research, the framing and meaning of the so-called 'ethical consumer' and associated notion of 'ethical consumption', in order **(b)** to understand what constitutes an 'ethical consumer' and how is the prerequisite of 'purchase' affecting this framing, particularly with respect

to realising the potential change (both in terms of degree and type) that the so-called ethical consumption promises to deliver.

Therefore, by embracing a bottom up approach, I undertook **research in Partick**, at the West-End of Glasgow, with the **(research) aim** to explore the ‘ethical’ and ‘political’ discourse of consumption based on individuals’ perceptions and experiences.

In particular, the research had the following three **research objectives**:

- **Research Objective 1:** to explore the meanings and degree of homogeneity (collectiveness) of the ‘ethical’ consumer frame, as well as its connection with other consumer frames, and particularly those of the ‘green’, the ‘political’ and the ‘socially conscious’ consumer,
- **Research Objective 2:** to critically explore the variety of practices and the narratives behind these practices (what emancipates and what limits decisions to engage with different practices),
- **Research Objective 3:** to critically examine the perceived potential of using consumption to practice politics, and the associated metaphor of ‘voting’.

Insights were sought from three perspectives: ten interviews with local grocery **Retailers**, a street survey to get opinions from the **General Public** and twenty in-depth interviews with self-identified **Ethical Consumers**.

Overall, findings revealed a tendency to associate ethical consumption with the ‘purchasing’ of ethically framed products. This was particularly prevalent amongst retailers who were familiar with the concept. Findings from the street survey indicated a positive statistical association between the four consumer frames (ethical, political, green and socially responsible). It also revealed that the ‘ethical’ consumer frame is mostly associated with practices of buying organic and Fair-Trade labelled products, whereas ‘green’ consumers engage in a variety of lifestyle practices including those of recycling, reusing shopping bags, avoid flying and buying from charity shops. Moreover, findings from the street survey highlighted that while people who identify themselves as ‘ethical’ consumers, tend to claim buying organic and fair trade more frequently, there is still a considerable proportion of people who would engage in the same practice (of buying organic and Fair-Trade), but who would not describe themselves as being ethical consumers.

In-depth interviews with self-identified ethical consumers provided a deeper insight on why and in what terms people chose to ascribe themselves an ‘ethical’ consumer identity. Through these interviews, it became evident that there is a stereotypical understanding of an ‘ethical’ consumer as a person who only engages with certain practices. Because of this stereotyping, some participants even resisted to ascribe to an ‘ethical consumer’ identity. This was rather surprising since participants were recruited for interviews according to their self-identification of being ‘ethical consumers’.

Moving on, these in-depth interviews provided evidence of engagement with ethical consumerism as an ongoing reflexive process. Self-identified ethical consumers are not as homogenous as thought in market–research. People develop and apply ‘ethics’ in their everyday life as consumers in a variety of ways; the meaning of ethics in consumption is not confined to the idea of purchasing. Furthermore, the degree of efficacy of ethical and political consumption to achieve change was recognised as limited, indicating the need to consider ethical and political consumption as an ‘addition’ to other ways of political participation (Stolle et al., 2005)

Finally to accommodate an understanding of the limitations of ethical consumption as a stereotypical practice associated with certain purchasing patterns (as the findings of this study suggested), a conceptual distinction between an ‘ethical Shopper’ and an ‘ethical Consumer’ is proposed. This divide helps distinguishing between a hegemonically market-driven understanding of the phenomenon of ethical consumption and its proactive, agency-driven counterpart. It is the latter perspective of ethical consumption that is argued here to be closer to the concept of political consumption.

For those that are interested in examining the way contemporary consumption may be used as everyday political praxis, an ‘ethical’ frame might be futile. Findings highlighted the dangers associated with assuming political meaning to all purchase of ‘ethically’ framed products. Additionally, it is proposed that understandings of political consumption will benefit from including additional consumer practices which are not easily commodified or deal only with aspects of ‘purchasing’.

1.4 Why sociology? (or Embracing a sociological perspective)

Ethical consumption has received a growing interest from researchers working in various disciplines within the academic community, including – but not limited to – marketing, economics, psychology, history, sociology, anthropology, environmental and political sciences. There is already a plurality of disciplinary paradigms that have guided research on this topic and which lie on diverse – sometimes even antithetical – ontological and epistemological assumptions. As I have already mentioned in my prologue, I began this research while a student serving the Marketing discipline – a discipline within which, as Belk (2002, p. 152) noted, academics (heavily influenced by economics and psychology) have predominately “*focused on understanding consumption by investigating individual attitudes, needs and perceptions without appreciating that all of these are socially constructed*”. This study views consumption as a concept infused with social meaning to be explored both in and outside the individual consumer, and ethical consumption as a phenomenon to be investigated not solemnly in economic, but in social and political terms too.

In his infamous ‘Promise’, Charles Wright Mills (1959) explicitly asserts that “[n]either the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both” (p. 3). Personal ‘issues’ and public ‘troubles’, as he defines them, are interrelated, and thus, it is unfruitful to attempt and explain one without taking into account the other. Such perspective highlights the importance of context, where spatiality and temporality ought to be acknowledged as defining features of social phenomena. But perhaps most importantly, it also highlights the interplay between persons and systems – or better, agency and structure.

This is what Mills (1959) called ‘sociological imagination’; a quality of mind that “*enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society*” (p. 6). And I feel that applying this ‘imagination’ in the studying of ethical consumption accommodates for a critical understanding on the phenomenon; an understanding that does not recognise concepts (for example values, or truths) and phenomena as natural, absolute, as universal and homogenous within society, but rather as fluid and constructed

outcomes of historical processes. Sociology is “*first and foremost, a way of thinking about the human world*” (Bauman 1990, p. 8). It is through this lens that this study takes a look upon the phenomenon of what has been termed ‘ethical consumption’.

1.5 Who cares? (or Audience for this thesis)

This research report constitutes an academic thesis, and as such it has been drafted to meet the requirements for a PhD thesis as expected by The University of Edinburgh. Its main target audience, therefore, is fellow academics and researchers interested in ethical and political consumption, consumer culture, identities, social movements and social change.

Nonetheless, consumption and consumerism are aspects of everyday life for – if not all, at least the majority of – individuals nowadays. Hence, ethics and politics in consumption are issues which could interest individuals and groups outside the academic circles. The requirement from the part of the University of Edinburgh to include a lay person’s summary when submitting a PhD thesis seems to acknowledge the need to address interested parties outside academia. Keeping this in mind, the present report embraces a writing style intended to comply with the aforementioned academic requirements while respecting, as much as possible, a lay person’s academic jargon indigestibility.

Having said that, for the non-academic audience such as business, collectives and individuals interested in the topic of this research, it is suggested that they also take a look at the slides of a relevant talk I gave at a public event back in 2010. These slides, although condensed in their argumentation, have been designed exclusively for the purpose of communicating the particular research and its findings to the general public. They can be found at Appendix 2 (p. 289) and online at the internet blog which was created for this particular study:

(<http://ethicalconsumptionstudy.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/who-is-the-ethical-consumerweb.pdf>).

1.6 What's next? (or Overview of the chapters to follow)

The present chapter provided a brief introduction to the topic under investigation and identified the potential audience for this study. The rest of this report is structured around seven chapters – a brief overview of these chapters is provided below.

Chapter 2: This chapter unfolds the theoretical framework underpinning this study. It is essentially a review of the most relevant literature which served as the background knowledge necessary to conceptualise and develop the research design of this particular study. The body of literature presented here concerns both micro and macro understandings of the phenomena under investigation, including literature on the birth and rise of consumer societies, consumer culture, ethical and political consumerism, and finally, identity.

Chapter 3: A detailed account of the development and execution of this research is presented in this chapter titled Methodology. The chapter provides all necessary information regarding the research design and the methods used in this study. The study embraced an ethnographic approach and generated both qualitative and quantitative data through interviews (with twenty self-identified ethical consumers and ten retailers) and a street survey (with a hundred and twelve respondents). A detailed profile of the research participants and a brief discussion on Partick, the locale of this study, are also included here.

Chapter 4: This is the first chapter presenting a fraction of the findings of this research. In particular, it offers insights drawn through data collected from the side of the retail sector. Retailer's perspectives are often missing from discussions of ethical consumption, yet it is their decision to stock (or not) certain products that facilitate the exercise of such consumption). The views of ten managers and/or owners of grocery stores are here presented and analysed. The chapter offers insights on both personal views as well as decisions regarding logistics from people working within the side of supply. The stories of the ten interviewees are analysed separately, an approach that allows a deeper understanding of their views. Towards the end, insights gained from these stories are combined and main conclusions are drawn.

Chapter 5: This chapter engages with - predominately - quantitative data acquired through the street survey. The use of the identity and the associated practices of an 'ethical consumer' are examined here based on the views of the general public. In this chapter, data are also used in order to gain insight on the way four identities, that of an 'ethical', a 'green', a socially responsible', and finally a 'political' consumer, relate to each other. A conceptual mapping of how twelve different identities relate according to the quantitative data gained from the street survey is also offered in this chapter.

Chapter 6: This chapter takes a closer look at the meanings and identities of ethical consumers through the use of the qualitative data gained from the twenty in-depth interviews with consumers. The discussion begins with an examination of the process through which individuals learn to use their consumer power in order to communicate grievances and exercise pressure for change. The discussion then focuses on the stories of eight individuals in order to illustrate their varying – and sometimes even conflicting - views on ethical consumption and its corresponding consumer identity. Some of the practical constraints and trade-offs tied up with the practicing of ethical consumerism are then illustrated. The chapter ends with an examination of the 'voting' metaphor in ethical consumerism discourse which directly connects consumption with the realm of politics. Here, the views of consumers on the political aspect of ethical consumption reveal its perceived limitations with respect to effectiveness and potential.

Chapter 7: The chapter titled Discussion (or My Thesis) revisits the concept of the 'ethical consumer' and informs theory through the utilisation of the findings from the primary research. Here, the conceptual distinction between an 'ethical Shopper' and an "ethical Consumer" is proposed. This division is developed as an analytical tool in order to facilitate distinguishing between a hegemonically market-driven understanding of the phenomenon and its pro-active, agency-driven counterpart. It is the latter perspective of ethical consumption that is argued here to be closer to the concept of political consumption - as a more appropriate term to use (due to its less value-laden nature).

Chapter 8: This chapter operates as the closing chapter of this report. Here, a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of ethical consumption is provided based on the insights gained from this particular research. An account of the limitations of this study is also included, along with a few recommendations for those interested in pursuing further research on ethical and political consumption.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The previous chapter provided a brief description of the concept of ethical and political consumption. This chapter explores these concepts in more depth and offers a literature review that draws upon relevant theoretical and empirical work from multiple disciplines.

The chapter is divided in two parts. Part I examines the wider context within which ethical consumption is situated, through a discussion of the so-called consumer society and associated culture. An exploration of the structural conditions of contemporary society that both enable and restrain conceptualisations of consumption as a form of political participation is also offered here.

Part II begins with a description of ethical consumption based on related practices, issues of conflict, goals and adversaries, followed by a commentary on this phenomenon's individual and collective character. The politicisation of ethical consumption through notions of citizenship and globalisation are also presented here, along with a brief commentary on the use and limitations of the 'voting' metaphor frequently used in ethical and political discourse. A review on the concept of 'collective identity' and the insights it can generate so as to facilitate our understanding of ethical consumption is then presented. Building on the major points made through this literature review, the closing section presents the aims and objectives of this thesis.

PART I

2.1 Introduction

Western capitalist cheerleaders are, at the time of writing, redoubling efforts to encourage consumers to consume more to maintain economic activity and continue to pursue narrowly defined progress, while at the same time beginning to focus on the urgent need to tackle climate change as though this has nothing to do with consumerism

(Gabriel and Lang, 2006, p. 24)

A review of the literature promptly reveals that *consumption* hasn't been the favoured child since the beginning of social theorising. In fact, it seems that classical social theory has instead traditionally focused on how our position within the sphere of *production* shapes the way we organise our personal and social lives. Who we are, why we are and how we relate to other people around us were issues to be explained usually by reflecting upon our place on the production line of a carefully, and somewhat fixed, social stratification that was based on the aspect of 'work'.

Gradually, however, this focus on work was replaced by a focus on consumption – although, one may argue these two are intimately related. Miller (1995) explained the previous neglect of consumption, as the result of a rather silent consensus between the conventional political ideologies of left and right, which handed exclusive power to economics (as an academic discipline) to deal with what consumption is and, thus, to shift the world in the direction of increasing compliance with its abstract models. The increasing recognition that modern politics have become a “*mere dependent of modern economics*” (Miller, 1995, p. 5), gave rise to a new study of consumption which – to use Miller's words – acknowledges “*the degree to which economic instruments such as the International Monetary Fund and political parties of left and right are increasingly the agents, not of international capitalists so much as of international shopping*” (Miller, 1995, p. 5). Responding to this, sociology as a science took its first steps towards the emergence of ‘a sociology of consumption’ around the 1980's (Miles, 1998, p. 20). Such is considered by some scholars to be the importance of consumption nowadays, that it is celebrated as ‘the

vanguard of history' (Miller, 1995) and '*the* religion of the late twentieth century' (Miles, 1998, p. 1).

It is because of this shift in focus, that conceptualisations of ethical, sustainable, green and political consumption have become possible. This chapter aims to provide a review of the relevant literature so as to draw the theoretical framework that is essential in order to articulate the research objectives, and consequently to contextualize the findings of the primary research of this study. The discussion commences with an examination of the concepts of consumer society and culture, in order to illuminate the context within which ethical consumption, as the focus of this study, is situated. This is presented in Part I. Once this is established, a closer look into the current literature on ethical consumerism is then offered in Part II.

As a starting point, I feel it is necessary to provide and critically discuss some of the terms that are used throughout this thesis and which, do not deserve to be taken for granted.

2.2 Consume, Consumption, Consumerism and the Consumer

Throughout the vast amount of existing academic work on consumption, it is seldom that definitions and/or enquiries on the meanings, origins and assumptions of the terms 'consume', 'consumption' and 'consumerism' are discussed. Anthropologist David Graeber, who brought this shortcoming to attention, provided a helpful critical insight in his recent paper titled 'Consumption' (2011). Graeber (2011) considers 'consumption' as a theoretical term which – along with others such as 'culture', 'identity', 'agency', 'flow', 'body' and 'governmentality' – seems to have at a certain point in time become a 'buzzword', but whose meaning nonetheless is often assumed as self-evident (i.e. not being debated and sometimes not even defined). For example, he notices that in a relevant textbook titled 'The Consumer Society Reader' edited by Schor and Holt (2000), not a single one out of the twenty eight essays has incorporated a definition of either the term 'consumption' or 'consumerism'.

In his attempt to unravel the development of the meaning of the term, he starts off by looking at the etymology of the word, and he explains:

The English 'to consume', derives from the Latin verb consumere, meaning 'to seize, or take over completely' and, hence, by extension, 'to eat up, devour, waste, destroy, or spend' [...] 'Consumption' first appears in English in the fourteenth century. In early French and English usage, the connotations were almost always negative. To consume something meant to destroy it, to make it burn up, evaporate, or waste away. Hence, wasting diseases "consumed" their victims, a usage that according to the Oxford English Dictionary is already documented by 1395. This is why tuberculosis came to be known as "consumption".

(Graeber, 2011, p. 491-2)

It seems that initially the word consumption was referring to what I would describe as a passive alteration of the nature of an object (or subject), and which signifies its ending of existence. In other words, it focuses on what happens to the quality of an object when consumed, i.e. it gets destroyed, spent, wasted. Under such theorization, the consumer is understood as a destroyer, an actor who uses up, wastes and devours things. Baudrillard (1998) viewed consumption as an intermediate term between production and destruction, suggesting that it is in the destruction that the consumer gains his/her meaning.

Other definitions on the term might appear more familiar to the reader. For example, the one used by Campbell (1995), who defines consumption as the "*selection, purchase, use, maintenance, repair and disposal of any product or service*" (p. 102). The added feature of this definition is that it positions consumption within an economic system which follows certain mechanisms; this is important because it carries with it some assumptions which reflect the current state of affairs. For example, it assumes the existence of products and services, which not only offer selection but also most notably, require the act of purchasing. The explicit appearance of 'purchasing', as the legitimate and normalized way of acquiring the objects of consumption, surely reflects a systemic feature of contemporary society. What is being consumed is not an object, but a commodity in the Marxian sense; something that is produced and traded in a market. The focus here becomes the act of shopping; the consumer is seen as an actor involved in certain mechanisms of monetary exchange within a given economic system; s/he is a shopper, the purchaser of objects of consumption.

While economics as a science seems overwhelmingly concerned with the terms of market exchange, other social sciences (including, but not limited to sociology, anthropology, history and archaeology) usually pay more attention to the use of objects and their symbolic significance. In doing so, they attempt to address the social and cultural dimensions of consumption when not seen as a strictly economic act. Under such understanding, the consumer can be seen as much more than a destroyer and/or purchaser; for example s/he can constitute a creator, an activist, an identity seeker, a signifier of identity or social distinction etc. Acknowledging social and cultural qualities in consumption helped to extend our understanding of consumption beyond the restricting feature of market exchange, but it also generated certain complexities – a consequence that isn't uncommon when broadening (or stretching-out) concepts.

One example is given by Graeber (2011), who illustrates how an abandonment of the requirement of purchasing creates a tendency (for scholars) to incorporate under the term consumption almost any act that is not included in the category of production. He cautions

Above all, I think we should be suspicious about importing the political economy habit of seeing society as divided into two spheres, one of production and one of consumption, into cultural analysis in the first place. Doing so almost inevitably forces us to push almost all forms of nonalienated production into the category of consumption or even “consumer behaviour” (p. 501)

Graeber's point above describes one of the challenges we may face in our attempt to intersect the cultural and the economic dimensions when theorising about society. It doesn't only raise questions on the extent to which we feel comfortable in considering production outside the market economy as not 'real' production; perhaps most importantly, Graeber's reminder that this dichotomy of consumption and production is only one way to see society, invites all of us to carefully evaluate the significance that we wish to assign to consumption (and production) in the articulation of who we are and how we construct our social lives.

Another example of complexity accompanying attempts to highlight a cultural dimension of consumption is that illustrated in Warde's (2005) understanding of consumption as

a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information, or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion. (p. 137)

In the above we see that appropriation, appreciation and discretion are for Warde the defining features for conceptualising consumption, leading to a view of consumption as “*not itself a practice but, rather, a moment in almost every practice*” (Warde, 2005, p. 137). Here we see a conceptualisation of consumption as a notion almost completely ‘liberated’ from its economic meaning.

Miles (1998, p. 3), proposes to use the term ‘consumption’ as the plain act of purchase, and applies the term ‘consumerism’ to represent the “*cultural expression and manifestation*” (Miles, 1998, p. 4) of such an act. Hence, in essence, by distinguishing between these two terms he attempts to draw a line between an economical act (consumption) and a cultural signifier of a broader and reflexive ‘enterprise’ (consumerism) which ultimately constitutes a ‘way of life’ (Miles, 1998, p. 4). However, this third concept – consumerism – also incorporates a degree of ambiguity.

Sometimes consumerism is portrayed as synonymous to over-consumption, a growing and uncontrolled passion for material things, or – as Gabriel and Lang (2006) put it – a life that is “*excessively preoccupied with consumption*” (p. 3). Provided that something like that is considered ‘bad’, consumerism gains a negative connotation. In fact, Gabriel and Lang (2006, p. 8) identify the following five variants on the meaning of consumerism as:

- a. A moral doctrine in developed countries to represent the essence of good life. Here consumerism is the vehicle to freedom, power and happiness. It reflects the ability to choose, acquire, use and enjoy material objects and experiences.
- b. An ideology of conspicuous consumption. Here, in addition to defining the meaning of life, consumption has displaced religion, work and politics as the mechanism by which social and status distinctions may be established.
- c. An economic ideology for global development promoting capitalist accumulation in a global system dominated by transnational corporations.
- d. A political ideology in the form of privatisation of previously state regulated industries. This was formerly supported by the political right, but is increasingly embraced now across the political spectrum.

e. A social movement seeking to promote and protect the rights of consumers.

The above is illustrative of the way the notion of consumption (through its different meanings of consumerism) has today infiltrated the cultural, political and social realms, and the way that the very meaning of consumption consequently, comes to signify a lot more than mere destruction, satisfaction of needs, or even purchasing. Consequently, this multifaceted meaning provides an indication of the challenges I faced in my attempt to perceive 'consumption' in its complexity. The most interesting remark to be made here, however, is that, as an "-ism", the concept of consumerism encourages us to consider the ideological facet of consumption (Mullins, 2007) particularly since, in comparison to liberalism and conservatism, it is 'consumer-ism' that seems to have won the 20th century and continues to dominate the 21st century (Scott, 2010).

While it is of course significant to view consumerism's (perhaps most seductive) side - in the way Matthew Hilton (2003) saw it, i.e. as an organised social and political movement which reflects the self-organisation and political campaigning of ordinary consumers, we should not overlook that consumption "*as a set of social, cultural and economic practices, together with the associated ideology of consumerism, has served to legitimise capitalism in the eyes of millions of ordinary people*" (Bocock, 1993, p. 2). To this, it could be added that consumerism still serves to legitimate capitalism and the inequalities it produces. In his recent paper titled "Towards a consumerist critique of capitalism: A socialist defence of consumer culture", Varul (2013) suggests that consumerism need not necessarily be connected with a capitalistic state of affairs. He actually defends consumerism as capable of providing freedom for individuals and highlights the need for alternatives to contemporary capitalist arrangements: "*Capitalism is eating up the liberty that it produces in the form of consumerism. If we want to protect the human progress culturally instituted in the sphere of consumption, we need to think about alternatives to capitalism*" (p. 309). This highlights the usefulness in distinguishing between the act of consumption (as a concept closely related to the idea of destruction) and the context, or the framework, within which this act is performed. In this sense, if we are to view consumption as more than an act of destruction, we should begin treating consumption "*as an ideology to be investigated*" (Graeber, 2011, p. 502). In light of this, we may revisit our understanding of 'consumption' as a tautology of 'purchasing' so as to include modes of consumption

that are not recognized under a strict economic ideology; for example consumption that may not be commodified, such as consuming vegetables from our own garden.

To sum up, through a brief examination of the meanings of three interconnected terms (consume, consumption and consumerism) it became evident that ‘consumption’ has evolved thought time to signify much more than the act of using-up goods. An understanding of consumption as beyond the mere act of purchasing furthers our insight to incorporate the cultural and social qualities of this concept, even though such understanding is not unchallenged. Nonetheless, it is exactly such understanding that helps reveal the ideological baggage that the notion of consumption carries with it and thus, allows for a critical reflection upon the political and economical arrangements of contemporary society. The above discussion also revealed some of the complexities inherent with conceptualising and using these terms. In practical terms, the multiple meanings and perspectives on ‘consumption’ within academic literature are invaluable for gaining a deeper understanding, but they can also complicate and mislead. Through the literature review in this chapter, these complexities will be revisited and explored further where appropriate.

2.3 Consumer society and consumer culture

The next section offers a brief discussion on the historical development of what is often referred to as ‘consumer society’, followed by an examination of the concept of ‘consumer culture’. In essence, it deals with two questions: how did we become ‘consumers’ in the first place, and what are the relevant consequences for the contemporary individual? Stearns (2001) reminds us that we certainly weren’t born consumers (let alone, ‘ethical’ consumers), consumerism is not simply natural but rather something to be examined: “*people come to grow up with consumerism from infancy; they assume its logic and normalcy*” (p. 138). Thus, answering such questions is unarguably the first step in getting closer to an understanding of the context within which today’s phenomenon of ethical consumption unfolds.

The birth and rise of consumer societies and their associated concept of ‘consumer culture’ appear to be lively areas of academic investigation. An exhaustive overview of

literature, however, would shift the focus away from ethical consumerism which is the topic of this study. This section, thus, limits itself to the introduction of key aspects so as to facilitate a basic understanding of the historical development of the so-called consumer societies and consumer culture. A further discussion on the shift from an early modern to 'late' or 'post' modern understandings of contemporary society and consumption is then offered, followed by a commentary on the consequences of the three pillars of 'reflexivity, risk and liberalism' in understanding the role and potential of contemporary consumption. The theoretical perspectives presented here lay the foundations for this study's theoretical framework.

2.3.1 The emergence of consumer societies

It is not rare for people to use the epithet 'consumer' in order to characterize contemporary (predominately western and economically developed) societies. According to Sassatelli (2007), a consumer society is a society where "*daily desires are satisfied through the acquisition and use of 'commodities', goods which are produced for exchange and are on sale on the market*" (p. 2). Products and services are being designed for a consumer public and people are increasingly being viewed (and even view themselves) as 'consumers'. Of course, such a society did not appear overnight; it actually is the result of a long-term historical process (Benson, 1994).

Tracing back the origins of consumer societies is not an easy task. In fact, there seem to be varying views among scholars with respect to the exact chronology of the emergence of such societies; in part, this seems to be due to the characteristics that each scholar wishes to focus upon when defining a consumer society. Scholars initially perceived consumer societies as a 'sudden and mechanical reaction' to the industrial revolution, a point in time when mass-produced goods gradually became available to all social classes (Sassatelli, 2007). The emergence of adaptable markets, large production lines, and the rise of advertising, capitalism and industrialization - according to this view - prepared the ground for consumer societies to develop sometime around the twentieth century.

Since the 1980's, however, consumer societies have been perceived as predating the industrial revolution (Stearns, 2001); they were no longer the result, but an active

participant in the development of the capitalist system – what Sassatelli (2007) terms as an ‘anti-productivist vision’. Under such theorisations, scholars view the emergence of consumer societies as early as the sixteenth century in Elizabethan England (McCracken, 1988; Slater, 1997), seventeenth century in Holland (De Vries, 1975) and France (Braudel, 1974), as well as eighteenth century in England (McKendrick, 1982; Campbell, 1987). Whatever the precise boundary line between preparatory steps and flowering, consumer societies are identifiable by the mid-eighteenth century in Britain, France, the Low Countries and parts of Germany and Italy (Stearns, 2001). At that time, these regions had a relatively developed commercial economy and their access to global products was expanding (Stearns, 2001, p. 15). Although each of those societies had their own special idiosyncrasy, they all shared some common characteristics, which enable theorists to conceive a new type of society; a society built upon ‘consumerism’.

One shared aspect of these societies is the proliferation of shops and new marketing methods to attract customers. By the late seventeenth century, we find circuses travelling all around Europe, new consumption spaces such as coffee houses and restaurants being established, and the clothing industry booming (Stearns, 2001). A redefinition of needs and desires also became apparent; the list of items that people considered as necessities was beginning to expand. Stearns (2001) comments that during the French Revolution when Parisian workers insisted that they be provided with ‘*goods of prime necessity*’ (p. 20), what they were looking for was sugar, soap, coffee and candles - the first three of which would have seemed clear luxuries a century before.

In the eighteenth century, fashion also came into play; its requirement of having to replace consumer goods over and over again, turned consumption into a more frequent and demanding activity (Corrigan, 1997). Pottery manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood is often quoted as one of the first entrepreneurs who utilized new marketing techniques as a way to fit his products into the lifestyle of the aristocrats (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, 1982). Through observation of social patterns in clothing, Wedgwood is depicted to have noticed that tastes and preferences were somehow handed down, from the aristocrats to the middle class and from there, to the lower classes. He, thus, turned his attention to those he considered as ‘sponsors’ of his pottery, meaning the monarchy, the nobles and the art connoisseurs who at that time were the leaders of fashion (McKendrick, 1960, p. 410). Once his goods were accepted and purchased by the

aristocrats, it was only a matter of time until other groups in the population would want to acquire them as well. Wedgewood strategic marketing became an example for many other producers and soon a wide variety of products obeyed the demands of fashion (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, 1982). During the eighteenth century consumption was starting to evolve into an activity that people from an increasing number of social groups would engage with more frequently, in more locations and in search of new goods.

2.3.2 The rise of consumer societies

The nineteenth century saw further encouragement of consumption through intense manipulative advertising and the offering of credit (Stearns, 2001). Perhaps the landmark of this period with regards to consumption was the creation of a new commercial institution – the department store. Gradually, smaller family run shops began to give way to larger scale shops, and new venues of consumption, the department store and catalogue, were established (Stearns, 2001). These new ‘cathedrals of consumption’ had large, brightly lit windows and sophisticated advertising and sales promotions (Walsh, 1999).

An interesting symptom – as well as evidence (Stearns, 2001) – of the intensification of consumerism of that period is to be found in the nature of consumer theft and in particular, in the emergence of ‘kleptomania’ as a diagnostic tool and concept. Although shoplifting pre-dates the department store, it was this type of store that seems to have provided the space within which the invention of a ‘new’ psychiatric condition that was named kleptomania developed (Abelson, 1989). O’Brien (1983) explored the development of this concept through the examination of individual case studies of such ‘mania’ found in psychiatric and forensic literature of the nineteenth century France. In her work, she illustrated how kleptomania as a new type of consumer theft represented changing social patterns and a social critique of bourgeois values of the time. Other social aspects associated with the development of the concept of kleptomania are found in Abelson’s (1989) work. Abelson (1989) argues that kleptomania was invented as a woman-only condition and, moreover, a concept that was allowed to be attached only to

women in the middle classes; it was middle class women that suffered from kleptomania, the working class women were merely thieves. Through the concept of kleptomania we also find critiques on consumerism as responsible for the transformation of ‘wants’ into ‘needs’. For example, an English psychiatrist of that period, John Charles Bucknill, saw the concept of ‘need’ being as distorted to such an extent, that it encouraged wealthy women to steal: “*The really poor steal because they want bread; the relatively poor are tempted to steal because they desire the possession of that which seems, to a mind trained in a bad school, as essential as bread itself*” (quoted in Whitlock, 1999, p. 414).

Another interesting aspect of the nineteenth century consumerism deals with the second-hand retailing which, up to that point, accommodated – what Lemire (1988) termed as – a ‘second tier demand’. Lemire (1988) argues that demand in Britain during the pre-industrial and early industrial period had two distinctive layers:

At the top was the open and apparent consumer demand expressed by the middle and upper ranks through acquisition of new furnishings, clothing, tableware, and the hundreds of miscellaneous items manufactured in growing volumes in the workshops of Britain. Beneath this lay the most numerous of Britain's families [...] [who] did not have as much to spend, and they were limited in the range of new articles that they could afford. But within Britain there existed a well-established, organized system of redistribution, which reflected the demand of the men and women in more straitened circumstances, and which in turn developed to meet the needs of this portion of the population. (p. 2-3)

Practices of minimising waste and the re-using of durable goods actually have a long history - see for example Davis’ (2010) account of second-hand goods in late medieval England and Woodward’s (1985) account of re-cycling clothing, building materials and buildings, metal and paper in pre-industrial Britain. There is evidence that suggests that although second-hand retailing in the nineteenth century did not cater only for the lower classes, most of it did (Lemire, 1988). Nonetheless, Lemire (1988) argues that, at least in terms of apparel, by the 1870’s the used-clothing trade had ‘visibly decayed’; second hand dealers who catered for this less ‘visible’ demand were not able to compete against fashionable clothing that was readily and cheaply available. This gradual marginalization of the second-hand trade resulted in a change of attitude toward the purchase of used apparel: second hand goods came to hold a stigma (Lemire, 1988). Thus, demand which was until that time was satisfied through second-hand retailing was beginning to merge

with demand for more new and affordable goods, thus preparing the ground for the development of mass production.

As suggested earlier, scholars are increasingly abandoning the idea that the industrial revolution was responsible for the birth of the consumer society. Nonetheless, industrialisation did play a significant role in the flourishing and transformation of such a society, mainly through the ability to offer an ever-increasing number of affordable consumer goods. Fordism, a term coined to Antonio Gramsci (Antonio and Bonanno, 2000) encapsulates a period of social and economic transformation that appeared in the beginning of 20th century and was inspired by Henry Ford, an American industrialist who is generally accredited as the pioneer of the system of mass production (Miles, 1998).

The Ford Motor Company accelerated mass production and consumption through the introduction of car assembly lines and automation. Gramsci held that Fordists improved wages, provided a more stable employment, and expanded the state's role in protecting worker well-being; he suggested, however, that the logic behind this strategy was actually “*to regulate workers by consent as well as by coercion*” (Antonio and Bonanno, 2000, p. 35). Whatever the motivation behind it, the result was to achieve a reduction in the cost of production of motor vehicles and, thus, transform “*a luxury toy into the element of a new mode of mass transport*” (Simon Clarke, 1992, p. 21). By providing affordable products, workers were encouraged to be consumers of the very goods they were producing (Miles, 1998). Moreover, the standardisation of components allowed the assembling of a wide variety of products without losing the benefits of mass production, making possible an enormous diversification of mass consumption (Clarke, 1990). Offering goods that were both affordable and varied, mass production signalled a new era for mass consumption.

The discussion so far provided a brief overview of the historical development of what is termed ‘consumer society’, a new type of society that both emerged from and generated continuous changes in social and economic structures, values and attitudes. It touched upon certain attributes, which may characterize a consumer society, but it is far from being complete. In fact, listing the characteristics of a ‘consumer society’, is perhaps impossible; as Sassatelli (2007) suggests, “*to understand what characterizes today’s consumer society, one has to keep in mind a series of phenomena which have developed over a long period of time at*

different speeds and in different places” (p. 10). In their attempts to address consumer society, it is not rare for scholars to emphasise certain attributes according to their disciplinary interests. Benson (1996) for example, highlights the different perspectives that scientists have when embracing one economic paradigm and those embracing one closer to social science:

Economists and economic historians tend to define such a society as one whose economy is directed by the purchasing decisions of millions upon millions of individual consumers, and/or one in which a certain proportion of GNP (gross national product – the value of all the goods or services produced in the economy) is devoted to individual consumption.[...] On the other hand, most social historians seem to believe that a consumer society is one in which there is a desire for products which are new, exciting and fashionable, one in which choice and credit are readily available, and social value is assessed in terms of purchasing power and material possessions (p. 7)

It becomes evident in Benson’s account, that any attempt to prescribe any finite number of characteristics to the so called ‘consumer society’ is challenging. Moreover, Benson (1996) argued that there are so many inherent contradictions in all attempts to define concrete measurable attributes, that it is perhaps unfruitful to use such an epithet to define societies. ‘International consumerism’, after all, is not ‘a uniform product’ (Stearns, 2001, p. 137). Nonetheless, the concept of ‘consumer society’ can offer insights into the context within which ethical consumption develops.

In the beginning of this discussion, I used Sassatelli’s (2007) definition of a consumer society as a society where daily desires are satisfied through the acquisition and use of commodities. This definition perhaps applies better to the current state of affairs and opens up questions about the nature of daily desires (e.g. how are they formed?) and the extent to which they are satisfied through the acquisition and use of ‘commodities’. This literature review is connected to a particular study and the aim of this discussion was to provide a brief outline of the historical development of this type of society that has been called ‘consumer society’. To that end, my aim is not to explore whether a particular country, deserves to be termed a consumer society (e.g. as Britain in Benson’s work), but to draw a framework, which identifies the context of this study as a society where consumerism is embedded.

In the following section, I will attempt a closer look at contemporary consumer societies and the implications for the individual today, through an exploration of the concept of ‘consumer culture’.

2.3.3 Consumer culture

Consumption is perceived nowadays as core ingredient in the experiencing of life itself. It seems that we are increasingly living under conditions where we are both forced and inspired to act as consumers. To capture this central role of consumption in contemporary societies, scholars often use the term ‘consumer culture’.

It was in the 1980’s, as discussed earlier in the literature, that academic thought experienced a general shift from production-focused to consumption-focused accounts of social life and the world. This shift provided new terrains of investigation on the social and cultural dimensions of consumption, and incorporated perspectives from a variety of disciplines. Ten years ago, Arnould and Thomson (2005) put forward the umbrella term ‘consumer culture theory’ in order to outline the body of consumer culture literature relevant to a broad constituency of social science, public policy and business disciplines. Consumer culture theory, they explain, is “*not a unified, grand theory [but] a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meaning*” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 868). In other words, it is an attempt to group together or demarcate – but not necessarily merge or combine – theories that address the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption.

For Lury (2011) consumer culture is a type of material culture, which has emerged within Euro-American societies in the second half of the twentieth century. Seen from this perspective, consumer culture highlights the relationships between persons and objects, as well as the ways people relate with each other socially through the mediation of things. In Slater’s (1997) view, consumer culture implies that “*in the modern world, core social practices and cultural values, ideas, aspirations and identities are defined and oriented in relation to consumption rather than to other social dimensions such as work or citizenship, religious cosmology or military role*” (p. 24). The notion of consumer culture appears to broaden the role of

consumption; it is not merely a medium to fulfil needs, it also has the ability to convey (and is embedded within) cultural symbols and social structures. The richness of this perspective when considering consumption is so evident that McCracken (1988), for example, views consumption as a “*thoroughly cultural phenomenon*” (p. xi). Echoing Slater (1997), it is perhaps important here to clarify that “in talking of modern society as a consumer culture, people are not referring simply to a particular pattern of needs and objects – a particular consumption culture – but *a culture of consumption*” (italics in original, p. 24)

In contrast to the term consumer society which somehow appears to emphasise aspects of structure, the term consumer culture denotes interest in the norms, meanings and values associated with a society that is dominated by consuming commodities, thus making the connection between historical processes and the individual’s learned behaviour patterns and perceptions more visible. This is perhaps reflected in what Miles (1998) describes as a shift from a ‘macro-structural’ to a ‘macro-cultural’ perspective in the sociology of consumption.

In consumer culture as a field of study, Featherstone (2007, p. 13) identifies three major perspectives. The first perspective, he suggests, “*emphasizes the expansion of capitalist commodity production leading to the deployment of leisure and consumption activities in contemporary western societies*” (p. 13). Under this perspective we may include the economic and liberal accounts of consumption as promising individual freedom and equality, as well as its critique of ideological manipulation as shaped by critical theory of the Frankfurt school. This is illustrated in, for example in Baudrillard’s (1998) argument that: “*The same process of rationalization of productive forces which took place in the nineteenth century in the sector of production reaches its culmination in the twentieth in that of consumption. The industrial system, having socialized the masses as labour power, had much further to go to complete its own project [s’accomplir] and socialize them (that is, control them) as consumption power. The small savers or anarchic consumers of the pre-war age, who were free to consume or not, no longer have any place in this system*” (p. 81-2).

The second perspective, which Featherstone identifies as more sociological one, underlines the “*satisfaction derived from goods related to their socially constructed meanings*” (2007, p. 13). Consumption, as the use of goods and experiences, is responsible here for generating both social bonds as well as distinctions. Under this perspective we may include for example, Veblen’s work on conspicuous leisure and conspicuous

consumption (1949), Miller's 'theory of shopping' (1998), Bourdieu's (1984) and Douglas and Isherwood's (1979) work on consumption as the marker of social distinctions but also as the medium for communication.

As a third perspective of consumer culture, Featherstone (2007) considers consumption as a source of fantasy and pleasure "*celebrated in consumer cultural imagery and particular sites of consumption such as malls which generate direct bodily excitement and aesthetic pleasures*" (p. 13). Here Featherstone (2007) quotes the work of Walter Benjamin to note "*the utopian or positive moment in the mass-produced consumer commodities which liberated creativity from art and allowed it to migrate into the multiplicity of mass-produced everyday objects*" (p. 24). Similarly, recent work from Soper (2008) suggests the concept of 'alternative hedonism' and its potential for the formation of an anti-consumerist, but nonetheless hedonistic, aesthetic.

Featherstone's categorisation presented here is indicative of the diverse theoretical perspectives we may apply when examining consumption. In a similar manner, Arnould and Thompson (2005) proposed a categorisation based on research domains. One of the four major research domains they identify (and the closest to this study's interest) deals with identities – what they call Consumer Identity Projects. In brief, research is concerned here with "*the relationship between consumers' identity projects and the structuring influence of the marketplace*" (p. 871). To put it in Sassatelli's (2011) words: "*Consumer culture is deeply implicated in the fabrication of identities: it produces consumers and does so in a variety of ways*" (p. 236).

The discussion so far has offered an overview of the historical development of consumer societies and commented on the notion of 'consumer culture' as a field of investigation that incorporates diverse theoretical and research perspectives under the same aim: to reveal the social and cultural dimensions of consumption. The next section offers an overview of three conditions that characterise contemporary society (reflexivity, risk, and liberalism). That section and the one following it, discuss the shaping of consumption as a form of political engagement and completes the setting up of the base theoretical foundations and the context within which ethical consumption is situated. From there onwards, the discussion will focus on the research topic, which is 'ethical' consumers and consumption.

2.3.4 Contemporary society: reflexivity, risk and liberalism

Attempts to describe contemporary societies and the associated consumer culture often incorporate discussion on the aspect of modernity. 'Modernity' usually refers to a time period in Western history starting from the late sixteenth century up to the present, and 'modernism' refers to the philosophical and sociocultural ideas and conditions marking that period (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Some of the conditions that characterise modernity according to Firat and Venkatesh (1995) are: the rule of reason and the establishment of rational order, the emergence of the cognitive subject, the rise of science and an emphasis on material progress through the application of scientific technologies, the emergence of industrial capitalism, and the separation of the sphere of production which is institutionally controlled and public, from the sphere of consumption, which is domestic and private (p. 240).

Science, rationalism and technology were traditionally perceived as the driving forces behind interpretations of the modern individual and society as a whole. This, however, is far from the way theorists view conditions of contemporary societies, and consequently, aspects of contemporary consumption and culture. The notion of 'postmodernity', a concept popularised by Lyotard – in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) – triggered discussions over the differences between early modern and contemporary societies. The aspect of discontinuity, the idea that modern social institutions are unique and distinct from all types of traditional order (Giddens, 1991), seems to be a central point of debate among scholars. A consensus on whether contemporary society could be characterized as postmodern or not has not been reached, partly because of the different interpretations on what constitutes modernity, and consequently, postmodernity. Featherstone noted that, when we try to understand whether we have moved into a state of capitalism, industrialization, or modernity "*we must also face the possibility that it is not the 'reality' which has changed, but our perception of it*" (2007, p. ix). It is perhaps not as important to find a consensus on a label, as it is to explore and advance our understanding of the transformation, if any, of our perception on 'reality'.

Delanty (2000) suggests that it is better to perceive modernity and postmodernity as continuous phases through the idea of a developmental logic; for him, the discussion on

modernity and postmodernity reflects “*a movement from a concern with scepticism (in the domain of knowledge) in the pre modern era, to one of discursivity (in the domain of power) in the modern period, to a preoccupation with reflexivity (in the domain of self) in the postmodern era*” (p. xii). For sociologists Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, the notion of reflexivity is significant for understanding contemporary life - although they both reject the label of postmodernism, and instead propose the notions of risk society (Beck, 1992) and late or high modernity (Giddens, 2013) respectively to describe the conditions of contemporary societies.

‘Reflexivity’ in modern social life describes, for Giddens (1991), a condition where “*social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character*” (p. 38). Here, reflexivity is viewed both as a *cognitive* and *aesthetic* process to describe the way social agents are able to monitor (and organise) their own individual life-narratives, as well as to interpret social practices, and how society itself – via social science – is capable of self-constituting (Lash and Urry, 1994, p. 6). We see that this process of self-reflection is not only apparent in the life of the contemporary individual but in society as a whole. This reflexivity is thought to be applied to the extent of including “*reflection upon the nature of reflection itself*” (Giddens, 1991, p. 39).

The emergence of new types of high consequence risks goes hand in hand with the development of such reflexivity. Although it may be argued that the overall riskiness of certain areas and modes of life has been reduced, ‘new risk parameters’ largely or completely unknown to previous eras have now emerged (Giddens, 2013). According to Giddens (2013), these parameters include high-consequence risks deriving from the globalised character of the social systems of modernity. Giddens (2013), thus, views the late modern world as “*apocalyptic, not because it is inevitably heading towards calamity, but because it introduces risks which previous generations have not had to face*” (p. 4).

It is in this sense that Beck understood contemporary society as a ‘risk society’; a society that is no longer about class politics but rather socially manufactured risk and risk management: “the driving force in the class society can be summarised in the phrase *I am hungry!* The driving force in the risk society can be summarised in the phrase *I am afraid!*” (italics in original, Beck, 1992, p. 49). Beck argued that a shift in the perception of risk has occurred; risk in early modernity was something that was inflicted on society by

external forces (such as natural hazards), while in late modern era risks are perceived as being produced by society itself, in this sense they are manufactured risks:

risk society is characterized essentially by a lack: the impossibility of an external attribution of hazards. In other words, risks depend on decisions, they are industrially produced and in this sense politically reflexive (Beck, 1992, p. 183)

Inequalities in terms of wealth and income still exist; the new risks, however, for Beck, such as environmental hazards, cut across traditional inequalities. Moreover, he argues, the flexibilisation of the labour market, globalisation, and the deterioration of the welfare state have dissolved the bonds of collective experience; in contemporary western society every day experience of risk has become ‘individualized’ (Beck, 1992). What this means is that social actors are increasingly confronting risks as individuals and not, for example, as members of a collective. This individualisation of the social actor in contemporary society is illustrated by Rose (2001) who, commenting on the decline of social insurance in the UK, argued that the state is shifting responsibility to the individual:

Every citizen must now become an active partner in the drive for health, accepting their responsibility for securing their own well-being. Organisations and communities are also urged to take up active role in securing the health and well-being of their employees and members. This new ‘will to health’ is increasingly capitalized by enterprises ranging from the pharmaceutical companies to food retailers. (Rose, 2001, p. 6)

It is exactly this shift from collective to individual responsibility that welcomes, promotes and sustains the proliferation of private commercial enterprises to fill the gap of providing security to the contemporary individual. Rose (1999) argued that at a stage of ‘advance liberalism’, “*the self-interest of the economic subject and the patriotic duty of the citizen are no longer in conflict; it now appears that one can best fulfil one’s obligations to one’s nation by most effectively pursuing the enhancement of the economic well-being of oneself, one’s family, one’s firm, business or organization*” (p. 145). The responsibility of an individual’s security and well-being and that of their family is no longer the responsibility of a state, but a project of each individual to articulate in the market. In this way, we see the emergence of an “*industry of risk, seeking out and creating markets for products in the interest of its own profit*” (Rose, 1999, p. 159). The consequence of this, in Rose’s (1999) view, is a ‘virtually endless spiral of amplification of risk’, or a ‘culture of risk’ that is “*characterized by uncertainty,*

plurality and anxiety, and is thus continually open to the construction of new problems and the marketing of new solutions?” (p. 159).

2.3.5 The shaping of contemporary consumption as a new form of political participation

Giddens (2013) suggests that, in this stage of high modernity, “*for the first time in history, ‘self’ and ‘society’ are interrelated in a global milieu*” (p. 32). Perhaps the most distinctive feature of our times is that “the self becomes a *reflexive project*” (italics in original, Giddens, 2013, p. 32). It is the individual’s task to explore and construct a new sense of self as part of a reflexive process connecting personal and social change. Consumption seems to have become a significant tool for the construction of this new self. With contemporary societies engaging their members “*primarily as consumers*” (Bauman, 1998, p. 24), consumer identities are being constructed and promoted as major social identities (Sassatelli, 2011, p. 236).

Living within an economic system of advanced capitalism, we are increasingly *required* to act as consumers. More than twenty years ago, Bauman (1990) commented on the way we have become dependent on technology, developing new types of need: “*These new technological objects (for example, television) did not replace old ways of doing things; they induced us to do things we never did before, and made us feel unhappy if we did not do them*” (Bauman 1990, p. 199). I would add that today, we are also increasingly required to keep up with new technological advances in our daily life, e.g. to own a credit card so that we can do our shopping, to own a mobile phone to be able to have business calls, to own a computer and have access to the internet to pay our council tax bill, etc. Here we see the dark side of contemporary consumer culture, as a trap; we have trapped ourselves in a world of consumerism that we ourselves have created. There is also, however, as presented earlier, a celebratory side; which views consumption as the source of fantasy and pleasure (Featherstone, 2007).

Living within a political arrangement of advanced liberalism, we are once more forced to act as consumers. In the previous section, we presented Rose’s (1999) illustration of how, with regards to the welfare state, citizens are being transformed into consumers.

This was an example of how consumerism has penetrated once strictly political territories. Under such conditions, however, there appears also an emancipatory discourse of consumerism which views consumption as an extra political tool that can help us organize our society and lives.

Life decisions, including those of consumption, are thought to signify more than choice over private matters; they are entering the realm of public debate, and thus politics. Giddens (1994) argued for the increasing centrality of what he called 'life politics' to both formal and less orthodox domains of the political order. He defined life politics as

...a politics, not of life chances, but of life style. It concerns disputes and struggles about how (as individuals and as collective humanity) we should live in a world where what used to be fixed either by nature or tradition is now subject to human decisions (1994, p. 14-15).

It is not only the development of political issues on the organisation of society, but also of ethics, "how we should live", that becomes in contemporary society recognised as subject to human assessment. And for Giddens, (1991), this is achieved through the process of self-actualisation in post-traditional concepts. Consumption, as a major practice within everyday life, becomes politicized. Here, however, it is not just the purchasing of a good or service that enables this aspect to become possible; to acquire a political essence, everyday consumption needs to be thought of in its broader aspect which includes the making of decisions, reflecting upon, making plans or setting up moral principles.

In a similar manner, Beck talked about 'subpolitics', a form of politics that is "*outside and beyond the representative institutions of the political system of nation-states*" (Beck, 1996, p. 18). Here, we see areas of concern that develop outside the formal political system, and for which – in contrast to traditionally defined politics – there is no need for legitimization by way of democratic procedures (Holzer and Sørensen, 2003). The individualisation of the social actor in contemporary society fits perfectly with a conceptualization of subpolitics as "*small-scale, often individual decisions that either have a direct political frame of reference or achieve political significance by way of their aggregation*" (Holzer and Sørensen, 2003, p. 80). Advancing Beck's theory on subpolitics, Holzer and Sørensen (2001), proposed a distinction to be made between what they called 'active' and 'passive' subpolitics; the former referring to non-formal – i.e. non-institutionalised – forms of politics where politics is the goal of the actions (e.g. activity of NGOs), and the latter referring to non-

political forces that influence our common living conditions in an indirect and accidental way – that is as a ‘side-effect’. This focus on intention seems useful for understanding consumption as a tool for practicing politics, as it allows us to ascribe either an active or a passive character to consumer decisions. To be able to distinguish amongst these two, however, consumption is again not to be simply understood by strictly economic terms of purchasing, but requires a deeper understanding of what motivates and influences those decisions.

The discussion until now commented on the restraining as well as the more emancipatory sides of contemporary consumption; the commercialization of everyday life and traditional politics, and at the same time the opening up of opportunities for the politicization of consumption under new forms of non-traditional politics. To be able to conceive this role for ‘consumption’, it becomes necessary that we move beyond the economic moment of transaction and exchange. In practical terms however, this notion of ‘consumption’ doesn’t really escape the system of the market. Under the current economic and political arrangements of western societies, social actors are increasingly referred to as consumers (Sassatelli, 2011, p. 240); nonetheless, in order to consume you have to participate in monetary exchange, you have to have economic capital to start with – “ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι, μηδὲν δ’ οὐκ ἔστιν” (there are no origins from nothing) ancient Greek philosopher Parmenidis of Elea once said (Mourelatos, 1981). This is perhaps the most challenging part: seeing ‘consumption’ as ‘naturally’ tied up with its economic equivalent, ‘purchase’. And here perhaps is where ‘consumption=purchase’ as a form of practicing (sub)politics may be promising more than it can offer.

Giddens (2013) warned that “modernity, one should not forget, produces *difference, exclusion and marginalization*” (italics in original, p. 6). In the same manner, Bauman (1998) declared that to lead a ‘normal’ life is to be a consumer and people who, for example, do not work cannot participate to the same degree in such a society. Instead they are defined as “*first and foremost as blemished, defective, faulty and deficient – in other words, inadequate consumers*” (p. 38). In his notion of life politics, ‘as politics of life style’, Giddens (2013) elaborated how his concept can include the marginalized:

‘Lifestyle’ refers also to decisions taken and courses of action followed under conditions of severe material constraint; such lifestyle patterns may sometimes also involve the more or less deliberate rejection of more widely diffused forms of behaviour and consumption. (p. 6)

But these ‘deliberate rejections of more widely diffused forms of behaviour and consumption’, do have consequences for the individual. In his *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, Bauman (1998) argues that in contemporary consumer society the lifestyle of the poorer people has actually become ‘criminalized’. Moreover, individuals, who do not have adequate economic capital, are not only inadequate as consumers, but they are also ‘*dispossessed*’ - they are deprived of the freedom that ‘normal’ consumers are promised (Bauman, 1998).

Firat and Venkatesh (1995) pose an interesting question: Can consumption take place without the perennial presence of the market? Acknowledging that much consumption does take place outside the market system, they elaborate: “*The modernist approach that places consumption in opposition to production has practically ignored consumption except as part of the logic of the market. As long as the consumer is viewed as being located solely within the market, the liberatory potential of the consumer cannot be fully realized*” (p. 258). The extent to which we, as scholars, are willing to include non-commodified consumption in our theorizations of contemporary consumerism remains to be seen.

To summarise; the structural economic and political arrangements of advanced-capitalism and advanced-liberalism are contributing to the shaping of a culture of consumption as *the prime space* within which individuals are enabled (required, empowered and allowed) to communicate aesthetic, social and political preferences, but most importantly to explore and construct their own selves (as a reflexive project). It thus becomes apparent how understandings of consumerism can range from a promising social movement to a mere reproduction of a hegemonic economic and political ideology. It is within this broad framework that the ethical consumption phenomenon is articulated; for example, as a project of developing a moral and political self through the practicing of consumerism that aims to achieve some type of social, economic and/or political change. It is now time to look closer at the phenomenon of ethical consumption and narrow down the discussion so as to begin formulating the research aims.

PART II

2.4 Conceptualising ethical and political consumption

Ethical consumption is a relatively new concept, and as such it represents an area of study; which offers plenty of possibilities for a fascinating and challenging contribution to knowledge. Moreover, the nature of the concept itself makes it attractive for scholars working in various disciplines from within humanities and social sciences, including marketing, sociology, geography, history and political science. Chapter 1 (section 1.1) already offered an introductory discussion of ethical consumption, its development as a marketing category and its connection with the concept of political consumption. Drawing from the literature on ethical and political consumption, this section offers a further description of the concept of ethical consumerism as understood through the practices, the areas of conflict, and the goals and adversaries of the particular phenomenon. The ‘individual’ and the ‘collective’ aspects of ethical consumption are also presented and analysed here. Through this review, certain theoretical inconsistencies stemming from the way ethical and political consumerism has been conceptualised hitherto are identified. These are summarised and discussed briefly at the end of this section.

2.4.1 Practices

While, ethical consumption seems to be often equated to sales of ‘ethically’ marketed products and services, the practice of ethical consumption actually involves a diverse set of *praxis* (acts) which go beyond just the purchasing of particular goods. For more than a decade, the Co-operative Bank reports on ethical consumerism have been measuring ten different ‘indicators’, which are thought to be relevant to ethical consumption. Table 2-1 presents these ten indicators and their score for the years 2000, 2010, 2011 and 2012:

Table 2-1

Indicators and their score for the years 2000, 2010, 2011 and 2012

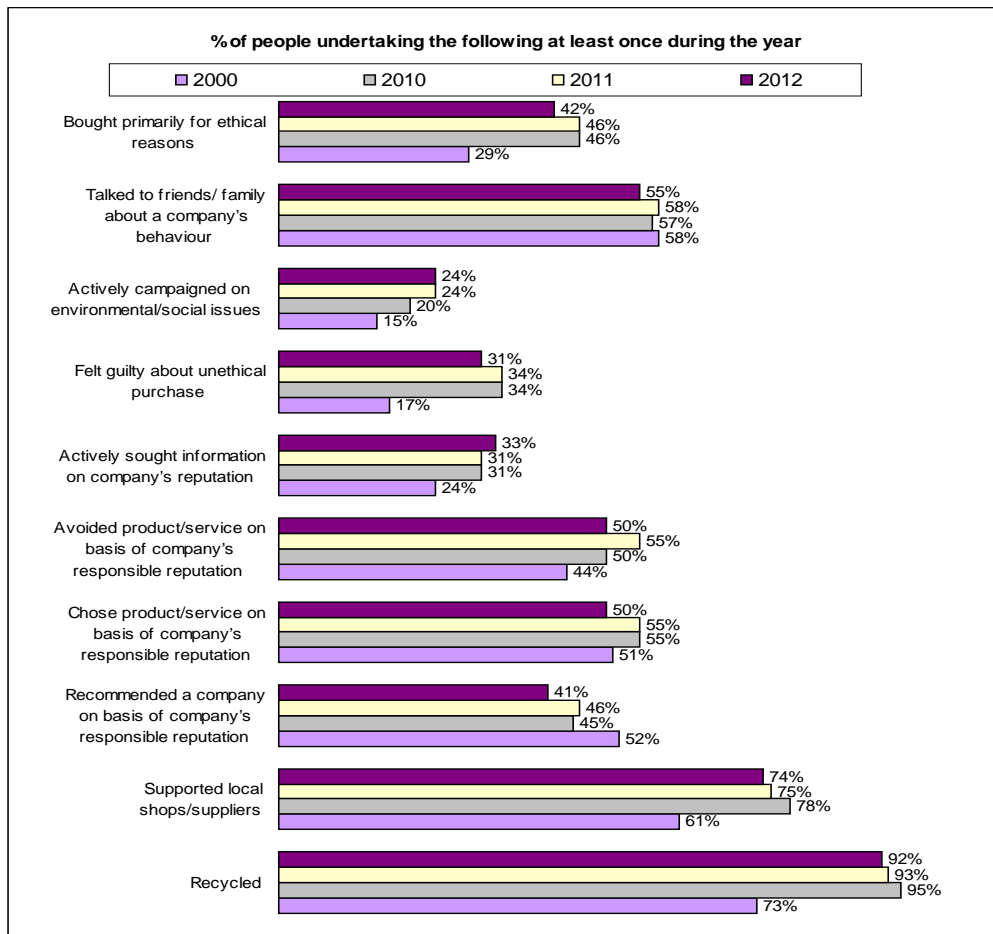


Table 2-1: Indicators and their score for the years 2000, 2010, 2011 and 2012 (Source: Combined data from The Co-operative Ethical Consumerism Reports 2011 and 2012).

All but one (the ‘felt guilty about an unethical purchase’) of these indicators are about practices, whether that is buying, avoiding, getting informed, recycling, etc. Table 2-1 illustrates the existence of diverse consumer practices, which are thought by researchers working in these reports to be related to ethical consumerism. This list is not exhaustive and by no means capable of providing information on the way these practices relate to each other and to the wider concept of ethical consumption.

In existing literature one will come across sincere attempts to analytically classify practices thought to be relevant to ethical consumption. Disciplinary paradigms appear to have influenced – as illustrated later – the typologies proposed with regards to the

practices of ethical consumption. On the one hand, there exists the more marketing-oriented typology proposed by Harrison et al. (2005) which identifies five types of ethical consumer practices – or better, types of ethical *purchasing*. On the other hand, there's the typology of political consumerism practices proposed by political science scholars (e.g. Micheletti, 2003), which extends beyond issues of monetary exchange. Under this approach, there are three major types of practices: boycotting, buycotting and engagement in discursive practices which, to paraphrase Peretti (2004, p. 258), highlight the importance of communication, opinion formation and framing. There is also another earlier typology proposed by Tallontire et al. (2001) which describes ethical consumerism as consisting of 'Positive ethical purchase behaviour', 'Negative ethical purchase behaviour' and 'Consumer action' (p. 7). The sections below present and critically discuss the major 'types' of ethical and political consumer practices by synthesising those three proposed typologies.

2.4.1.1 Boycotts

Boycotts, or negative political consumerism (Micheletti et al., 2004), may be defined as the attempt “*by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace*” (Friedman, 1985, p. 97-8). The practice of boycotting can be traced back at least to the American war of Independence (Peretti, 2004) which began in 1775, although the term boycott appears to have been established around 1880 after Captain Charles Boycott, an estate agent for Earl Erne in Ireland, was subject to social ostracism organized by the Irish Land League (Freidman, 1999; Micheletti, 2003).

Sen et al. (2001) proposed that boycotts may either be “political or social/ethical control boycotts” or “economic or marketing policy boycotts”. Under this distinction, economic boycotts which typically aim at lowering product prices are not, by definition, considered to be a form of ethical or political consumerism in the way the concept has been theorised in the literature today. ‘Political or social’ boycotts are believed to be both more prevalent and more successful than ‘economic’ boycotts (Klein et al, 2002)

and consumer participation in such boycotts is said to be less self-interested (Smith, 1996).

Boycotts are very diverse, creating problems for assessing their number and their efficacy (Friedman, 1999; Peretti, 2004). There has been, however, limited empirical research that indicated substantial falls in shares prices (Pruitt and Friedmann, 1986; Davidson et al., 1995) and changes in company behaviour (Davidson et al., 1995; Friedman, 2004) as a result of boycotts. According to Friedman (1999) boycotts usually have a national or international scope, but they can also be state, local or region oriented. Boycotts may be further classified according to their duration (i.e. long, medium and short term) and to the activities (i.e. full or part time) (Friedman, 1999). Examples of ongoing boycotts are those targeting the Nike, McDonalds and Nestle corporations. Through boycotts, consumer-citizens put pressure on and directly criticise a corporations' and/or governments' practices (Micheletti et al, 2004). A political campaign against G. W. Bush (former President of United States) for example, called on consumers to boycott companies that fund his party (see www.boycottbush.net). Boycotts as a tool for social change have also targeted consumerism itself. An example is the International Buy Nothing Day, which has been mainly supported by AdBusters and other initiatives throughout the globe

(see <http://www.adbusters.org/metas/eco/bnd>) [Retrieved 01/11/2011].

Boycotting may face a 'free-rider' problem. Since individual consumers are typically small in number relative to the market, their actions are likely to have a negligible impact on their targets (John and Klein, 2003). An individual will reap the benefits of a successful boycott whether or not she participates, thus there is an incentive to free-ride upon the boycott actions of others. However, boycotts occur. John and Klein (2003) explain participation in boycotts as reflecting either an exaggerated sense of the individual's own effectiveness, or as being motivated by an individual's emotions of guilt, the maintenance of self-esteem and the avoidance of dissonance. What appears to be missing, however, from John and Klein's (2003) understanding of boycotting is its collective nature and, thus, the resulting collective power this practice can have. Thus, rather than the 'exaggerated sense of the individuals own effectiveness' (John and Klein, 2003) it could be the anticipated 'collective effectiveness' that empowers the individuals to engage in such practices as, for example, illustrated in Shaw et al.'s (2006) study.

2.4.1.2 Buycotts

A second form of ethical consumerism is buycotting. The buycott (Harrison et al., 2005), otherwise referred to as a 'girlcott', 'procott', 'reverse boycott', 'antiboycott' or 'positive political consumerism' (Peretti, 2004) is an alternative to boycott (Friedmann, 1996). Whereas with boycotts consumers aim to punish companies or governments for certain policies, with buycotts consumers aim to reward selected companies or governments whose policies are considered ethically, socially or politically correct. This positive form of political consumerism appears to rely heavily on the establishment of product labelling schemes that guide consumer choices, and has mushroomed since the 1990's (Peretti, 2004). Although buycotting is a viable way to reflect consumer voice in the marketplace, it can be costly. Ethically labelled products are often more expensive than non-labelled ones; for example, price is cited as the main reason that consumers are not buying organic food (e.g. Mintel, 1999). Moreover, buycotting lacks "the mobilising bite of more protest-oriented forms" of ethical consumerism as Peretti (2004) successfully enunciates.

The acts of boycotting and buycotting are not totally irrelevant to each other. For example, one may buycott (i.e. purchase) a certain product and automatically this will imply the boycotting (i.e. avoiding/not purchasing) of all other products. Here, the way a consumer has rationalised their decision is important. When a consumer decides to support fair-trade, then he/she is buycotting fair-trade products, and subsequently boycotting non fair-trade products. Businesses aim to attract consumers, thus to create all necessary conditions so that a consumer 'buycotts' their products or services. It is, thus, not surprising that the tendency in both academic and non-academic business thought is to focus on labelling schemes and other ethical/political framings as a means to attract customers, that is to promote 'buycotting', and thus business in general (and particular!).

2.4.1.3 Discursive practices

A third form relevant to ethical consumerism is what has been termed ‘consumer action’ by Tallontire et al. (2001) or ‘discursive practices’ (Peretti, 2004). In contrast with the other two practices of boycotting and buycotting that involve monetary exchange, discursive political consumerism “*politicizes the market by giving pre-eminence to the importance of communication, opinion formation or deliberation, and framing of issues related to corporate practices*” (Peretti, 2004, p. 258). This is the most understudied category of ethical and political consumerism; it is often overlooked and even disregarded by scholars making arguments about both ethical and political consumption.

Discursive practices include actions such as signing petitions, lobbying, protesting, organising events and/or engagement with practices of “culture jamming”. The latter may be understood best as “*a strategy that turns corporate power against itself by co-opting, hacking, mocking and re-contextualising meanings*” (Peretti, 2004, p.127). Adbusters, an anti-advertising magazine based in Canada (Rumbo, 2002) is perhaps the most illustrative case of collective action within the existing academic literature that uses this type of practice. Another recently developed strategy for culture jamming is the so-called ‘shopdrop’ or ‘droplifting’ (the reverse of shoplifting), where merchandise with re-contextualised labels are covertly placed on display inside stores (<http://www.shopdropping.net/>).

2.4.1.4 Screening and relationship purchasing

Alongside boycotting and buycotting, Harisson et al (2005) propose another two types of practices relevant to ethical consumption: the – so-called – ‘screening’ of products and companies, and ‘relationship purchasing’. Even though Harisson et al (2005) explicitly baptise these two types as ‘ethical consumer practices’, the extent to which they actually represent distinctive *practices* of ethical consumers is debated here.

What Harrison et al (2005) call ‘fully screened’ practice reflects the existence of comparative ratings, which aim to help consumers make decisions. Products and/or

companies are listed against ethical benchmarks and consumer purchase decisions are based on them. An example is the Ethicscore developed by the *Ethical Consumer* magazine which rates over a hundred and sixty products and companies against nineteen ethical criteria (www.ethicalconsumer.org/research/ethicscore.htm). Some of the examples that Harrison et al (2005) provide to illustrate this are “The Ethical Consumer” magazine, “The shopping for a better world” book, and the UK Consumers’ Association “Which?”.

These are guides used by consumers to help them in their purchase decisions-making. Ultimately, they result in a choice and thus, to a kind of boycotting in terms of selecting one product/company over others. ‘Screening’ thus refers the *use* of such guides in order to make informed choices in the marketplace. For this reason, one may argue that this practice could be classified under the practices of boycotting or boycotting in the sense that the use of such guides is but a *tool* (or else a means).

‘Relationship purchasing’ refers to the practice of establishing a close relationship with sellers (whether retailers and/or producers) so as to educate them [*sic*] about ethical consumer needs (Harrison et al, 2005). One example that Harrison et al. (2005) provide, is when an individual consumer seeks to built up a relationship with a shopkeeper. Since this relationship has *communication* as its ultimate aim, one may argue that this practice could fit under the analytical category of discursive practices presented earlier. Moreover, another more mainstream – but totally neglected within the entire ethical and political literature – medium of communication between consumers and sellers, that of customer feedback (through for example feedback and complaint forms etc.) could also be added here.

2.4.2 ‘Anti-consumption’ and ‘sustainable consumption’

The planet is no more going to be saved by green consumption than by flying pigs

(Miller, 2012, p. 159)

One last ‘practice’ that Harrison et al (2005, p. 3) include in their typology is what they term ‘anti-consumption or sustainable consumption’. Similar to the two types presented

above, here it is argued that the proposed category is not adequate to describe a consumer *practice*; nonetheless, it does provide insight, which aids our understanding of the way ethical consumption is practiced.

The reason this category is argued to be erroneously characterised as a consumer practice (and perhaps this is the reason that the political consumerism typology doesn't include such concepts) is because anti-consumption and sustainable consumption are better understood as *framings* of consumer behaviour rather than practices *per se*. In other words, anti-consumption and sustainable consumption, like environmental and green consumption, are better considered as types of consumerism which follow certain "*frameworks or schemata of interpretation*" (Goffman, 1975, p. 21), and which enable people "to locate, perceive, identify and label" (p. 21) their consumption practices and how these relate to consumerism in general¹.

Literature on ethical and political consumption has often touched on the issue of anti-consumption. In the editorial of a special issue on anti-consumption by the Journal of Business Research, Lee et al (2009) draw a clear distinction between green and sustainable consumption and anti-consumption:

Anti-consumption literally means against consumption, yet the word is not synonymous with alternative, conscientious, or green consumption; neither does anti-consumption merely comprise the study of ethics, sustainability, or public policy. Although some consumers may affirm their anti-consumption attitudes through non-standard consumption and/or lifestyle choices – for example, buying environmentally friendly brands when possible – anti-consumption research focuses on reasons against consumption rather than pro-social movements. Generally, consumer research focuses on approach aspects of consumer behaviours and attitudes; for instance, why people choose a product or brand. In contrast, anti-consumption research focuses on consumers' reasons for avoiding a product or brand. A complete understanding of consumers'

¹ Gamson and Meyer (1996) explain the passive and strategic use of frames: "*Frames are, on the one hand, part of the world, passive and structured; on the other people are active in constructing them. Events are framed, but we frame events. The vulnerability of the framing process makes it a locus of potential struggle, not a leaden reality to which we all must inevitably yield*" p. 267).

decisions requires careful study from both orientations. Alternative, conscientious, green, and sustainable consumption simply describe various forms of pro-social consumption; anti-consumption, on the other hand, focuses on phenomena that researchers traditionally have ignored (p. 145)

Lee et al.'s definition (2009) above establishes a clear-cut distinction between boycotting and boycotting, and suggests that green and sustainable (I will also add ethical) consumption is all about buying and supporting products and brands (pro-social consumption), whilst anti-consumption is about refraining from shopping. This separation reflects the strong tendency to associate ethical, green and sustainable consumption with boycotting; ultimately though it neglects ideas such as 'reducing' for example, which are promoted under such framings.

A different view comes from Varul (2013) who distinguishes between lifestyle and tactical anti-consumption. The first one refers to the "*widespread sense that consumerism just isn't good for you*" which "*supplies followers to the growing lifestyle movement of 'voluntary simplicity'*" (p. 296). The second one refers to "tactical political non-consumption (e.g. politically-motivated boycotts)" and less radical forms of political consumption (such as buying fair trade). Such understanding, I feel is again somewhat problematic, since it allows the purchasing of marketed products such as Fair Trade to be positioned under the term anti-consumerism. It does raise, however, two interesting points: it implicitly draws a connection between ethical/political consumption and anti-consumption, and it draws a line between lifestyle understandings and tactical understandings of consumer practices.

Practices such as mending clothes, growing your own vegetables, baking your own bread and cutting your hair instead of going to the hairdresser are practices not adherent to commodification. In an increasingly commodifying world, these are practices to resist commodification. Part I of this chapter already illustrated that the concept of 'consumption' is overwhelmingly connected with the aspect of *purchasing*, reflecting the state of advanced capitalism in contemporary consumer societies. Sustainable consumption's famous three R's (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) are approaches to consumption which urge individuals to become less of 'shoppers/buyers' and 'wasters'. Anti-consumerism, does that too. What I see is as huge difference though, is that under the frame of sustainability, the individual has still a role as a 'consumer', something that

anti-consumption doesn't embrace. Hence, business is still able to provide solutions, i.e. 'green' bags, recycled paper etc.

On the contrary, under anti-consumption one will find practices which not only cannot be supported by, but which also actually disturb the economic status quo. One example is the act of shoplifting. In 1999 in Montréal, Canada, an anarchist collective issued a call urging people to take part in what they called the 'Steal Something Day'. This began as a response to the 'Buy Nothing Day', a protest event organised by the Adbusters magazine, which calls on people to refrain from buying anything for one day each 26th of November. In comparison, the 'Steal Something Day' is a protest event, which aims to promote and legitimise shoplifting. The organisers explain:

[The 'Buy Nothing Day' is a] day which, by definition, is insulting to the millions of people worldwide who are too poor or marginalized to be considered "consumers". It's supposed to be a 24-hour moratorium on spending, but ends up being a moralistic false-debate about whether or not you should really buy that loaf of bread today or ... wait for it ... tomorrow! Unlike Buy Nothing Day, when people are asked to "participate by not participating", Steal Something Day demands that we "participate by participating". (reproduced by the Earth First website <http://earthfirst.org.uk/actionreports/node/432>) [Retrieved 01/11/2014]

It is perhaps worth noting here that this practice of 'stealing' is not only proposed as a tool to overcome social inequalities of people in their role as 'consumers', but also in their role as 'workers'; in 2010, a similar protest event appeared on the world wide web declaring 15th of April as a 'Steal from Work Day':

On April 15, 2010, millions of employees around the world will steal from their workplaces. Sweatshop seamstresses will slip spools of thread under their sweaters. Cashiers will outsmart surveillance cameras to pocket cash from registers. Secretaries will pilfer envelopes, carpenters will slip screws into their tool belts, baristas will treat their friends to lattes on the house. Viewed in terms of individual cases, this phenomenon appears to be a matter of isolated misbehavior; but taken as a whole, it indicates widespread discontent with capitalism itself. (<http://stealfromwork.crimethinc.com/>) [Retrieved 01/11/2014]

Practices which override the assumptions underlying the conceptualisation of the contemporary 'consumer' such as those presented above, often acquire an 'illegal' framing. This is mostly because they challenge one concept upon which the capitalist system relies; the notion of 'property'. Seen as a form of direct action, however, the political nature of such practices can be understood. In a recent study, Sinwell (2010) illustrated how the occupation of houses was orchestrated by the Alexandra

Vukuzenzele Crisis Committee (AVCC) in South Africa in order to provide a solution to an existing developmental problem. By taking this as a case study, and applying the concept of ‘invented spaces of participation’, Sinwell (2010) explains how direct action (violent or non-violent) can be a means by which marginalised actors can claim power and, thereby, participate and exercise citizenship, ‘from below’.

To conclude, within existing literature acts of boycotting and buycotting seem to receive most of the attention of scholars interested in ethical consumption. Both of these practices refer to the decision-making processes of a ‘consumer’ as a ‘buyer’ or a ‘shopper’; to buy or not to buy. Insights from a political science perspective place those two practices amongst others, which have a more ‘political’ feel; signing petitions, organising protest events; engaging with so-called ‘culture jamming’. In this way the political character of the contemporary ‘consumer’ and/or ‘activist’ and/or ‘citizen’ is revealed. Practices, however, that are directly related to the realm of consumption and which do not render themselves to be commodified by the market, such as acts of DIY, reusing, sharing, shoplifting or occupying, are infrequently discussed in the literature on ethical and political consumption. Instead, when there is any mention, it will most probably be under the more ‘deviant’ literature of anti-consumption, consumer resistance and consumer rebellion (e.g. Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Ozanne and Ballantine, 2010; Cherrier, 2009; Close and Zinkhan, 2009). There are at least three possible reasons for this: Firstly, it is difficult to label a practice as ‘ethical’ when it is also framed as ‘illegal’. Even if business thought embraces views that treat legislation (which deals with matters of right and wrong) and ethics as being two intersecting domains (see Crane et al, 2004), a proposition that shoplifting, for example, can be an ethical practice of consumption is not readily understood. Secondly, practices that challenge the norm of ‘consumer as a purchaser’ are automatically disqualified from the interest of the business world that *needs* consumers to operate. Unsurprisingly, therefore, scholars in business science tend to overlook such practices. (The reasons why social scientists tend to do the same are less clear). And finally, these practices are perhaps more sporadic, less-formally organised, and sometimes less visible (e.g. growing vegetables; though the emerging Transition Network may be changing this:

<http://www.transitionnetwork.org/> [Retrieved 01/11/2014]), so they are more difficult to be both spotted and measured. In other words, there is lack of ‘material traces’ as Hogg et al (2009) put it.

Nonetheless, these practices are taking place and do challenge the very notion of the ‘consumer’ as an actor who is bound to certain rules and mechanisms of the capitalist market. Moreover, they challenge a strictly ‘non-economic’ motivation which is considered a prerequisite for ascribing an ‘ethical’ and ‘political’ frame to consumption as will become evident in the next section.

2.4.3 Areas of conflict in ethical consumerism

Seen from a micro perspective, the grievances that people want to project through their engagement with ethical consumerism are numerous. Drawing from the existing literature (Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti et al, 2005; Harrison et al., 2005) it could be argued that from a macro perspective the areas of conflict in ethical consumerism can fall under three major categories: the environment, animal welfare and human welfare (see Figure 2-1 below).

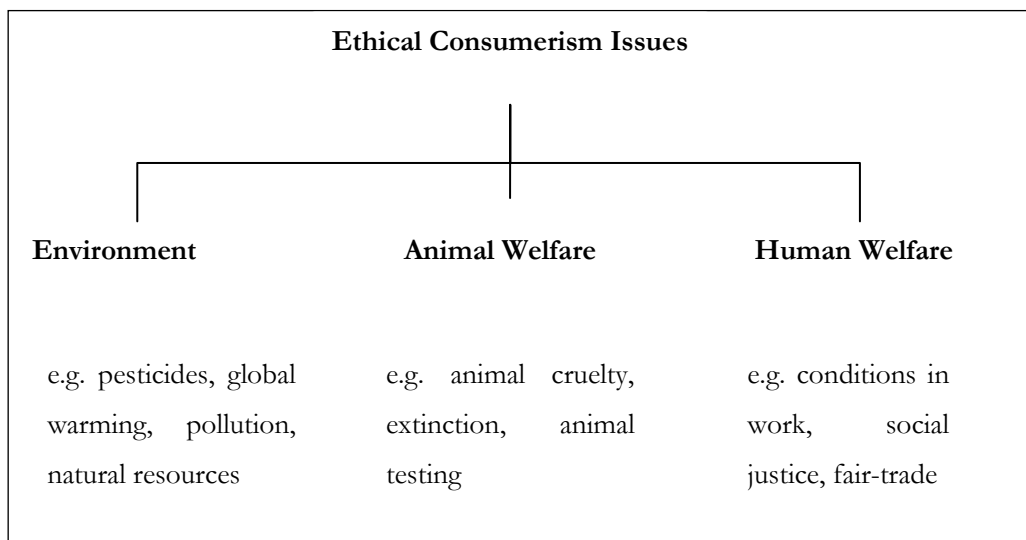


Figure 2-1: Three categories of conflict in ethical consumerism

Under the category termed ‘environment’, issues that deal with environmental concerns including global warming, pollution, the shortage of natural resources and preservation

the ecosystem etc. can be positioned. In this category, the terms ‘ethical’ and ‘green’ consumers as well as ‘ethical’ and ‘sustainable’ or ‘environmental friendly’ consumption are completely overlapping.

The category dealing with animal welfare includes all those issues that deal- as the term obviously suggests- with animals. Here are issues concerning animal cruelty and exploitation that are addressed in various levels; from a product related issue such as animal testing, to an adaptation of a lifestyle such as being a ‘vegetarian’ or a ‘vegan’.

The third category incorporates all issues that more directly deal with human welfare. Again, in this category, there are numerous issues that ethical consumerism may address. The working conditions of employees in ‘unethical’ corporations, which gave rise to anti-sweatshop struggles is one example. This category may also include issues of social justice, fairness and/or solidarity as reflected in the fair-trade movement (Moore, 2004; Wilkinson, 2007) and the anti-corporate movement (Crossley, 2002). The interesting point here is that under this category, issues that relate with the ‘traditional’ economic criteria of a purchase, such as the price of a product, are by definition (both for ethical and political consumption) excluded as issues of conflict. One may argue that this is because ethical and political consumers are led by altruistic rather than self-interested motives, and that’s what ethical and political consumption is all about. This argument, however, is easily discarded since self-interest is actually acknowledged in the very definition of political consumption (though it’s acknowledged only for non-economic criteria). The formal definition of political consumption has already been presented in Chapter 1 (see page 5) – with the crucial point being that: *“It is based on attitudes and values regarding issues of justice, fairness, or non-economic issues that concern personal and family well-being...”* (Micheletti et al., 2004, p xiv-xv). In a recent survey by Willis and Schor (2012) self-interest and public interest did not appear to be mutually exclusive motivations for political consumers.

This raises a very important question: why are economic criteria explicitly (and stubbornly) not included in theorisation of ethical and particularly of political consumerism? If human welfare is indeed an issue of conflict that ethical and political consumption aims to address, shouldn’t there also be included here practices that concern the welfare of people who are, for example, unable to afford even basic goods in order to survive? Perhaps this isn’t the case because theories of ethical and political

consumption have been developed in western affluent countries where all individuals can have at least the basics, so it's only a matter of making sure that people in other less privileged countries can have a 'decent' income via, for example, fair trade schemes. Even if this is the case, a more interesting question then arises: what happens with those 'defective and disqualified consumers' who, according to Bauman (2011), were responsible for the London riots in 2011? Weren't their practices of looting and rioting all about human welfare? Why wouldn't their practices be acknowledged as political? Why aren't they portrayed as ethical and political consumers of some kind?

Earlier in this chapter, the practice of 'shoplifting' as a tool to overcome social inequalities of people in their role as 'consumers' was discussed. It was also explained that although anti-consumption is found in literature as sometimes overlapping with the ethical consumption discourse, specific anti-consumption practices such as shoplifting are nowhere to be mentioned. In this section, through a closer examination of the issues that are considered to be related to ethical and political consumption, we gain perhaps one more insight into why such practices are missing from the ethical and political consumerism discourse: because the current theorisation assumes that an individual is first and foremost an unquestionable 'purchaser', who's obliged and solemnly responsible for his/her 'adequacy' as a purchaser; that is, who has disposable income so that he/she can embody this particular understanding of a 'consumer'. So, we see here the concept of 'human welfare' (like 'ethics' and 'politics') interpreted in a way that assumes the tautology of a 'consumer' and a 'purchaser'. Under such perspective, the "-ism", of ethical and political consumerism carries all the ideological baggage of advanced capitalism and liberalism of a contemporary consumer society.

The social issues that ethical consumerism brings forward are – as is demonstrated in the next section – directly linked with goals and adversaries. Before examining what these goals and the related adversaries or targets of ethical consumerism are, it should be noted that there is no clear-cut distinction between the categories analysed above. This is because some social issues may be considered as relevant to more than one of those categories. For example, an issue dealing with animal extinction is directly related to animal welfare. At the same time, however, it is arguably related to both the environment and human welfare (at least in an indirect manner) since both human and animals live in the same eco-system. Therefore, the categorisation made above is for

illustrative purposes and categories are expected to overlap for at least some, if not for all, social issues.

2.4.4 Goals and adversaries in ethical consumption

Since the social issues that motivate individuals to engage with practices of ethical consumption are numerous, the goals of ethical consumerism (in the sense of the term as a consumer movement) are expected to be multiple as well. In particular, it may be argued that a single social issue may be tackled by ethical consumers in different ways, thus creating a *polyphony* in terms of goals and adversaries of ethical consumerism. In terms of goals, the use of pesticides in agriculture – for example – may be addressed by ethical consumers on several levels; from the support of organic products in the marketplace or the support of producers' initiatives such as the Soil Association in the UK to the adoption of a DIY lifestyle of home-growing organic produce. In terms of adversaries, ethical consumers may oppose certain companies that use pesticides in their produce or governmental legislation that allows producers to use pesticides. 'Ordinary' consumers may also be considered as adversaries, as will be discussed later. One consequence of this is what Littler (2011) identified as 'contradictory consumption', arguing that "*ethical consumption is no mere simple force for progressive social change, but rather one which is constituted of a battery of different practices which can at times conflict with each other*" (p. 28). Analytically, the goals of ethical consumerism may be understood as falling under two distinctive categories: 'market related' and 'non-market related' goals (see Figure 2-2 in next page).

All those goals that are directly related with the market and the market structure fall under the first category. These goals reflect social issues that are rooted in the market or else in the economic sphere. Two subcategories can be identified here: goals that deal with the restructuring of the market and goals oriented toward the disconnection from the market. In general, the first subcategory incorporates all these goals of ethical consumerism that deal with questions of how much, what, how and who will *produce*. In the example of pesticides that was discussed earlier, the support of organic produce and the subsequent punishment of non-organic produce in the marketplace, as well as the

support of legislation and initiatives against pesticides are all goals related with market reform. Questions of how much, what, how and who will *consume* are also under this subcategory reflecting goals dealing with consumption culture (such as promoting the ‘organic’ preference amongst consumers).

The adoption of a lifestyle promoting home-growing organic produce would fall in the second subcategory; that of ‘de-linking’ from the market. Goals of ethical consumerism that fall under this subcategory assume that social issues can be solved through disengagement from market mechanisms, and thus, ethical consumption gets closer to the idea of anti-consumption. Here, ‘voluntary simplicity’ (Ballantine and Creery, 2010; Bekin et al., 2005; Maniates, 2002; Shaw and Newholm, 2002) is an excellent example of a lifestyle reflecting such goals.

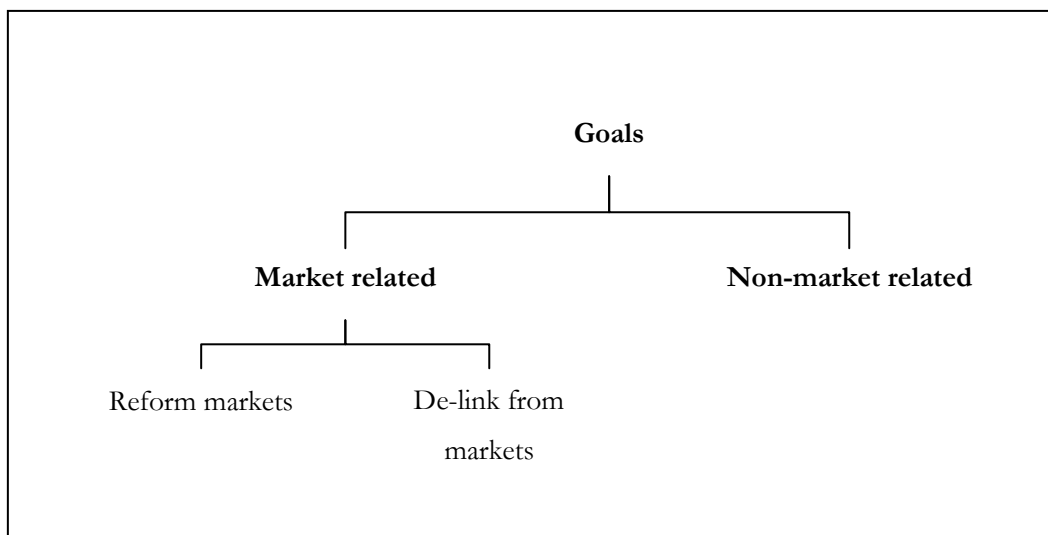


Figure 2-2: Proposed analytical categorisation of the ethical consumerism goals

The second category of ethical consumerism goals incorporates goals that are non-market related. Here, ethical consumers exercise voice for social issues that are not directly related to the market and the market structure. The goals related to this category, however, reflect social issues whose solution is sought through economic means. An example would be the boycotting of French wine in the U.S. as a reaction to the French opposition to the 2003 war in Iraq (Chavis and Leslie, 2006). In this case, the goal of the U.S. consumers was to voice their opposition to the French government; a goal that is explicitly non-market oriented.

Here, it is worth noting that distinguishing between market and non-market oriented goals provides a useful insight in understanding the difference between the terms 'ethical consumerism' and 'political consumerism'. This study does treat these two terms as tautological. In the example of the French wines above, 'political' rather than 'ethical' consumerism seems to best describe this situation. Here the problems of ascribing an 'ethical' frame in consumption practices are highlighted: the framing of consumption as 'ethical' indicates a moral judgment over the issue of conflict. Moral judgments, however, can be very subjective. In this example, one may say that the U.S. consumers boycotting French wines may very well be practicing ethical consumption on the condition that the war over Iraq was also framed as an 'ethical' or moral thing to do. But the same war might not be perceived as 'ethical' by a French citizen, who is not as directly affected by the relationships between U.S. and Iraq. For the purpose of this literature review the 'ethical' frame in consumption is used and reproduced since this is the topic of investigation of this thesis. This example, though, illustrates one major shortfall of ethical consumption as a category: namely, the subjectivity of its 'ethical' frame, and the dangers it may carry with it such as the development (and even imposition) of a universal 'morality'.

With regards to adversaries, ethical consumption practices may target actors operating within three analytical spheres; the production sphere, the consumption sphere and the political sphere. In terms of production, adversaries or targets of ethical consumerism can vary from single products, product categories, companies or whole industries. Within the political sphere, targets relate to policies and legislation. Here, adversaries may take the form of governments, political parties and local or global political institutions and organisations in general.

In the sphere of consumption, 'ordinary' consumers can be seen as adversaries for 'ethical' consumers. An example can be drawn from the recent work of Kozinets and Handelman (2004) that focused on consumer 'movements' struggling for ideological and cultural change. Building on new social movement theory, the study explored the 'movements' among anti-advertising, anti-Nike, and anti-GE (Genetically Engineered) food activists. One major finding of this study is that mainstream consumers were seen as ideological opponents of the activists involved in these 'movements' and not activists' clients as viewed by other conventional new social movement theories. Perhaps this

should not come as surprise if we think that consumption has long been a site of contention over distinction, as discussed in Part I of this literature review. To my knowledge, existing theoretical and empirical work on ethical and political consumption regarding aspects of distinction (in both terms of degree and nature) between ‘ethical’ and ‘ordinary’ (or even other consumer categories, such as ‘green’) consumers is still limited.

2.4.5 Individual and collective aspects in ethical consumption practices

Frequently, acts of ethical consumerism are carried out in an individual manner. Decisions to boycott or boycott a certain product, product category or brand are embodied within the marketplace. When shopping, the individual is often physically alone; nonetheless, the purchase decisions he/she makes are expected to contribute to a collective struggle. Under such circumstances, it may be argued that the relation between the ‘individual’ and the ‘collective’ is somewhat blurred.

This is not a unique characteristic of the ethical consumerism repertoire of actions. Larana et al (1994) have already highlighted that “... [*m*]any contemporary movements are ‘acted out’ in individual actions rather than through or among mobilized groups” (p. 7). This ‘individual’ nature of action in movements is, after all, one of the dimensions that differentiate the ‘new’ from the ‘traditional’ types of movements [for the division between new and traditional social movements see Pichardo (1997), Larana et al. (1994, p. 6-9), Scott (1990, p. 19) and Buechler (1995)].

The first researcher to comment on the inability of the term ‘collective action’ to capture the nature of action in ethical consumerism was Micheletti (2003; Micheletti et al., 2004). She proposes that the term ‘*individualised collective action*’ captures better the ‘individual’ nature of the collective action in this context. Nonetheless, since it is the individual act that is charged with a collective meaning, Holzer (2006) successfully notices that “it might be... more appropriate (though a bit more awkward) to speak of ‘*collectivised individual action*’ than the other way round” (italics in original p. 411). Although the recent development of the so-called “carrotmob”, where consumers target

a specific shop which they want support and do a purchase ‘flashmob’ (Hutter and Hoffmann, 2013), brings closer the idea of collective action, still many of the practices of ethical consumption are performed individually.

Disagreements in the literature on whether the ‘individual’ or the ‘collective’ nature of the action should prevail when describing practices of ethical consumerism, call for a more analytical explanation. An action can be categorised as being ‘individual’ in nature in two ways; First, when the action occurs in a setting where the consumer is physically alone, and second, when the action was initiated by the individual and was not the outcome of an organised call for action. For example, a consumer might boycott a company (e.g. Nike) as a result of an organised campaign against the company’s sweatshop policies. In this case the consumer will be physically alone when ‘acting out’ this decision but his/her act will be contributing to a formalized collective goal. Here, Micheletti’s (2003) definition of ‘individualised collective action’ seems apt. This perspective highlights the setting where the action takes place but, at the same time, emphasises the contribution of the act to a collective, organised and, thus, ‘group’ endeavour.

On the contrary, if the consumer’s decision to boycott the same company is initiated by him/herself, for example because he/she wants to avoid buying from trans-national corporations in general, then Holzer’s (2006) understanding of ‘collectivised individual action’ seems more appropriate. Under this perspective and in the micro-level of analysis, the action is again ‘individual’ in nature in terms of the setting within which the action takes place, but is also ‘individual’ because it was initiated and reasoned by the individual him/herself. The latter could be argued to presuppose a degree of freedom and creativity from the part of the individual; Freedom in the sense of selecting the grievances and creativity in the sense of selecting the action the individual decides to engage with in order to project or resolve these grievances.

In the macro-level of analysis, this action can be described as ‘collective’ because it may contribute to, for example, a predefined by SMOs ‘collective’ aim of lowering sales. Nevertheless, there is an important consequence when placing this individual action under a ‘collective action’ label. Since the grievances behind the ‘individual’ and the ‘group’ actions in this example are different (the one is against trans-national corporations and the other is against sweatshop policies), the signals sent to the specific

company through boycotting may not reflect both the grievances of the 'individual' and the 'group'. In fact, it seems more probable that the affected company (if bothered) will translate a reduction in sales based on the grievances proposed by the 'group'. An organised campaign can collectivise and publicise individual voices (Holzer, 2006) and frame them into the 'group' grievances and thus, the company can 'read' these signals. It is impossible, though, for the company to be in the mind of each individual consumer that decides not to buy the company's products.

To conclude, in terms of the setting (i.e. time and space) where the action takes place consumers can engage in practices of ethical consumerism either individually (e.g. when boycotting, buycotting or signing petitions) or as a group (e.g. when protesting, shopdropping, altering advertisements in the streets). Additionally, consumers may engage in ethical consumption practices either as a result of the mobilized efforts of a group or according to their own initiative and reasoning. Such understanding of the engagement with collective action in ethical consumerism allows for the recognition of the creative nature of individual agency in selecting the practices, which will enable an ethical consumer to act out his/her concerns. Parallel to this, however, it also reveals the complexity of communicating these concerns and highlights the importance of an organised 'group' that can help to get the message across.

2.4.6 Summary and comments

This section offered a description of ethical and political consumption as seen through an examination of the relevant practices, goals and issues of conflict. The diversity of perspectives, understandings and explanations of ethical and political consumption within existing literature was also illustrated. Several observations were made and particular points were raised with regards to the unselfish and non-economic motivation that supposedly define the framing of ethical and political consumption, the small but important difference between the 'ethical' and the 'political' framings, as well as the actual practices that the literature identifies as related to the concepts of ethical and political consumption.

One challenging issue; the above review brought to surface is in the categorising of consumer practices that resist commodification, such as consumption of DIY products, downshifting (Levy, 2005; Nelson et al., 2007), dumpster-diving, and even shoplifting. Within existing literature, such non-commodifiable consumption has selectively appeared under the framings of ‘ethical’, ‘political’, ‘green’, ‘sustainable’ and ‘anti’ consumption, but overall it is largely ignored. As a consequence, there is a tendency to overlook practices that resist a dominant consumer culture that equates “consumption” with “shopping”.

Finally, the discussion also touched upon the individual and the collective aspects of ethical and political consumption explaining how decisions on consumption may be outcomes of both self-reflection and initiative (that may however be envisioned as part of a wider collective effort), as well as of the mobilising efforts of a group. It is the ‘collective’ nature in ethical consumption which, perhaps more than anything else, is responsible for bridging the individual and political worlds. Part I already provided a brief overview on some of the major conditions (risk, reflexivity, advanced capitalism and liberalism) that contribute to an understanding of consumption in general as a form of political participation (in terms of, for example, life politics or sub-politics). The next section narrows down the focus and addresses issues more relevant to the politicisation of ‘ethical’ consumption.

2.5 Politicising ethical consumption

Traditional ethical and political theories make a huge conceptual distinction between citizens or ‘homo politicus’ on the one hand and consumers or ‘homo economicus’ on the other (Agh, 1994; Korthals, 2001). This distinction is thought to have been acknowledged first by Rousseau, when he distinguished between a ‘citoyen’ and a ‘bourgeois’ (Agh, 1994). The main issue underlying this distinction appears to concern the motivation behind an individual’s action. According to Rousseau (cited in Korthals, 2001), a citizen or citoyen acts according to the principle of ‘amour de propre’, thus a love to do what is considered as proper. In this sense, his or her behaviour is directed by

a love centred on the relation between self and others (Korthals, 2001). On the contrary, it is an 'amour de soi' or love for the self that guides bourgeois, or consumer behaviour.

This strict distinction between the consumer and the citizen is difficult to maintain in present times. In fact, one may argue that those two terms are now closer than ever; the citizen is becoming a consumer and the consumer a citizen. From the citizen's side, marketing principles are being implemented into politics (Maarek, 2011; Kavanagh, 1995; Lees-Marshment, 2001) whilst politicians and political parties are seeing and treating citizens as consumers. Under this perspective, some political parties are not only marketed as products for a citizen-consumer, but their approach towards public policy has also been developed to serve a citizen-consumer. One may think, for example, of New Labour's approach in modernising and reforming public services in the UK (Clarke, 2004).

From the consumer's side, the axiomatic theorisation of his/her self-interested agency is gradually losing ground. As reflected both in recent empirical and theoretical work on political consumerism, non-economic criteria such as labour rights, environmental concerns, animal rights, anti-competitive practices and racial or gender discriminations may also influence consumer choices (Micheletti, 2003). Under this perspective consumers are increasingly behaving like citizens who are 'voting' by using their purchasing power in the marketplace (Shaw et al, 2006; Shaw, 2007).

2.5.1 *Citizenship and consumers*

In general terms, citizenship represents the notion of participation in public life (Van Steenbergen, 1994). Historically, citizenship has had a strict political definition with an emphasis on the relationship between an individual and the state, a concept which recent academics have questioned. In fact, the notion of citizenship has been developed over time. Marshall (1950) identified three types of citizenship that had emerged during the past three centuries:

- Civil citizenship found in the 18th century, which established the rights necessary for individual freedom (e.g. rights of property, liberty and justice);

- Political citizenship found in the 19th century, which established the rights to participate and exercise political power, and
- Social citizenship found in the 20th century, which encompassed the citizen's rights of economic and social security.

In the 21st century, the notion of citizenship has evolved and new types of citizenship such as cultural citizenship, ecological citizenship, digital citizenship or global citizenship are unfolding (Van Steenbergen, 1994). Amongst these, one may find the notion of consumer citizenship (Cronin, 2000; McGregor, 2002) although it seems to be an understudied and underused concept.

Within political consumerism literature, consumers frequently qualify as citizens in the sense that they practice *judgment*, *autonomy* and *solidarity* through their responsibility-taking (Micheletti, 2003). Consumers may practice those three aspects of citizenship only if they are equipped with adequate resources and skills. These may be product knowledge, experience and the ability to assess both product quality and the values embedded in the products (Micheletti, 2003). In other words, consumers need to be educated (Stolle and Houghe, 2004) and sophisticated sufficiently for them both to judge and act upon those judgments.

In practical terms, however, for such sophistication to be achieved, consumers need to invest time to seek for information (Kominou, 2006) and perhaps to know where to seek for this information if it exists. Besides information, consumers also need to act autonomously, that is to have the capacity of independent action as discussed earlier. The capacity for autonomous action for consumers may be empowering and, thus, critical for political consumerism.

In a recent empirical study, political consumers were found to ascribe a moral responsibility to the issues that they sought to address through their consumption choices (Shaw, 2007). Political consumers view it as their responsibility to evaluate the consequences of their individual purchases on society (Barnett et al 2011; Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti et al; 2004; Shaw, 2007). Evaluating the consequences of individual consumption is close to the concept of “reflexivity” introduced in Part I of the literature overview. The responsibility-taking in their behaviour as consumers appears to be the reason that brings political consumers closer to the notion of citizenship. The actual

process of how political consumers come to engage with this responsibility, however, appears to be empirically understudied.

Whereas responsibility is a defining characteristic of citizenship, rights and entitlements are also incorporated in the role of an individual as a citizen (Van Steenberghe, 1994). Consumer rights are being safeguarded by national and inter-national legislation such as EC Consumer Law. Although consumer rights may vary from nation to nation according to local laws, Consumers International asserts that the eight basic consumers' rights for consumers globally are access to basic goods, basic services, safety, information, representation, redress, consumers education, and finally a healthy environment (<http://www.consumersinternational.org/who-we-are/consumer-rights>) Retrieved 01/11/2014]).

In this way, ethical consumers could be expected to target governments in terms of changing legislation that can promote their rights as consumers. This aspect of citizenship within ethical consumerism has been acknowledged (e.g. Micheletti 2003; Micheletti et al., 2004; Bostrom et al., 2005), nevertheless empirical work on this is still limited. In fact, the whole concept of political consumerism as a new form of political participation has been criticized in these terms. Stolle and Hooghe (2004) raise their concern on this by arguing that most ethical consumerist actions are frequently directed at companies and large corporations and not at governments or specific governmental policies.

Another issue that appears to be relevant when examining the link between consumers and citizens is the geographical dimension. In more traditional notions of citizenship, a citizen's entitlements and obligations would be located in a certain community, probably the nation. This is somewhat changing now, and a notion of a 'global' citizenship is emerging. With the rise of multinationals and international trade, political consumers appear to be able to exercise judgement not only on their national companies and governments, but also on international corporations and other governments. A closer examination of this 'cosmopolitanism' in ethical and political consumption is provided next.

2.5.2 Globalisation and the 'Cosmopolitan' consumer

The term cosmopolitan originates from the Greek word *κοσμοπολίτης* (*kosmopolitês*) meaning a citizen of the world, and has been used to describe a wide variety of views in moral and socio-political philosophy. Cosmopolitan views appear to share the idea that all human beings, regardless of their political/social/national affiliation, do (or at least can) belong to a single community (Kleingeld and Brown, 2014). Diogenes the Cynic is often cited as the first to have used this term by declaring “*I am a citizen of the world*” in defence of his refusal to pay any local taxes (Follesdal, 2004).

Cosmopolitan ideas have been further developed within the philosophical stream of Stoicism influencing other more recent philosophers like Kant (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 9). Hierocles, a Stoic philosopher of the first-second centuries CE, provided an interesting reading of how relationship between self and others should be regarded under a cosmopolitan orientation. He argued that one should understand oneself and others around them in terms of a set of concentric circles (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 9), each encompassing a group of citizens whom the person originally perceives as more distant. Thus, in the middle is oneself, then a circle drawn around one’s immediate family, and then follows one’s extended family. Then in order is a circle drawn around one’s neighbours and local groups, one’s fellow city-dwellers and then one’s fellow countrymen. The last circle includes humanity as a whole. Hierocles then concludes that one must try to draw the people in the outer circles into the inner ones (Berges, 2005, p. 20).

For Berges (2005), this conceptualization provided by Hierocles offers specific instructions on how to carry out the process of *Oikiosis*, which is a central aspect for the Stoic conception of moral development. *Oikiosis* is the extension of natural tendencies from self-preservation to an impartial concern of all (Annas, 1993). For a being that is both concerned to protect its own interests and rationale this seems the best way to develop; “*for such a being will see that, rationally, their interests cannot be more important than anybody else’s*” (Berges, 2005, p. 20). Here, the Stoics maintain an other-regarding concern that “*is not only universal in scope, but also equal in the way it weights people’s interest*” (Berges, 2005, p. 20).

This process of *Oikiosis* in cosmopolitan perceptions may appear useful in furthering the understanding of ethical and political consumers. In fact, it can support claims that self-interest and public interest do not have to clash when categorising who may be a political consumer or not. In a recent study, Atkinson (2012) illustrated how consumers reap several private benefits from their socially conscious choices and at the same time help to secure broader public virtues. Thus, she urged for an understanding of citizenship in which “*the acquisition of private, self-serving benefits is inextricably linked to the pursuit of broader, collective virtues*” (p. 191). Anderson and Tobiasen’s (2004) exclusion of consumers from the categorization of ‘political consumption’ because of their motivation of satisfying personal needs does not consider this perspective. Further examination of the relationship between private and public issues as motivating factors of political consumerism seems crucial and would facilitate a deeper understanding of this aspect of consumerism.

The notion of cosmopolitanism in political consumerism is often related to political opportunity structures (POSS). POSSs may be described as opportunities that facilitate or constrain the development of protest movements and are comprised by the specific configuration of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization (Kitschelt, 1986, p. 58). Globalisation or better ‘economic cosmopolitanism’ (Kleingeld and Brown, 2002) appears to have created opportunities for big corporations and multinationals to operate in a number of different nations without being controlled by a single international regulatory body safeguarding consumer, human or animal rights or the environment. Transnational enterprises can affect vulnerable individuals both within and outside the marketplace when decent protection is lacking (Follesdal, 2004).

The cases of sweatshops and EU nuclear-waste dumping in Russia (Greenpeace, 2005, <http://www.greenpeace.org/russia/en/news/europe-s-secret-nuclear-waste/> [Retrieved 01/11/2014]) are two amongst myriads of examples of how ‘unethical’ business practices can affect human beings and the environment. At the same time, governments and civil society prove to be incapable of taking action against these irresponsible business practices. The combination of the above may help explain why multinationals may stand in need of justification in ways that domestic businesses do not (Follesdal, 2004).

It seems that Guy Verhofstadt (2001), president of the European Union in 2001, had this kind of globalisation in his mind when he argued that more and not less globalisation will be the answer to the problems of the developing world. Such globalisation could be termed ‘political cosmopolitanism’ (Kleingeld and Brown, 2002) in the sense of the establishment of a global federation of states or at least the economical, political and legislative merging of a number of nations such as the EU. When using the term political consumerism, attention needs to be paid to whether political consumers are envisioning becoming ‘political cosmopolitans’ – and in this way perceive to be members or want to be members of any global regulatory and/or political institution or not. For as explained earlier, the notion of citizenship attached to political consumers is rather closer to the social and not the political sense of the term.

The alternative theorisation would be that ethical consumers are supporters of a ‘moral cosmopolitanism’ (Kleingeld and Brown, 2002). In this sense ethical consumers are expected to have a moral obligation or responsibility for the people around them and for all humanity. It is however, precisely the ‘economic cosmopolitanism’, which creates the problems, that also creates the opportunity for ethical and political consumers to use their power as consumers in order to express their ‘moral cosmopolitanism’ in the first place!

2.5.3 Consumption and voting

The act of consumption has been seen by some scholars as an equivalent to voting in parliamentary elections. This analogy appears at least as early as 1905, when Frank A. Fetter (1905) asserts that: “*The market is a democracy where every penny gives a right of vote*” (p. 394-5). The connection between consumer and citizen has also been addressed by economist William Hutt (1936) who is frequently cited as being the first intellectual to define consumer sovereignty:

The consumer is sovereign when, in his role of citizen, he has not delegated to political institutions for authoritarian use the power which he can exercise socially through his power to demand (or refrain from demanding) (p. 257).

It is worth here to note that the term sovereignty implies a political understanding of hierarchy in a system, which in this case is the market. The way Hutt seems to understand this analogy of consumption and voting is concerned with the manner that political and economical systems operate. Consumers, like citizens, give their vote through their consumption within the marketplace and, in this way decide how the system of the market will function. This analogy of consumption and voting calls for an investigation in the aspect of democracy, since voting is supposed to be embedded in democratic principles.

There is a view that the market is actually more democratic than parliamentary politics. This is illustrated in the following quote from Thomas A. Murphy, chairman of General Motors: “*Unlike the political system, every person can win in an economic election*” (in Silk and Vogel, 1976, p. 91). Such attitudes rest on the idea that consumers do not require a majority to get what they desire. In this sense, consumption can even be seen to be superior to the democratic system of elections as it appears to be a win-win situation, at least at face value.

The voting analogy, however, has received much criticism. One of the most obvious ones rests on the fact that, unlike elections, votes in the marketplace are not equally distributed among society (Micheletti, 2003). Whoever has the most money automatically has more votes in the market. Moreover, ethical consumerism may not always promote democracy (Micheletti, 2003, p. 9). Acts of ethical consumerism such as boycotting have been used in the past for and against democratic values, often because what is democratic or not is difficult to define, as in the case of the boycott of Denmark by Muslims in the wake of the cartoons of Mohammed in 2006. Furedi (1999) also appears to be sceptical of the democratic nature of consumer activism and asserts that “*the new consumer activism, carried out in the name of 'the People', is really elitist networking that thrives on political apathy*”. Thus, the ‘votes’ of ethical consumers might not always reflect what is actually wanted by the general public.

Acts of ethical consumerism might appear to be close to a form of direct democracy, in the sense that consumers are directly registering their preferences. Here, understandings of ethical consumption as practicing of ‘life politics’ or ‘sub-politics’ seem far more adequate than analogies of voting and electoral participation. A less problematic

perspective from which to observe ethical consumption is consumer movements, which is discussed next.

2.5.4 Traditional and New Consumer Movements

New Social Movement Theory suggests that there has been a transition from a “traditional” type of movement focusing on economic grievances, political integration and conflicts over material resources, to a “newer” type of movement centred on post-materialistic values and lifestyle (Pichardo, 1997; Buechler, 1995; Larana et al., 1994; Scott, 1990). To some extent, one may argue that such transitions are reflected in the evolution of consumer movements.

According to Lang and Hines (1993), three consecutive waves of consumer activism can be identified. The first wave of consumer movements focused on value for money, on basic functional product information and labelling, as well as on consumer choice. The second wave dealt with investigations into product safety and has been associated with broader questions of corporate accountability. The partial resolution of these issues has been facilitated by the establishment of both governmental and non-governmental organisations including the Consumers’ Association, the National Consumer Council in the UK and the International Organisation of Consumer Unions.

The third wave of consumer movements, according to Lang and Hines (1993, p. 111) includes two distinctive forms: the ‘environmental’ and the ‘ethical’. This distinction, however, is unnecessary since ethical and environmental consumerism represent overlapping concepts. Smith (1990) successfully captures this overlap by arguing that environmental consumerism is essentially a form of ethical consumerism where the link between “*what is consumed and the social problem is more direct*” (p. 286).

By putting forward social issues of justice and fairness as well as environmental, animal and human rights, one may argue that ethical consumerism embodies the transition from the ‘traditional’ movements of the first and second wave to the ‘newer’ types of movement of the third wave which are characterised by preoccupation with post-material values. There is, however, some degree of complexity here.

Ronald Inglehart for more than thirty years now has been advocating that a ‘silent revolution’ (Inglehart, 1977) is transforming society and that we are experiencing a fundamental value change that “*takes place gradually, almost invisibly*” (1990, p. 69). Drawing on a remarkable amount of data (he constructed a scale to measure post-materialism, and conducted time series of surveys for six west European nations covering 18 years, in total nearly 200,000 questionnaires), Inglehart suggests that western societies are undergoing a transformation of individual values, switching from ‘materialist’ values that emphasise economic and physical security, to a new set of ‘post-materialist’ values which are centred around issues of autonomy and self-expression (Inglehart, 2008, p. 130). He sees this transformation as the result of “*historically unprecedented prosperity and the absence of war*”, coupled with the increasing education of the population (1990, p. 56).

While preoccupation with autonomy and self-expression might be on the rise for all the reasons that Inglehart proposes, living in a contemporary society characterized by risk (as argued earlier in Part I) doesn’t really erase security fears, whether economic or physical. In fact, environmental concerns aren’t necessarily separated from concerns of personal health. Hilton (2003) perhaps has a point when arguing that “*the two socio-political movements of consumer poverty and consumer affluence may seem worlds apart, but as will be seen, there have been important crossovers between the two which now, in a global political environment, are once again coming together*” (p. 5). Thus, materialistic issues such as health or safety could also be of concern for an ethical consumer who, for example, supports organic produce.

Having discussed ethical consumption as a consumer movement, it is now time to look at ethical consumption from the perspective of identity. As will become evident, the aspect of identity has much insight to provide in understandings of ethical consumption both as an explanatory as well as an exploratory tool.

2.6 Ethical consumer Identity

The aim of this section is to introduce the concept of ‘identity’ and then place it within the context of ethical and political consumption. The discussion begins with a theoretical description of the three types of identity as provided by Kluckhohn and

Murray (1949) and the way they can be applied to the context of consumption. A conceptual understanding of how various social identities relate with each other is then presented. A theoretical understanding of the ‘ethical consumer’ as an identity is then offered, along with a discussion of the various insights the particular concept may generate through empirical investigation. The section ends with a brief comment on the way the ‘ethical consumer’ and other relevant consumer categories such as the ‘green consumer’ relate to each other. This is the final section of this literature review before moving on to the presentation of this research’s aims and objectives that completes the chapter.

2.6.1 Types of identities

Within the social science literature, the concept of identity has – as Ashmore et al. (2004) put it – “*a long history and an active present*” (p. 80). The body of theory on identity can be divided in two parts according to the micro or macro level of focus (Mennell, 1994). On the one hand, there is literature dealing with the self or personal identity of an individual (the micro level). Under this approach, scholars explore the ways in which interpersonal interactions shape an individual’s sense of self. On the other hand, there is literature focusing on how various groups of people come to share a collective identity (macro-level). This macro-sociological perspective on identity appears to be dominant in academic works produced mainly since the 1980’s (Cerulo, 1997).

A simple but intuitive way to understand this micro-macro divide in theorising about identity can be seen in Kluckhohn and Murray’s (1949, p. 35) following dictum:

Every man [sic] is in certain respects:

- (a) like all other men
- (b) like some other men
- (c) like no other man

In the context of consumerism, case (a) would translate into the point that every person is a consumer like every other person is a consumer. This is true for consumer societies. Case (a) here is not an indication of a common identity between consumers. Instead, the

relationship illustrated in (a) could be better understood in terms of 'roles'. Being a consumer is a role. The concept of role here is very close to Simpson and Carroll's (2008, p. 43) understanding of role as the mediating mechanism for "the meaning-making processes of identity construction". In other words, roles provide the context within which micro and macro levels of identity are constructed.

Part I of this literature review already commented on how consumerism as the context within which individuals construct their identities has been heavily discussed within the social sciences and especially in connection to (post)modernistic accounts of contemporary societies. Traditional societies provided someone with a narrative and a social role, in the post-traditional society an individual is usually forced to create one themselves (Giddens, 1991). "*We have now entered the age of the ordinary individual, that is to say an age when any individual can (and must) take personal action so as to produce and show their own existence, their own difference*" (Cova, 1997, p. 299-300). Identity's link with consumption rests primarily here, in the communicative function of consumption.

Through the acquisition of goods, individuals have the ability to construct their identities by using the symbolic qualities that they ascribe or which are ascribed to goods (McCracken, 1986). "*Shopping is not merely an acquisition of things; it is the buying of an identity*", Clammer (1992, p. 197) declares. Identities thought to be created through consumption are not fixed but are "*reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions*" (Giddens, 1991, p. 185-6). This reflective process, as presented in more detail in Part I, is one major argument that (post)modern thought rests upon.

Case (c) illustrates what was presented earlier as the 'self' or 'personal' identity. This micro-level of analysis refers to physiological traits and psychological predispositions that make an individual unique. Some times in the literature 'identity' and the 'self' have been conflated. For example, Belk (1988) in his work uses the terms 'self', 'sense of self' and 'identity' interchangeably to describe a person's subjective perception of who they are. In the context of consumerism, a consumer may understand their uniqueness in different levels; through a specific act of consumption (what they buy), and/or through their overall consumption lifestyle (what, when, why, how).

Objects and goods can serve as 'bridges' that connect the individual with his/her ideal-self (McCracken, 1986). Belk (1988) convincingly demonstrates how material objects

and possessions may be understood as part of an individual's 'extended-self'. The use of consumption to achieve distinction and/or difference is not something new; it can be traced back to the 19th and 20th century with Veblen's and Simmel's portrayals of consumption styles (Gabriel and Lang, 2006, p. 37). Baudrillard (1998) asserts that difference is the driver of consumer choice. As Rutherford (1990, p. 11) puts it "*It is no longer about keeping up with the Joneses; it's about being different from them*".

Even though consumption may be a tool for constructing the unique self of an individual, at the same time consumers may fall into specific categories of consumption and/or consumption lifestyles. From a business perspective, such categories represent consumer segments organised from sales fact-sheets and market research. From a sociological perspective, however, consumption has already been studied as the basis around which collectivities have evolved (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Wheaton, 2003; Cova and Cova, 2002; Maffesoli, 1996).

It is in this respect that case (b) is understood; a consumer perceives themselves to be similar to some other consumers. Identity, at this level, deals with the characteristics of a group or collectivity. This macro-level of perceiving identity reflects what is commonly known as collective identity. Post-modern conceptualisations of contemporary society highlight the prime role of consumption in influencing the way distinctions are made among individuals. Traditionally social identities were based on work and class distinctions, whereas lifestyles or ways of living seem to be more important factors in making any distinctions now (Featherstone, 2007; Holt, 1997).

The discussion above illustrated the micro (self) and macro (collective) level of examining the concept of identity. The 'ethical consumer' is often treated as a homogeneous consumer category; the extent to which consumers engaged in practices of ethical consumerism actually do share a collective 'ethical consumer' identity, however, is something yet to be examined. The next section focuses on the ways that self and collective identity are organised. A detailed discussion on the key theories of collective identity is provided thereafter.

2.6.2 How different identities are organised

As demonstrated earlier, each individual has a personal identity, which refers to those “*traits and behaviours*” (e.g. kind or responsible) that the person finds self-descriptive (Deaux, 1993, p. 6). Along with this, however, an individual may have a number of collective identities, which reflect membership categories (e.g. ethical consumer, feminist, Muslim) that a person claims as representative. Viewing identity claims as a ‘political’ problem (Gabriel and Lang, 2006) and not an existential one, it may be argued that one chooses ones identities according to the amount of claims one wants to project. Thus, in respect of sex one might claim to have a certain gender identity; in respect of political affiliation one might claim to have a radical left identity; in respect to consumption one might claim to have an ethical consumer identity and so on. Such claims maybe representative of an individual’s sense of self, but are also representative of the individual’s affiliation to certain social categories.

Since such claims reflect social categories, within the literature the term ‘social’ instead of ‘collective’ identity has been used. In this section, those two terms will be used interchangeably, although a distinction can be made which justifies why in this study the term collective identity is preferred.

In line with Ashmore et al.’s (2004) views, I agree that the term social identity is somewhat vague. Embracing a social constructionist approach, it may be argued that all aspects of the self are socially influenced: “*They acquire their meaning and significance only with a context of social relations between people*” (Simon, 1997, p. 321). Hence, reference to a social identity does not provide a clear distinction from other personal or relational forms of identification (Ashmore et al., 2004).

Furthermore, since this study is interested in the ‘collectiveness’ and the ‘we’ of ethical consumption as a consumer movement, I make use of the term ‘collective identity’ as a more appropriate term to understand this. As a result, the connotations (e.g. collective action) ascribed to this term are more relevant for the current study.

An illustration of how a personal identity may be connected with several social/collective identities is provided in the following Figure 2-3:

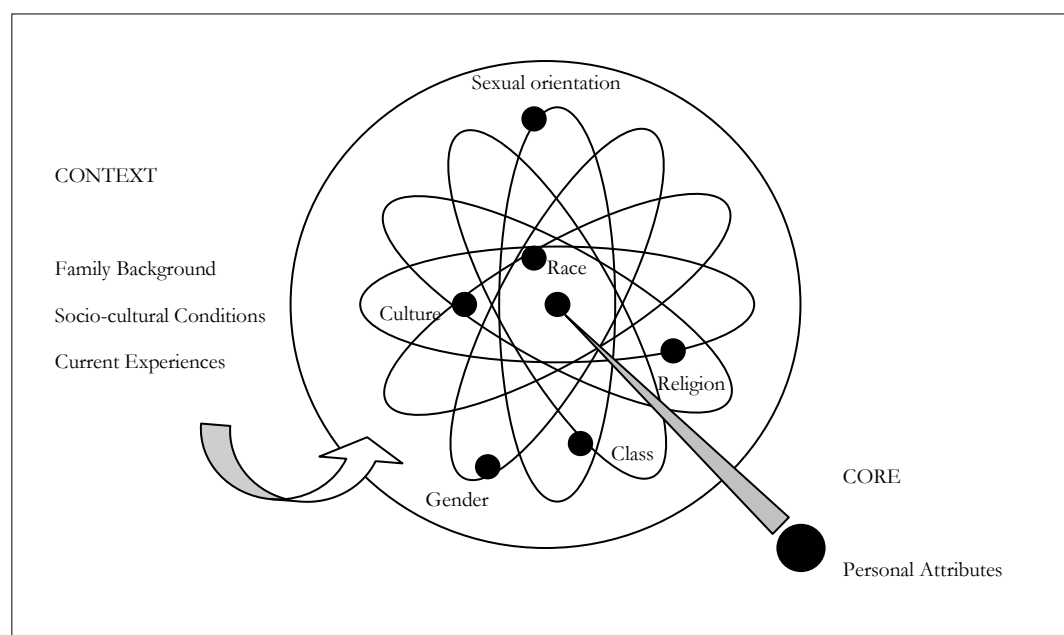


Figure 2-3: Personal and Social Identities (Source: Jones and McEwen (2000, p. 405).

The above illustration is just an example of how the relationship between personal and social identities may be conceived. It is an illustration provided by Jones and McEwen (2000) from a study of a group of 10 female college students, aged 20-24 and of diverse racial-ethnic backgrounds. This figure reflects the multiple social identities that one individual may have and its relation to their personal identity or the self. The social context an individual is in facilitates certain social identities to become stronger and realised, thus approaching his/her personal identity. A similar point was raised earlier by Deaux (1993), who conceptualized identities as both defined internally by the self and externally by others. She suggested that *“social and personal identities are fundamentally interrelated. Personal identity is defined, at least in part, by group memberships and social categories are infused with personal meaning”* (p. 5).

An individual’s social or collective identity is a ‘multidimensional’ concept (Ashmore et al., 2004), in the sense that it can reflect much more than a simple categorization or membership in a group. For an individual to share a collective identity with a certain group, the individual will share some characteristics with that group of others such as stereotypic traits or ideological positions (Ashmore et al., 2004). Furthermore, a collective identity can engage values and emotional significance (Tajfel, 1981). This may involve the evaluation of a category from the individual as well as a perceived value

placed on that category by others. Collective identity may also involve an affective commitment and feelings of closeness towards other members of that category (Phinney, 1992; Jackson, 2002; Asmore et al., 2004) or even a sense of common fate (Gurin and Townsend, 1986; Der-Karabetian, 1980).

In the context of consumerism, collective identity appears to be present amongst members of consumption groups. Consumption choices and patterns have become a contemporary way of socialization. Whether termed as ‘consumption communities’ formed around brands (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001), ‘subcultures’ of consumption (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Wheaton, 2003) or ‘tribes’ (Cova and Cova, 2002; Maffesoli, 1996), individual members of such groups are “*held together through shared emotions, styles of life, new moral beliefs, senses of injustice and consumption practices*” (Cova, 1997, p. 300). Recently, Shaw (2007) illustrated how consumers adopting a voting metaphor in their approaches to ethical consumption feel part of a wider imagined community of like-minded consumers.

The discussion above has illustrated the twofold interaction between identities and consumption. On one hand, (post)modernity has ‘forced’ individuals to create an identity and make their stance within society - this was further discussed in Part I of this chapter. Consumers could, thus, be portrayed as ‘identity-seekers’ (Gabriel and Lang, 2006), looking to position themselves within society through their consumption.

On the other hand, individuals through their consumption are able to communicate their identity. These consumer ‘communicators’ (Gabriel and Lang, 2006) are seen as owning an identity, which their consumption practices are able to project. It should be highlighted here that every consumer is at the same time both an identity-seeker and a communicator through his/her consumption. Thus, as well as using ethical consumption instrumentally to change what they perceive as questionable or unethical institutional and market practices, ethical consumers through their consumption may be also identity-seekers and communicators of identity.

2.6.3 The ethical consumer as an identity

The ‘ethical consumer’ identity is clearly historically constructed and not something that derives from ‘natural’ or ‘essential’ characteristics. The birth of consumer society and

associated culture, as Sassatelli (2007) convincingly argues has emerged “*gradually* through a progressive, but not linear or uniform, *coming together* of a variety of factors” (Sassatelli, 2007, p. 50) - both social and economical - which often differed in terms of time and forms, as discussed in detail in Part I of this review. In the same way, one may argue that the consumer as a role, and subsequently the ‘ethical’ consumer as an identity, acquired meaning through a historical process.

A social constructionist theorization of identity “*rejects any category that sets forward essential or core features as the unique property of a collective’s members*” (Cerulo, 1997, p. 387). Ethical consumers, in this respect, can be conceptualized as consumers who came to understand themselves as being ‘ethical’ through a *process* and not because they simply share some ‘natural’ characteristics that allow them to be defined as such. Collective identity, under this approach, is regarded as something “*neither static nor the property of the actor, but as a process through which individual and/or collective actors (in interaction with other actors) give a specific meaning to their traits, their life occurrences and the systems of social relations in which they are embedded*” (Della Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 92). Collective identity in the Social Movement literature has been heavily studied to the point of sometimes being over-stretched as a concept. Polletta and Jasper (2001) point out that collective identity, as an analytical concept to describe many different dimensions and dynamics of social protest, has sometimes been forced to do too much

In this study, collective identity is seen as a tool for understanding how the interests of ethical consumers emerged and in what way (if any) ‘ethical consumers’ form a ‘we’. The collective identity of ethical consumers may, in this sense, be understood as an *incentive* for mobilization and as an *indicator* which may explain the engagement of ethical consumers with different practices in order to bring about their desired change.

Ethical consumers are expected to be engaged in boycotting, buycotting and discursive practices because they are able to define the boundaries between the actors in conflicts related to ethical consumerism. This includes the identification of the actor as such, which in this context is the ethical consumer and his/her adversaries. As demonstrated above, ethical consumers have a range of adversaries found in the form of companies, governments and other institutions. The occurrence of a collective ‘we’, however, is also important for collective action (Touraine, 1977; Melucci, 1996; Della Porta and Diani 2006). This collective ‘we’ is responsible for the development of emotional attachments

amongst members (Della Porta and Diani, 2006) and at the same time defines the orientations of the movement's action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which such action is to take place (Melucci, 1996, p. 70).

Emotional investment enables individuals to feel part of a common unity (Melucci, 1996). In her recent study, Shaw (2007) illustrated how ethical consumers feel part of a wider imagined community of like-minded consumers. As part of this wider community, ethical consumers were found to experience feelings of belonging, shared rituals and moral responsibilities. In Shaw's study all 10 participants implicitly appear to experience such notions of belonging. A similar study examining consumers engaged in boycotting practices, however, found that two out of the eight participants did not perceive themselves to have any connections with other consumers except for the fact that they all engaged in the same consumption practice (Kominou, 2006). Further examination into the extent to which individuals identify themselves as 'ethical consumers' might spread some light on those contradictory findings.

Emotions of solidarity as opposed to the vague emotion of 'belonging' or the emotion of 'sameness' may be a better way of understanding perceived relationships amongst ethical consumers. Commenting on collective action, Melucci (1996) stresses the role of solidarity amongst movement members. He concludes that for many contemporary movements, solidarity is not just a feeling experienced amongst members but can be a goal of the movement itself. A distinction between two different types of understanding solidarity can be made. According to Rucht (2000), solidarity may imply expectation and practice of mutual support, but it may also imply altruism, in the sense of lending a helping hand to others "*who have not strong voice or arm*" (p. 78).

In the context of ethical consumerism, solidarity as a goal and an act of altruism can be seen in fair-trade initiatives. Political consumerism literature also comments on solidarity, in the sense that ethical consumers, through their responsibility-taking practice solidarity (Micheletti, 2003). Here, since solidarity refers to the perceived relationships amongst ethical consumers, it is close to Rucht's (2000) first category, i.e. the expectations of mutual support. "*Activists and movement sympathisers are aware of participating in realities which are much vaster and more complex than those of which they have direct experience. It is in reference to this wider community that the actor draws motivation and encouragement [to act]*" (Della Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 95). This way of understanding emotional

closeness amongst ethical consumers overcomes complexities that could arise since ethical consumers may not share the same interests or goals behind their engagement in collective action.

Despite the emotional investment that acts as an incentive to participate in a movement, collective identity also influences the repertoires of action through which the movement members are striving to bring about change (Melucci, 1996; Polletta and Jasper, 2001). Through the realisation of the conflict, ethical consumers are able to identify the opportunities and constraints, which will shape their collective action practices. As discussed already, both individual and group initiatives for collective action can exist in ethical consumerism. Seen from a macro perspective, Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) are important in understanding how the ethical consumer collective identity is framed. From a micro perspective, the individual consumer is expected to decide on the nature of his/her agency based on the weighting of the opportunities and constraints as framed by the SMOs or based on his/her perceptions of what the opportunities and constraints are.

Ethical consumers do not have to be formal members of any organisation to be considered as part of the ethical consumerism movement (if we assume that such a movement does indeed exist). Actors in a social movement do not necessarily need to interact with each other physically (Della Porta and Diani, 2006). The concept of 'imagined communities' that was used in Shaw's (2007) study is very similar in this respect. Ethical consumer as an 'imagined' collective identity allows for the existence of a variety of adversaries, goals and practices within the ethical consumerism movement. This *polyphony* in ethical consumerism is not unexpected. Research on collective identity highlights the dangers of approaching collectives as homogeneous entities and urges careful consideration of the complex, and sometimes contradictory, nature of collective existence (Cerulo, 1997).

Collective identity and the system of opportunities and constraints, develop in social movements in a circular manner (Melucci, 1996, p. 73). Ethical consumers should be able to identify themselves when they *learn* to distinguish between a collective 'we' and the environment, reflecting a cognitive process. Ethical consumers and the system of opportunities and constraints reciprocally constitute themselves and thus, the movement of ethical consumerism becomes self-aware through its relation to its

external environment. It could be argued that is in this stage that SMOs may start to develop.

In this sense, collective identity presupposes the reflexive ability of social actors. Action -as the outcome of a collective identity- is hence not simply a reaction to social and environmental constraints but produces symbolic orientations and meanings which actors are able to recognise (Melucci, 1996, p. 73.). The development of 'ethical' product labels such as 'fair-trade' and 'organic' may be considered here as examples of tangible cultural materials used in ethical consumerism to express this collective 'we'. Other ways of expressing collective identities are through models of behaviour (rituals, traditions and duties), events, objects and artefacts or even a shared language (Melucci, 1996; Della Porta and Diani, 2006). Embracing Melucci's argument that collective identity is experienced not so much as a situation as it is an action (Melucci, 1996), the engagement with ethical consumerism practices for consumers could be thought to largely reflect their experience of '*we-ness*'. This is of course, however, something to be examined.

Finally, collective identity may arguably establish or reveal the *continuity* of a movement (Della Porta and Diani, 2006). According to Melucci (1996) identity for an individual entails an ability to perceive duration, thus enabling him/her to establish a relationship between past and future and to tie his/her action to its effects. When constructing a collective identity, individuals achieve this continuity through the "active re-elaboration of elements of their own biography and their reorganisation in a new context" (Della Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 96). Hence, an in-depth examination of the identity of ethical consumers could provide fruitful insights not only into the nature of this collective identity, but also on the historical process that gave birth to this identity.

2.6.4 The ethical consumer and other relevant consumer categories

Disciplinary orientations and explanations focused on different aspects influence theorisations of ethical consumption creating a plethora of approaches and terminologies. The terms of the ethical and the political consumer have been used in this literature review interchangeably. This approach is not uncommon within the existing literature. However, throughout this literature review, comments were raised,

where appropriate, indicating that these two framings of ‘ethical’ and ‘political’ seem to allow for qualitatively different conceptualisations of consumers and their practices.

The ‘socially conscious consumer’ is the frame that perhaps has the longest history among marketing categories related to ethical consumption. In the opening article of the *Journal of Marketing* in July 1971, Eugene J. Kelley commented on the emerging social and environmental market segmentation:

Currently, markets are segmented essentially on demographic and behavioral bases. Market segmentation based on consumers' societal orientation is emerging; markets will be evaluated according to the degree to which consumers accept the consumer-citizen concept and buy as individuals concerned not only with their personal satisfactions, but also with societal well-being. In addition to the changes in marketing brought about by the social/ environmental orientation of individual consumers, new markets are developing in such fields as air and water pollution, solid wastes management, public transportation, thermal pollution, and noise control. (1971, p. 1).

In Webster’s (1975), definition, the relationship between ‘ethical’ and socially conscious’ consumers frames is evident: “*The socially conscious consumer can be defined as a consumer who takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or who attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change?*” (p. 188). One of the earliest references utilising this frame appears - to my knowledge - to be that of Anderson and Cunningham in 1972, who attempted to construct a scale for the profiling of the ‘socially conscious consumer’. Anderson and Cunningham (1972) developed their scale using constructs from Berkowitz and Daniels’ (1964) ‘social responsibility scale’ and the Berkowitz and Lutterman (1968) revised scale on ‘socially responsible personality’. It appears that a further focus on the environmental side of social responsibility shaped additional consumer framings such as the ‘socially/ecologically conscious consumer’ (Mayer, 1976), the ‘ecologically concerned consumer’ (Kinnear et al., 1974) and the ‘ecologically conscious consumer’ (Roberts and Bacon, 1997), leading to the ‘green’ consumer (Roberts, 1997; Jansson et al., 2010) and respective ‘shades’ of green (Cleveland et al., 2005).

It becomes thus apparent that ethical consumer seems to overlap with several existing consumer categorisations or ‘framings’. Within the marketing literature, Connolly and Shaw (2006) identified 15 different terms used to describe consumers whose

consumption behaviour is not strictly based on economic concerns. From this vast array of categories the 'ethical consumer', the 'green consumer' and the 'voluntary simplifier' appear to be the most frequently utilised (Connolly and Shaw, 2006). By focusing their examination of fair trade consumption, Connolly and Shaw (2006) demonstrated that the conceptualizations of those three categories of consumers are actually overlapping. A similar conclusion was highlighted earlier by Eckersley (1992) who argued that the meaning of ethical consumer, green consumer and voluntary simplicity is elastic i.e. is being applied to or appropriated by various social justice positions.

With so many categorisations and framings already existing within literature, and with a tendency to sometimes use framings interchangeably, the answer to what exactly we mean by 'ethical consumer' and how the 'ethical' is different from the 'socially conscious' consumer, for example, becomes complex. One thus may wonder what are the distinctive characteristics, or else the additional value, this frame offers us today. Recent work on the ethical consumption discourse is picking up on this. For example, based on her evidence from an ethnographic study with six families in North West England, Hall (2011) illustrated the multiple ways of recognising consumption as an ethically-embedded process, only to conclude that ethical consumption discourses are dismissive of the ethics in everyday consumption.

In their recent book titled "The Myth of the Ethical Consumer", Devinney et al. (2010) heavily criticised the frame of the 'ethical' consumer, asserting that "*the notion of ethical consumerism is too broad in its definition, too loose in its operationalization, and too moralistic in its stance to be anything other than a myth*" (p. 9), and continuing that, "*it carries mythological baggage that needs to be discarded*" (p. 9). Their perception of the ethical consumer as a myth was articulated in three ways. First, they argued, it represents a role model that is '*fictional*', cannot exist. Second, they consider it '*mythical*' in the sense that it represents idealizations that open to contestation the existing flawed, behaviour of members of the society. Third, ethical consumption, they argue, is an '*idealized*' behaviour, in the sense that it represents a role model wherein the morality of the model itself is a subject of contestation. Consequently, they find using the 'ethical' frame dangerous, not only because it creates a divide with unethical or less ethical consumers, but more importantly because it assumes universal homogenous values that are imposed upon people.

It is not uncommon for scholars and commercial marketing research to create consumer categories in order to characterise individuals and their practices. Although this might be a useful approach to analytically explain individual variations in consumerism, this top down approach generates several questions. To what extent are individuals familiar with such categorisations? To what extent would an individual ascribe to an 'ethical' and/or a 'political' framing, for example, in order describe his/her consumption? What are the meanings individuals ascribe to their 'ethical consumption' practices and how do they relate to the meanings assumed by both academia and marketing research? And most importantly, what are the consequences (if any) of academia and marketing using an 'ethical' frame to describe consumption and, subsequently, individuals?

2.7 Reflections and statement of research Aims and Objectives

By combining, analysing and critically evaluating certain focal points (including the involved practices, goals and issues of conflict) of the concepts of ethical and political consumerism as they are portrayed in existing literature, it was possible to identify some inconsistencies in the very conceptualisation of such phenomena; these inconsistencies particularly dealt with the exclusion of self-interested and non-economic motivations behind the practicing of ethical consumption, as well as a tendency to overlook practices that do not lend themselves to commercialisation. In particular, literature on ethical consumption often equates ethical and political consumption with shopping.

The same seems to hold true if we think about the wider context of contemporary consumer societies, where, as discussed earlier, under the forces of advanced capitalism and liberalism the individual is transformed to a 'consumer' and ultimately to a 'shopper'. Nonetheless, the review of the literature also provided insight into the different meanings of consumption and consumerism and commented on alternative understandings of practicing consumption (such as practices who usually fall under the 'anti-consumption' frame) which are not tied to the current economic and political structures. With 'consumption' increasingly becoming a space within which

contemporary individuals are both empowered and enforced to construct their personal, social and political selves, such an understanding of consumption as only related to 'purchasing' might be restraining.

The **aim of this thesis**, thus, is to explore, through primary research, the framing and meaning of the so-called 'ethical consumer' and associated notion of 'ethical consumption', in order to understand what constitutes an 'ethical consumer'. Relatedly, the thesis interrogates how the prerequisite to 'purchase' affects this framing, particularly with respect to realising potential change (both in terms of degree and type) that the so-called ethical consumption promises to deliver.

Reflecting on this literature review, it is arguable that much of the conceptualisation of ethical and political consumption has remained at a theoretical level, with academics and market researchers arbitrarily ascribing individuals the label of a 'consumer' and the accompanying framings of being 'ethical' and/or 'political'. However, the diversity found in terms of practices and in terms of goals and adversaries as presented in this literature review, challenges the tendency to treat 'ethical consumers' as a homogenous segment. This is particularly important if we are interested to see beyond market categories and gain an understanding of ethical consumption as a way of practicing (sub)politics. What is certainly missing, thus, is a better understanding of how individuals choose to frame themselves, their consumption practices and the type of change, if any, they attempt to pursue through their consumption.

Therefore, by embracing a bottom up approach, this research provides evidence that gets beyond the marketing definitions of the ethical consumer and explores the 'ethical' and 'political' discourses of consumption based on individuals' perceptions and experiences. To achieve this, this study had set the following **research objectives**:

- **Research Objective 1:** to explore the meanings and degree of homogeneity (collectiveness) of the 'ethical' consumer frame, as well as its connection with other consumer frames, and particularly those of the 'green', the 'political' and the 'socially conscious' consumer;
- **Research Objective 2:** to critically explore the variety of practices and the narratives behind these practices (what emancipates and what limits decisions to engage with different practices);

- **Research Objective 3:** to critically examine the perceived potential of using consumption to practice (sub)politics, and the associated metaphor of ‘voting’.

The methodology that was developed to achieve these research objectives is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Researching the ethical consumer

While the previous chapter introduced and discussed the major existing literature upon which this research was drawn, the present chapter aims to provide a detailed account of the methodology that was followed.

This chapter begins with a statement of the research aims, followed by an overview of the research process. Methodological considerations on defining and locating the 'ethical' consumer are presented next. The chapter continues with a description of the research design that was developed as well as a detailed explanation of the methods that were employed in order to carry out this piece of research. The chapter ends with a brief acknowledgment of the methodological limitations, commenting on the more pragmatic side of this academic research.

3.1 Introduction and re-statement of the research aims

Discourses of ‘ethical’ and ‘political’ consumption are increasingly used in the public domain, by media for example, or commercial research and other institutions, as well as, of course, academics. Nonetheless, our understanding is still limited, and it often comes from insights that follow a top-down approach; marketing research, for example, does this by categorising individuals as ‘ethical consumers’ when they tick the relevant boxes of, for example, buying organic labelled goods. Following a different approach, this study is interested to explore individuals themselves experience ‘ethics’ in their everyday life as consumers, and what meanings and discourses they develop. In short, to hear *their* stories of what ethical consumption is all about.

Hence, addressing this need for a bottom-up approach and combining it with the theoretical framework as developed through the literature review, this primary **research aimed** to provide evidence so as to get beyond the marketing definitions of the ethical consumer and explore the ‘ethical’ and ‘political’ discourse of consumption based on individuals’ perceptions and experiences. To accomplish this, I undertook primary research centred on the following **three objectives**:

- **Research Objective 1:** to explore the meanings and degree of homogeneity (collectiveness) of the ‘ethical’ consumer frame, as well as its connection with other consumer frames, and particularly those of the ‘green’, the ‘political’ and the ‘socially conscious’ consumer;
- **Research Objective 2:** to critically explore the variety of practices and the narratives behind these practices (what emancipates and what limits decisions to engage with different practices);
- **Research Objective 3:** to critically examine the perceived potential of using consumption to practice (sub)politics, and the associated metaphor of ‘voting’.

These three objectives constitute the backbone of the research design as presented later in section 3.4. Through the rest of this chapter, I make reference to these objectives where appropriate.

This chapter aims to offer a detailed description on the methodology (including research design and methods) developed in order to conduct my primary research in a way that addresses the aforementioned objectives.

The discussion comments with a briefly overview of the research process as it developed through time. This, I feel is necessary as it illustrates the dynamic nature of the research, and provides an overall picture of the way all features of this thesis (including the methodology) developed together. Some methodological considerations are then offered before moving onto a detailed account of the research design.

3.2 Overview of the research process

I have already mentioned in the Prologue that the concept of 'ethical consumption' has been of interest for me since my undertaking of a Master's course in 2005. My dissertation involved a qualitative piece of research, i.e. in-depth interviewing of consumers in Glasgow who are engaging in boycotting activities. This first attempt to research the specific phenomenon was the founding stone of the work I am presenting here, since it provided me with first hand insight not only on the subject per se, but also on the perspective from which I decided to view this phenomenon, as well as on issues which affected the development of a methodology that I ultimately decided to follow.

Starting off with a background in Business and specifically in Marketing, up to that point I was exposed mostly to knowledge that was generated within those specific disciplines. Soon after the research for that dissertation, I felt that a 'sociological' perspective – or better in the words of C. Wright Mills (1959), a 'sociological imagination' – seemed to me necessary in order to fully understand this concept. The reviewing of broader and inter-disciplinary literature helped me to formulate a first version of research aims and objectives, as well as to sketch a matching methodology which initially focused on a campaign group called STOP which was operating in Glasgow at the time.

After the generation of a database of 52 campaign groups opposing supermarkets in the UK and two semi-formal interviews with the president of the campaign group, it

became apparent that the methodology that was already planned was not adequate. Amongst other reasons, in June 2009 the president of STOP announced the campaign would be dissolved as there appeared no further reason for its continuation since their case was somewhat 'lost'. Under these circumstances, I was compelled to adapt and re-evaluate my initial research plans.

As a living organism which corresponds to external stimuli, the methodology followed in this study crystallised through time; during the whole process of development there was a constant flow or rearranging and re-evaluating up until the point of writing this report. Diagram 3-1 (see next page) illustrates this dynamic nature of the research process that this thesis embraced. In this sense, I argue that up until the point of writing this thesis, my approach to the phenomenon of ethical consumerism has been broad enough to allow for interesting ideas and perspectives to rise from this process, and at the same time narrow enough so as to constitute a workable project for a single and fund-less researcher.

Throughout I have approached my subject of interest in an 'ethnographic' manner. Through my reading and thinking, it had become apparent that the phenomenon of ethical consumerism could not be understood in much depth if it was separated from the context within which it takes place. My underlying belief was that insight generated from such a stance would not only help me understand better the mechanics of that concept, but more importantly would help to reveal much of the complexity and subjectivity that this phenomenon carries within it both as a concept and as a practice. Keeping up with this logic, I immersed myself in a specific area of Glasgow, where the STOP campaign group was operating, and attempted to look at it as if wearing a pair of glasses whose lenses were coloured by the concept of ethical consumption.

Once I had a working version of research aims and objectives, I continued with the development of a research methodology which included decisions of which methods of scientific enquiry would be used, how they would be used, when they would be used and so on. It is with a feeling of satisfaction that I confirm that the research strategy I developed at that point proved to be realistic (and thus achievable, since relatively minor changes had to be made) and adequate (by thinking retrospectively in terms of the quality and quantity of the data that were generated).

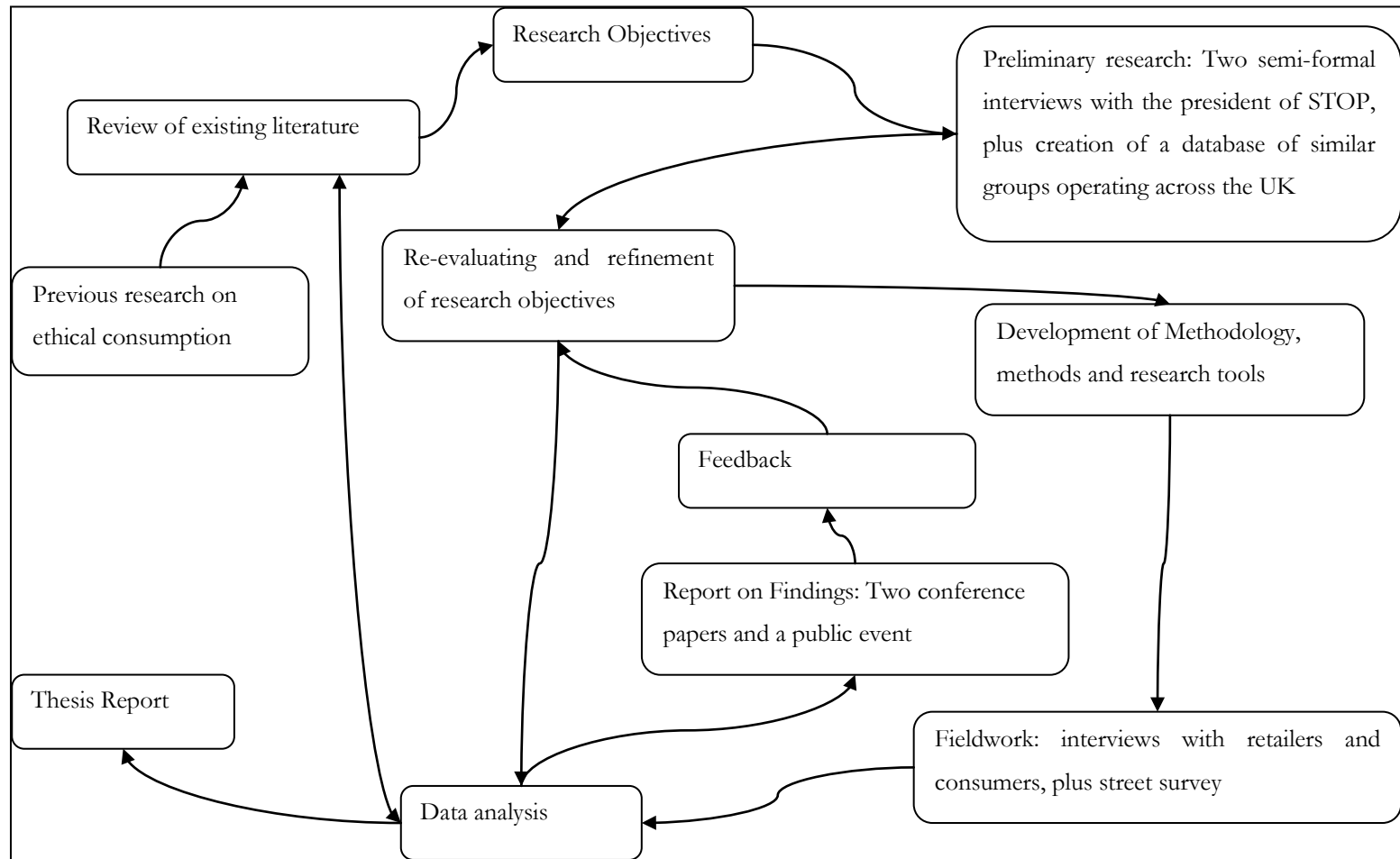


Diagram 3-1: The research process of this thesis.

3.3 Methodological Considerations

Whilst developing the methodology for this research, the way to identify the research subject, i.e. 'ethical' consumers had to be considered. If I was to interview ethical consumers, I had to have a plan of how to approach them. In particular, there were two questions that needed answering before getting further with the designing of this research: How to we recognise or distinguish the 'ethical' amongst other consumers? and Where do we find an ethical consumer?

3.3.1 *Defining the 'ethical' consumer*

Researching ethical consumers can be a challenging task with respect to developing a rigorous methodology that can generate valid, reliable and (theoretically and/or empirically) generalisable data.

Particularly important for this study are the methodological implications on whether and how the 'ethical consumer' population can be defined prior to conducting research. Perhaps, it might be helpful here to remember that the term ethical consumer first appeared as a category in a marketing research carried out by Mintel in order to describe consumer behaviour which is influenced by a wide spectrum of moral concerns (Newholm and Shaw, 2007). Up to now, it is almost a tradition that consumers are baptised as "ethical" if, in their role as consumers, they are involved in a number of practices – set mainly by academia and marketing – found in the ethical and political consumerism literature. For example if they boycott (that is refrain from buying) or buycott (purposively choose to buy) certain products because of the political or ethical issues involved with those products.

However, as discussed earlier in the literature review chapter (Chapter 2), such an approach is problematic in the sense that the extent to which a consumer is 'ethical' or not is left down to the judgment of those that are examining the specific phenomenon (the academics and marketing researchers). In other words, the 'ethical' aspect of consumption seems to be appropriated by people and organisations that often hold

some power – something that may complicate things more if we think of the conflicts of interest that might arise in such situations.

Hence, this study chose to leave the definition of ‘ethical’ consumption open (that is, not involved with the practices of consumers) and to use instead the framing of the identity of the ‘ethical’ consumer (that is, the degree to which a consumer identifies his/herself as ‘ethical’).

3.3.2 Locating the ethical consumer

The sample population and strategies used to recruit ethical consumers in prior studies could fall into two categories: a purposive sample of only ‘ethical’ consumers (where recruitment was done through events associated traditionally with ethical consumption, posters in spaces where ethical consumers are expected to visit often, or through subscribed members in associated magazines (e.g. Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., 2006; Shaw and Shiu, 2002; Shaw and Clarke, 1999) and a non-purposive one of all consumers (where recruitment was done for example through general public surveys – e.g. Cowe and Williams, 2000). Using a purposive sample of ‘ethical’ consumers in that sense means that the ‘ethical’ consumer needs to be defined *a priori*, and according to that definition recruitment strategies can be developed. The definition, however, of what is considered as ‘ethical’ in consumption and consequently who *is* the ‘ethical’ consumer constitutes for this study a research objective.

Such a limitation does not mean that a purposive sample in this respect cannot be of any value, but such a purposive sample should be complemented by information extracted from a non-purposive sample to facilitate holistic understandings of the ‘ethical’ discourse in consumption and exploration of the ‘ethical consumer’ as a collective identity.

The absence of an official listing or easily identifiable group of ethical consumers can impose difficulties for the researcher interested in this field with regard to issues of access as well as the ability to estimate the population of this segment. In this respect, it could be argued that a researcher interested in ethical consumers is facing many of the methodological implications expected to arise when examining *hidden populations*. Here,

the term 'hidden population' is used to describe "*a subset of the general population whose membership is not readily distinguished or enumerated based on existing knowledge and/or sampling capabilities*" (Wiebel, 1990, p. 6).

3.4 The Research Design

The previous section explained two major methodological issues that needed to be addressed before making any plans on how to carry out primary research. This section moves forward the discussion and presents the research design of this thesis.

3.4.1 Overview of the Research Design

Taking into consideration the issues raised earlier, a case study approach was considered to be the most appropriate research strategy for this study. The major advantage of employing such a research strategy is that it positions the study into a specific context, providing a geographical and situational frame that helped overcome the methodological difficulties illustrated earlier. The location I chose to undertake this case study was an area in the west-end of Glasgow called Partick. (The selection of this location and other details of the case study approach are discussed extensively in the next sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2 and 3.4.3). The positioning of the research in a specific situational frame allowed exploration of the extent to which the 'ethical' consumption discourses - like the environmental discourse (Jensen, 2003) - is context specific. Moreover, this approach enabled (and ultimately confirmed) an understanding of conflicts in ethical consumption as complex and continuous struggles over the appropriation (definition and meaning) of the 'ethical' discourse in consumption, rather than something static and definite.

Within this geographical space, I recruited and interviewed twenty self-identified **Ethical Consumers**. The very aim of this research, after all, was to understand the ethical consumption discourse from a bottom up perspective, something that affected all aspects of the research design, including methods. As the protagonists of ethical

consumption, in-depth interviews with self-identified ethical consumers were considered as the best method in order to elicit data that could address all three research objectives in an adequate manner (as set in section 3.1, p. 88). A more detailed discussion of the selected method (including details on recruitment, interviewing process and sample's profile) is offered in section 3.5.3 (p. 126). In a nutshell, these interviews were the prime focus of this research, enabling a deeper exploration of the meanings and degree of homogeneity (collectiveness) of the 'ethical' consumer frame (Research Objective 1) and associated practices (Research Objective 2) through real life examples, and ultimately an examination of people's perceptions on the potential for change (both in terms of degree and type) that ethical consumption promises to deliver (Research Objective 3).

To contribute to, and assist in, the understanding of ethical consumption sought through these interviews, two further angles from which to look at this phenomenon, the **General Public** and **Retailers**, were also incorporated in this research. Eliciting insight from these angles was expected to generate complementary primary data that could afford a better grasp of the topic under investigation.

With respect to the **General Public**, I decided to undertake a quantitative survey in the streets of Partick. The aim for this street survey was twofold: First, it was an alternative way to explore the views of people who might identify themselves as 'ethical consumers' but who did not respond to my calls for interviews, and secondly, it was an opportunity to explore further the framings and practices of ethical consumption by infusing it with perceptions of people who didn't ascribe themselves to such a framing. Thus I was able to explore further issues such as the self-identification of the 'ethical' and other relevant consumer categories (Research Objective 1) and extent to which these are shared, known, etc in the public sphere. I was also able to get a quantitative indication of how identification/framing and practices relate (Research Objective 1 and 2). In other words, to some extent the quantitative aspect of this survey aimed in complementing as well as triangulating the qualitative part of the interviews with consumers. A detailed account of the objectives of the street survey and the selected method (including details on questionnaire design, data collection and sample) is offered in section 3.5.2 (p. 118).

Insight from the side of **Retailers** was sought mainly due to their position as intermediaries between production and consumption. An understanding of relationships between supply and demand, or provision and consumption, as '*complicated and co-*

constitutive' (Van Vliet et al., 2005, p. 14), reveals the strategic role that retailers have in the formation and re-production of an 'ethical' discourse in consumption. Put simply, retailers can observe demand, they can reflect this knowledge in their decisions about what to stock in their shops, and in that sense they can affect the choice for consumers. They can also be the 'frontier' of production; consumers can provide feedback, for example, to stock more ethical products, and retailers can pass this demand through to production. Miller (1995) explains that through "*vertical integration it is the retailers who inform marketing and advertising as to trends in demand, and this in turn is fed back to producers and designers who are told to come up with a new version of a familiar commodity in order to fulfil this aspiration*" (p. 5). Perhaps, the most important aspect of retailers for this research is that they can observe the non-economic aspects of consumption a lot closer than producers who usually see only a drop in sales.

Thus, insight from the side of grocery retailers operating in the location of this study was also sought through both questionnaires and interviews. The research focused on grocery retailers since consumers appear to pay attention to political and ethical issues mostly when grocery shopping (Stolle et al., 2005). A detailed account of the selected methods (including details on questionnaire design, data collection and sample profile) is offered in section 3.5.1 (p. 110). The main objectives of eliciting information from local retailers were to explore their views on the framing of ethical consumption and ethical consumers (who are the ethical consumers?) as well as to examine their practical experience of ethical consumerism in their everyday operations. It was thus possible to get indications on the degree to which understandings of 'ethical' consumption and consumers match the understandings of the actors themselves in all three levels of frames and meaning (Research Objective 1), practices (Research Objective 2) and to some extent the politicising of ethical consumption, by seeking for example their views in other consumer practices such as boycotting (insight which fed into Research Objective 3).

The narrowing down of the focus of this research into a specific area and the three different angles to elicit data was expected to facilitate the gaining of a rich, detailed and holistic understanding (Snow and Trom, 2002) of the issues important to this study. This research design produced both quantitative and qualitative data through a variety of research methods including face-to-face interviewing and questionnaires. Secondary

data such as relevant documents (e.g. Council meeting proceedings, campaign literature from the field, and local retailers advertising material) were also collected and used where appropriate.

Having presented an overview of the research design, the discussion will now focus on providing some more details on the case study approach that this research embraced. After this, a detailed description of Partick, where the research was situated is offered.

3.4.2 The case study approach

As a scientific research strategy in social sciences, the case study has not been very popular in the past and has often been criticized regarding its ability to produce reliable, valid and generalizable data. Much of this criticism appears to focus on the limitations of case studies, thus leading researchers to – paraphrasing Flyvbjerg (2006) – “*misunderstand*” and often denounce the need and use of such a research approach. Along with all other research strategies, case study methodology has indeed limitations – some of which are discussed in more detail in the next section. These limitations, however, can be minimized – if not eliminated – through the development of a careful research design. For a case study approach, the careful selection of the case(s) to be examined (Flyvbjerg, 2006) seems to be a catalytic factor in safeguarding the scientific advantages this approach is able to offer.

This study focused its research on a particular area of Glasgow – Partick. This area was selected, as the most suitable place to focus upon, amongst other factors, due to a) the existence of a conflict between a big retailer and members of the public that had developed in the recent past, and b) the proximity of that area to the researcher's base. The conflict was generated by Tesco's plans for a retail and residential development on the bank of the river Kelvin in Partick. These plans met opposition from part of the public (mainly residents) and resulted in the creation of a campaign group named Stop Tesco Owning Partick (STOP).

The existence of a conflict involving a retailer and members of the public in the area is considered an advantage for several reasons. First of all, the nature of the specific conflict is such that it allows participation of individuals through all economic, political

and social structures; for example, as a consumer, an individual may decide to boycott the supermarket involved in this conflict. As an activist, the individual might decide to take part in campaigning against this development, sign petitions, write objection letters for the planning application procedure, demonstrate, etc. As a voter, the individual might vote in the council elections, for example for politicians that oppose these plans as well. Alternatively, someone may support the supermarket plans while framing his/her decision in ethical terms. Therefore, focusing the research in an area where such conflict exists provided a framework within which the structural opportunities or constraints linked with economic, political and social spheres could be examined. In return, this allowed the exploration of the way such opportunities and constraints impact on the negotiation of these roles and identities.

Second, the fact that one of the actors in the specific conflict in that area is a supermarket allowed for the existence of a wide range of issues and reasons for opposing this actor. Since this conflict deals with *developmental plans* of supermarkets, opposition to these plans could be due to reasons other than anti-supermarket sentiments. Opposing such plans, for example, might be a sort of Not-In-My-Back-Yard (NIMBY) reaction on behalf of residents that disagree with the proposed scale of development and its impact in terms of noise pollution and traffic, with aesthetic issues of the planning design, with the opportunity cost (e.g. having a green space instead of a building) etc.

Nonetheless, reasons for opposing these plans could also deal with issues that conventionally could be thought to relate to ethical consumerism. Big supermarkets have often been the target of consumers because of their business policies dealing with environmental issues, animal and or human rights. For example, according to the Ethical Consumer magazine, Tesco is on the black list of UK boycott campaigns for at least two reasons: its use of Radio Frequency identification which is considered to violate privacy, as well as for its animal rights policies on allowing the sale of live turtles, tortoises and frogs in their Chinese stores.

(<http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/Boycotts/currentUKboycotts.aspx#tata>;

[Retrieved 19/01/2009]).

Large scale supermarkets in the UK have also been criticized for their 'ghost town' effects, which impact upon the local economy and social life. According to a New

Economics Foundation study, between 1995 and 2000, the number of local shops and services including post-offices, banks, butchers and grocers has declined by 20% as a result of the proliferation of large supermarket retailers in the UK (Oram et al., 2003). The fact that the specific supermarket chain currently holds the biggest share in the grocery market (31.4% in 2008 according to TNS Worldpanel) is another advantage of narrowing down the research to an area where this conflict exists. Successful brands appear to have received special attention (Klein, 2000) in the anti-corporate protest. Hence, a conflict that involves Tesco could be thought to attract more voices (in terms of number and issues) of opposition than a conflict initiated by a less-well known retailer.

Third, the existence of an organized campaign group in the selected area of Glasgow is considered to further serve the research purposes. Within the context of this study, consumerism could be considered as a form of direct action since supermarkets are subject to consumer loyalty and satisfaction in order to generate the financial resources needed for, at least, their survival. Moreover, the explicit focus of this group to, amongst others, “*promote local retail diversity and small independent shops*” (excerpt from STOP constitution), indicates that the group might have attracted members interested in issues other than Not-In-My-Back-Yard ones. Researching the extent and the way consumer power was mobilized by the specific campaign group could provide further empirical evidence that could advance knowledge on how consumerism may be conceptualized, as well as the way consumer and social movements relate.

3.4.3 Guidelines followed in the case study approach

The research design for this study was shaped keeping in mind the procedural guidelines suggested by Snow and Trom (2002) as a means of enhancing the prospect of conducting an empirically sound and compelling case study. These guidelines are based on the following four principles: open-ended and flexible research, multi-perspectival orientation, longitudinal research and researcher triangulation.

Engagement with the first two principles is readily identifiable in the way the research design has been developed – a first indication was given earlier when presenting the

research process in section 3.2, p. 89. Concerning the third principle, the main reason to develop longitudinal research design is to capture and analyse social processes as they evolve (Snow and Trom, 2002). Such insight is considered valuable but it would take this study away from its main research objectives. Thus, the research design does not maintain a longitudinal character in this respect – however, the historical development of the ‘ethical’ frame in consumption is to a degree examined in this study both theoretically and empirically (through for example the narration of consumers’ personal biographies).

The fourth principle of researcher triangulation refers to the “*use and coordination of multiple researchers*” (Snow and Trom, 2002, p. 156). This approach is considered by Snow and Trom to be important since it can sometimes be difficult for a single researcher to acquire a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Since this research is part of a PhD thesis, researcher triangulation is not possible, but aspects of the approach are available through the cooperation of the researcher and her supervisory team.

To summarize, the existing knowledge on ethical consumers both in terms of theoretical and empirical insights is limited, meaning that the research is exploratory in nature. The necessary and sufficient data that can best fit the purposes of this study were primarily gathered through an in-depth examination of a case study in the area of Partick (Glasgow). The narrowing down of the research in this geographical area helped to overcome the methodological difficulties of access and population estimates when researching ethical consumers. In addition, the existence of a conflict (between consumers-residents and a big retailer) and a campaign group in that area facilitated examination on the structural opportunities and constrains - whether in the political, social or economic sphere - and the subsequent forms of agency.

3.4.4 Limitations of the selected approach

This positioning of the research within a specific geographical and situational frame does not come without trade-offs. Perhaps the most important implication when adopting such a strategy deals with the issue of generalisability of the findings. For this

study, the extent to which the data gathered from the specific case study could provide insights for ethical consumerism as a whole does not have a simple answer.

As presented earlier, this research incorporates a single case study approach, something that is considered to serve the research objectives of this study (as set out in the section 3.1 of this chapter). Snow and Trom (2002) distinguish case study research according to the *type* of the case in three categories: normal/representative, critical and negative/extreme cases. Similar to this categorization is the one developed by Flyvbjerg (2006) who distinguishes between the extreme, critical and paradigmatic cases.

Understanding a social phenomenon as a set of cases via categorizations of this kind appear to refer to the relationship between the selected case and other cases that exist within the same set. When the phenomenon under investigation is considered to be understudied – as in this study – knowledge of the properties that define the conceptual set of cases is deemed to be limited. Hence, the relationships between different cases that enable claims or identifications of a representative, a critical or an extreme case may be vague or unknown.

In this study, the properties of a case that could be claimed to be representative of ethical consumerism are considered unknown. This is in line with the epistemological approach this study takes on 'ethical consumption'. In return, the inability to identify the normal/representative case makes the identification of an extreme or critical case impossible. Due to the inability of defining the type of the selected case study for this research, it is not possible to make assumptions based on such categorizations on the extent to which any generalizations can be achieved by using insight drawn from the case in Partick.

Rather, it might be more important to highlight the nature of generalizations that a case study can offer. As many proponents of this research approach have argued - including Yin (2003), Snow and Trom (2002) and Flyvbjerg (2006), case studies can provide valuable research insights. Such insight is better understood as “*generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes*” (Yin, 2003, p. 10). Following this, case studies can provide 'theoretical or analytic', rather than 'statistical' generalisability (Snow and Trom, 2002, p. 164).

What this means for this study is that – provided a well-developed research design is applied - insights taken from the case study in Partick should be able to generate data in

order to fulfil the research objectives, since the latter involve analytic and not enumerable inquiries. For example, the case study in Partick should provide adequate data to enable generalizations on the extent to which the revised 'collective action frame' can explain mobilization and engagement of consumers with ethical consumer practices. It will not be able, however, to make any claims on – for example – which practices of ethical consumerism are more popular amongst 'ethical' consumers or what percentage of the UK population are 'ethical' consumers.

Before getting into more detail on the research tools and methods of collecting and analysing data for this study, it is considered necessary to give some information on the characteristics of the selected geographical location as well as a brief introduction to the STOP campaign that operated within that area. These are discussed next.

3.4.5 A brief history of Partick

The name Partick or else Perdyec, as MacIntosh (1902, p. 38) informs us, originates from the Gaelic *aper dbu ec* meaning “*the place at the confluence or mouth of the dark river*” - although there exists some dispute over the Welsh or Gaelic origins of the name. As reflected in its coat of arms (Figure 3-1), Partick's history is closely related with the flourishing of the shipbuilding industry of river Clyde and the milling industry operating mainly in the east bank of the river Kelvin in the early nineteenth century. Partick became a Police Burgh in June 1852 (Aird, 1894). This came after a change in legislation on Police Burghs in 1850 which made it easier for populous areas to establish a burgh so as to provide adequate infrastructure for the provision of public needs. The Partick Burgh Council held its meetings in various places until 1872 when the Partick Burgh Hall in Burgh Hall Street (originally Maxwell Street) was erected. (The same Hall is used for the Partick Community Council meetings nowadays).

With the population of Partick increasing dramatically between 1851 and 1893 (Aird, 1894), Partick transformed from a rural village to an industrial town and eventually became part of Glasgow City in 1912. Since then, the area of Partick has transformed into a vibrant urban space (Picture 3-1).

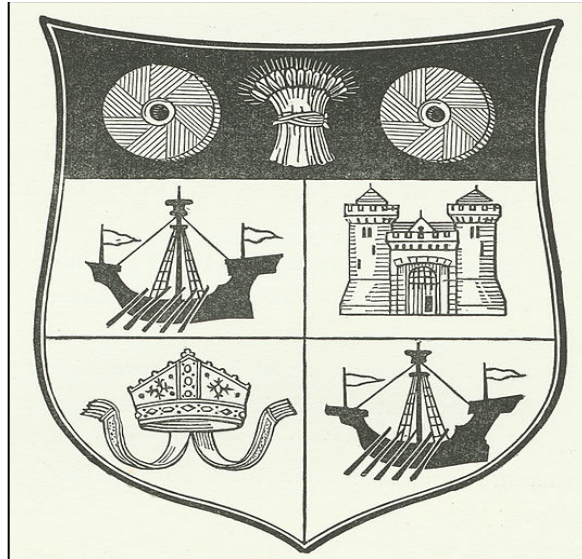


Figure 3-1: The coat of arms of the Burgh of Partick (Source: Michell Library, 477590).



Picture 3-1: Partick Cross – photographed by Alf Daniel in 1955, (Reference: 10005.97.270/ O.G. 1955.121. [227]) – Partick Camera Club.

Although part of the greater area of Glasgow city, Partick - along with other areas such as Maryhill, Govan, Gorbals and Ibrox – is believed to have retained a self-contained and self-sufficient working class community character up to the beginning of the seventies.

The phenomenon of several generations of the same family growing up and living in the same area appears to have started fading away with the adoption of high-rise building planning schemes across Glasgow (<http://www.theglasgowstory.com/storyf.php>).

3.4.5.1 Socio-economic overview of Partick

Geopolitical

As expected, the exact geographical boundaries of Partick as a village, town and lately a part of Glasgow city have been changing over the years. Today, Partick represents a loosely defined geographical area located in what is considered now to be the West End of Glasgow. It is neighbouring with other areas of Glasgow such as Hillhead, Whiteinch, Scotstoun, Jordanhill and Broomhill. For the purpose of political representation and governance, Partick - along with some other neighbouring areas - belongs to the so called Partick West Ward of the Glasgow City Council. A map of the geographical boundaries of Partick West is provided in Figure 3-2.

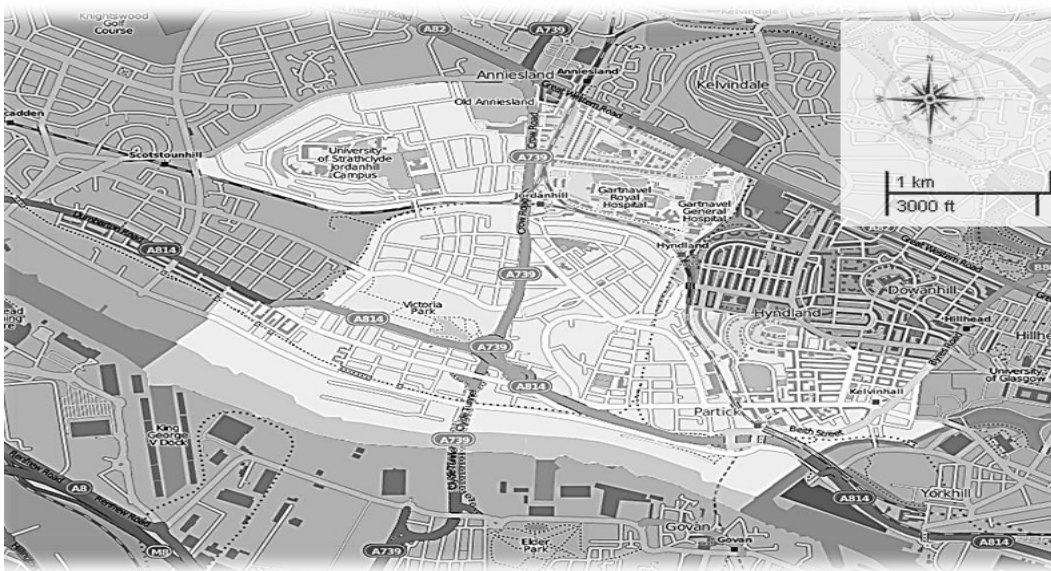


Figure 3-2: Partick West (Ward 12) geopolitical map.

Since the boundaries of Partick are so loosely defined, it is impossible to provide a precise overview of its residents' profile. Some statistical data on residents for the whole Partick Ward do exist and are illustrated in the following Table 3-1:

Table 3-1

Population and Unemployment in Partick West Ward

	Partick		Glasgow		Scotland	
	People	%	People	%	People	%
Population	6796		632959		5062011	
Males	3169	46.63%	297933	47.07%	2432494	48.05%
Females	3627	53.37%	335026	52.93%	2629517	51.95%
Unemployment	294	5.05%	25159	5.34%	148082	3.97%

Table 3-1: Population and Unemployment in Partick West Ward [Geographical levels: Census Standard Ward for Partick and Scottish Parliamentary Region for Glasgow] (Source: Scotland's Census 2011).

3.4.5.2 Gentrification and local retail economy in Partick

Partick was traditionally seen as a working class community (Atkinson, 2004). In recent years, however, Partick has been facing the issue of gentrification making it “*a great example of a socially diverse area*” (Atkinson, 2004). One reason is that Partick is located adjacent to Hillhead. Hillhead is the centre of the West End and is considered a very affluent area of Glasgow increasingly attracting people of higher incomes. The higher rents, house prices and property taxes extend to neighbouring areas including Partick, thus resulting in working class population being ‘displaced’ in several ways; from cultural residualisation (rejection of class identity), to economic costs caused by increased privatisation, to even eviction (Paton, 2014). Due to the recent gentrification, delicatessens appealing to higher income residents have also started to flourish, raising questions of whether Partick is becoming “*too posh*”? (Adams, 2004)

3.4.5.3 The Stop Tesco Owing Partick campaign

The Stop Tesco Owing Partick (STOP) campaign was formed by residents of Partick with the aim – as the title suggests – to oppose the supermarket chain Tesco and its relatively recent developmental plans in Beith Street, Partick.

Tesco's plans to develop a retail outlet on the specific site and its accompanying planning applications have a long history; the first – successful – planning application was submitted in February 1996, and until September 2006 a total of at least six applications are documented (Glasgow City Council, 2007). Within the year 2007, Tesco submitted three separate planning applications. One was submitted in January and concerns the development of a 9,950 square metres retail outlet, 693 student bed spaces, residential accommodation and leisure facilities, as well as a student union and 501 car parking spaces. A further two applications were submitted in June for a standalone store and a revised drawing of the earlier mixed-use development.

Throughout the years, Tesco's plans seem not to have been warmly welcomed from all residents in the area. From as early as September 2006 it is possible to find objections from local residents illustrated in the national media (see Paterson, 2006). STOP formally adopted its constitution on the 15th of January 2007, with the following aims (STOP Constitution, 2007):

- a) to stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history, wildlife, character and environment of River Kelvin and its surroundings of Partick;
- b) to seek, by lawful and democratic means, to protect the green space of Partick, for its environmental, social, educational and health benefits;
- c) to encourage the preservation of features of general public amenity or historic interest¹, and;
- d) to promote high standards of planning and architecture in or affecting Partick, in particular, a low rise, sustainable, mixed use urban environment;

¹ On the 28th of January, a historic building which was within the contested site, Partick Ticket Office, was demolished by Tesco. The demolition sparked a new wave of contention and received much criticism by locals who somehow felt their history and identity being attacked. Patrick Harvie, Member of the Scottish Parliament from the Green Party, was one of the first official figures to condemn Tesco's action (<http://www.patrickharviemsp.com/2007/01/news-release-tesco-bulldoze-historic-partick-building/>).

- e) to promote local retail diversity and small, independent businesses.

The arguments against Tesco's development plan that were officially put forward by STOP included (STOP Constitution, 2007):

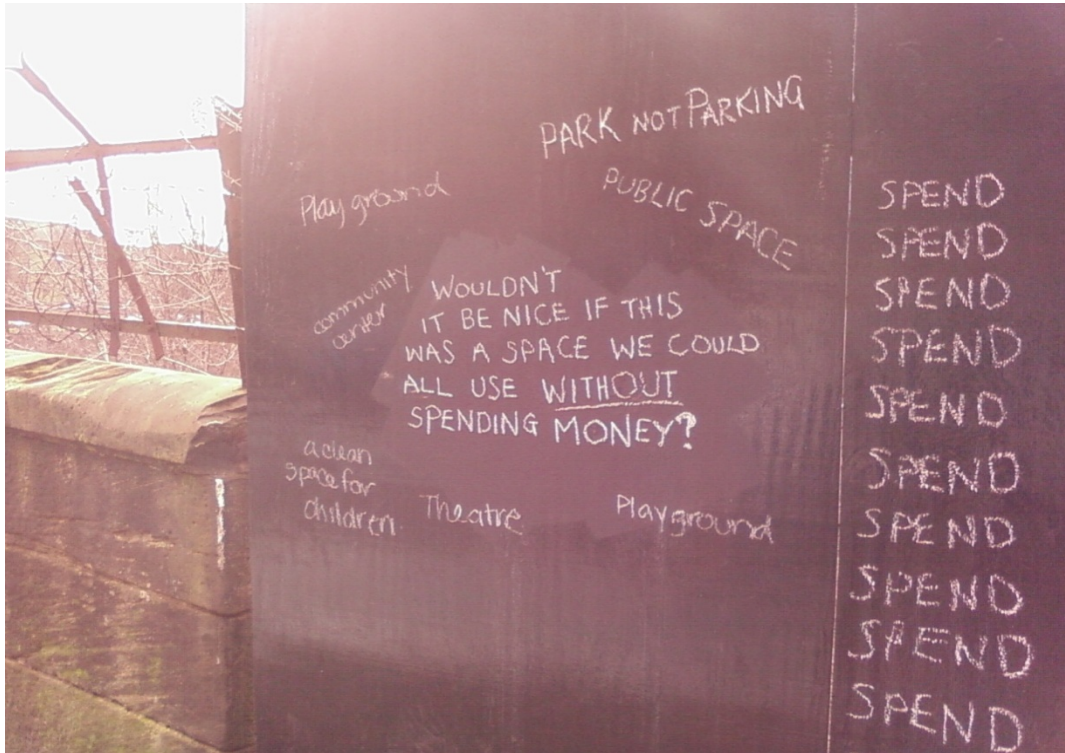
- increased traffic, parking and access problems
- the threat to locally-owned shops and family-owned businesses
- the City Plan and policy guidance violation
- inappropriate design, scale and materials

Between January 2007 and July 2008 (when approval of the planning application was granted and STOP ceased its operation³) STOP played a significant role in organising the opposition to Tesco's development plans. Amongst its primary operations, STOP created and managed a website for the provision of up-to-date information on the conflict, sought media attention, liaised with other groups such as Partick Community Council and 'All tomorrow's Partick' and orchestrated mobilisation of residents and local retailers through public meetings, events, petitions and letter writing.



Picture 3-2: Children's art on wall and pavement around Tesco site (Source: STOP, http://www.stoptesco.info/local_contributions.htm), [a].

³Interview with the chairman of STOP, July 2008.



Picture 3-3: Children's art on wall and pavement around Tesco site (Source: STOP, http://www.stoptesco.info/local_contributions.htm), [b].

The approved application in July 2008 concerned the development of a 6,500 square meter superstore as well as accommodation for 653 students, 220 private flats and leisure facilities (Paterson, 2008). In late 2008, Tesco opened a small scale outlet – a Tesco Express - a few blocks away from the contested site, but refrained from building on the Beith Street site. At a public showcase organised by Tesco and held in Partick Library in July 2009, the supermarket retailer revealed its new plans for the contested site which included the development of a large scale “Eco-Store”. Despite estimations from the Partick Community Council that a new application for this new store would be submitted before Christmas 2009, no such thing happened. Instead, Tesco allied with Glasgow Harbour Ltd and together applied (ref. no: 10/02343/DC) for permission for the erection of a supermarket at a different site within the Partick West Ward (bounded by Sawmill Road, South Street and Merklands Quay). The application dated September 2010, was granted permission from the City Council without any objections in October

2010. Since then, another planning permission (ref. no: 11/01264/DC) has been submitted in June 2011 by Tesco and Glasgow Harbour Ltd regarding the same site, in order to incorporate associated works including: access formation and road works/improvements, riverside walkway for pedestrians and cyclists, public realm works, landscaping (hard and soft), service yard and dot com shopping delivery facility, petrol filling station and car parking. This application was granted permission by the Council in October 2012, and in June 2013 construction works at the respective site appear to have commenced (Dumbarton Road Corridor Environment Trust, 2013).

With regards to the contested site on Beith street, Glasgow Harbour Ltd had applied (June 2011, ref no: 11/01350/DC) and achieved planning permission (December 2011) for the erection of a mixed use development comprising residential units, business use (Class 4), live/work units, retail, cafe/bar with associated access, car parking, open space, landscaping and public walkway along the River Kelvin. As at March 2013, construction work on that site has not commenced (Brown R., 2013).

3.5 Primary Data: Collection and analysis

The previous section presented the research design and already indicated the three major sources (Ethical Consumers, General Public, Retailers) from which primary data were generated. This section offers a more detail explanation on how this was achieved, including details on methods, procedures, research tools and the sample profiles.

The presentation here starts with the surveying and interviewing of the Retailers, followed by a discussion on exploring opinions from the General Public through a street survey, before looking into the most important source of data for this research which was the in-depth interviews with Ethical Consumers. This sequence reflects the presentation the research findings in later chapters, and it is thought to be more appropriate way to help build up the arguments in this thesis. Further sources of information that were collected during the research are also presented her at the end of this section.

3.5.1 Surveying and interviewing retailers

Based on the argument that ethical consumerism is not only about the perspective of consumers but also that of the retailers, this study sought insight from local retailers about their understanding of the 'ethical' frame in the context of consumption. Their views on who are ethical consumers and their professional experience on ethical consumerism were gained through the completion of a self-administered questionnaire and a series of short face-to-face interviews. The following sections provide a detailed description of the objectives and recruitment process of this part of the research, as well as an illustration of the research sample and the research tools used to elicit data from retailers.

3.5.1.1 Objectives, methods and recruitment process

The main objectives for eliciting information from local retailers were to explore the grocery retailers'

- views on what is ethical consumption and who are the ethical consumers,
- their practical experience of ethical consumerism in their everyday operations, and finally
- their awareness and opinion on the conflict generated by Tesco development plans in Partick

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in order to collect evidence that would facilitate the achievement of the above objectives. In particular, local retailers were first approached by the researcher in their premises and asked to fill out - in their own time - a short survey questionnaire. At the end of that questionnaire they were invited to participate in a series of face-to-face interviews.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, as well as the ordering of it, was considered as the most appropriate strategy mainly for two reasons.

First, it was viewed as a means to increase³ possibilities of gathering data from those retailers that did not wish to be interviewed, for example because of their busy schedules. Second, handing out the questionnaire was considered as a good way to introduce the research - and the researcher - to local retailers and provide a taste of what the study is about and consequently what the interview questions would incorporate.

3.5.1.2 Overview of the sample

Data with views of retailers originate from a non-probabilistic sample. In order to facilitate a systematic collection and examination of data, only the views of grocery retailers were sought, that is views of retailers that provided food products including fresh vegetables and other consumables. Most of the 'ethical' labelling schemes such as organic and fair-trade are mainly used in food products, thus this decision to focus the research on greengrocers was considered appropriate. Within this category, particular attention was paid so as to collect views of different types of grocery retailers: from Large grocery retailers to Specialist grocery retailers (specialising in organic, fair trade and/or local produce).

A total of nineteen local retailers operating along Dumbarton Rd and Byres Rd were invited to fill out the short questionnaire. Fourteen of them completed and returned back the questionnaires, and ten of them agreed to be interviewed⁴. The following Table 3-2 in the next page illustrates the actual sample size in terms of the category of grocery retailers and the method used to collect data for the retail outlets that participated in this study:

³ Success or not of this strategy is not possible to statistically assess since the sample size (as explained later on) is rather small to qualify for such examination.

⁴ Views from a total of fifteen different grocery retailers were gathered (one retailer only agreed to be interviewed and not to fill out the questionnaire).

Table 3-2

Retailer's sample according to the category of grocery retailer and the method used to collect data for the retail outlets†

Shop Number ⁵	Category of grocery retailer ⁶	Questionnaire	Interview
1	Large grocery retailer (outlet)	Yes	Yes
2	Large grocery retailer (outlet)	Yes	Yes
3	Large grocery retailer (outlet)	Yes	Yes
4	Frozen food retailer	Yes	No
5	Symbol group retailer	Yes	Yes
6	Symbol group retailer	Yes	Yes
7	Symbol group retailer	Yes	Yes
8	Independent non-affiliated convenience store	Yes	Yes
9	Independent non-affiliated convenience store	Yes	No
10	Specialist grocery retailer	Yes	Yes
11	Specialist grocery retailer	Yes	Yes
12	Specialist grocery retailer	Yes	Yes
13	Specialist grocery retailers	Yes	No
14	Specialist grocery retailers	Yes	No
15	Specialist grocery retailers	Yes	No

Table 3-2: Retailer's sample according to the category of grocery retailer and the method used to collect data for the retail outlets.

† Large grocery retailers: operate throughout Great Britain, carry a full-range of grocery products and may operate stores in multiple store size categories. Symbol group retailers: operate stores under a common fascia (or symbol), may be independently owned and use the common fascia under a franchise or membership agreement, or alternatively, may be directly owned by the symbol group or affiliated wholesalers. Frozen food retailers: specialize in the sale of frozen foods and generally carry a limited range

⁵ Some participants expressed their wish their name and their organisation's name to be anonymous. For this reason the table does not include the actual names of shops.

⁶ The categories of grocery retailers are based on The Competition Commission Report (2008) 'The supply of groceries in the UK market investigation', due to the fact that categorisations from other conventional sources, e.g. GOAD or Euromonitor, base their categories according to floor space. Instead, here I wanted to stress the aspect of market structure of the retailer stores from where I elicited my data.

of other grocery products. Specialist grocery retailers: primarily sell an individual grocery product category and include bakeries, butchers, fishmongers, greengrocers, health food shops and off-licence that give emphasis on ethical consumption. Independent non-affiliated convenience store: similar to specialist grocery retailers but without any obvious emphasis on ethical consumption

Data were collected from people holding different positions within each of the organisations, mainly depending on the scale and type of the organisation. For all supermarket chain outlets, views were gathered from the managers of the stores. In the case of the delicatessens, views were gathered from managers - who sometimes were also the owners of the shops. Views from convenience stores were gathered from owners who also acted as managers of their shop.

3.5.1.3 The retailers' questionnaire

Before going into any detail on the development of this questionnaire, it should be highlighted that all decisions concerning the design and administration of the questionnaire were based upon the specific needs of this survey. Hence, it is perhaps important to remind the reader that the purpose of this questionnaire was *not* to gain information that could yield a statistical examination (the sample size is rather indicative of this). In this sense, it was rather a way to establish a relationship with prospective participants for interviews, as well as an alternative way to gain information from those that did not wish to be interviewed.

In addition to the purpose, developing the questionnaire adhered to the specific needs and characteristics of its audience. The target population of this instrument were managers of grocery outlets in Partick. Hence, the research population - to a certain extent - was expected not to be homogeneous. The main reason for this is that the scale of each business (i.e. large, medium and small enterprises) would correspond to varying degrees of institutionalisation. This meant that the questionnaire should be designed and administered in a way that would take into account, for example, any special requirements of both professional managers of a large supermarket chain and managers

of a small family business⁷. Thus, it was recognised since the very beginning that the same questionnaire should appeal to a wide range of professionals.

Furthermore, the following points were identified as important issues to be considered throughout the whole process of researching retailers:

- The target population concerns professionals, so there is a need to recognise they may have a very busy schedule
- There may be considerable variation in terms of knowledge, powers and responsibilities across managers of different organisations
- There may be a danger of - at least the managers of large enterprises - representing an over-surveyed population

Design and Layout

The survey questionnaire used to elicit information and establish contact with retailers was four pages long. The first two pages were printed double sided (to provide the illusion that the survey instrument was as short⁸ as possible) and contained information about the study and the specific questionnaire as well as a check list to obtain the informed consent of the participants. The final two pages were printed single sided (to facilitate input of the data at the statistical software that was used for the analysis) and contained the actual body of the questionnaire consisting of a total of 18 questions. The three paper sheets of the questionnaire were collated and put in a blue⁹ semi-transparent plastic folder before being handed in to the retailers.

⁷ Of course only assumptions could be made on whether managers in outlets of large enterprises have indeed different requirements from those of small and medium enterprises. Nonetheless, it is somehow expected that they would do; for example, it seems more likely that a manager of a large enterprise will be more exposed to business terminology/jargon than the manager of a family-run business.

⁸ There are conflicting views in the literature on whether a 'short' versus a 'long' questionnaire affects response rates. Nonetheless, for this study, keeping the questionnaire rather 'short' served the purpose of the survey best.

⁹ The use of a colored semi-transparent folder was purposive. There is relatively little evidence on whether questionnaires printed on coloured paper have increased response rates (Jobber, 1986; Etter et al,

Since the questionnaire was designed to be a self-administered one, particular attention was paid in terms of colour use, title and information given on the cover page, and the general layout of the questions. The fact that the target population was business professionals made it important for the questionnaire to have a sort of “professional” feel. For this reason, special software was used in order to facilitate a high quality design and layout. Additionally, the questionnaire was colour-printed on high quality A4 paper. The cover page was designed using GIMP 2.0 (short for GNU Image Manipulation Software), a free raster-graphics editor software. This page included: information on the study and the particular survey; an appeal to complete the questionnaire; the contact details of the researcher and her supervisors; a short title (a “branded”¹⁰ name for the study); an image; and finally, the logo of the University of Edinburgh. Within the cover page, the voluntary nature of participation was made explicit. Further information in that page included an incentive in the form of “sharing the study’s main findings” that was offered to all those that would decide to complete the questionnaire. A copy of the cover page can be found in Appendix 3 (p. 299).

The consent form and the main body of the questionnaire were designed using the proprietary Snap 9 survey software. The consent page included information on how the researcher would handle the collected data. Informed consent, preference of withholding anonymity and willingness to receive the promised incentive were also presented within that page in the form of a check list. A copy of the Informed Consent page can be found in Appendix 4 (p. 300).

Questions

The main body of the questionnaire was divided into three sections A, B and C. Section A included fourteen questions (numbered A2 to A15) that were designed to elicit

2002). The questionnaire used in this study was printed on white paper but was placed in a coloured folder with the hope that it would gain attention when placed on a busy working surface.

¹⁰ For the purpose of developing and carrying out the primary research, the study was given the title “Ethical Consumption Study 2009”. This title acted as a ‘brand name’ for this study. This helped in making the study a somewhat independent entity. The brand name was used as a title in the retailer’s questionnaire and the study’s internet blog. It was also used for the email address which was created so as to serve communication with people only related to this study.

information on some characteristics of the organisation and its customers, to measure participant's beliefs on consumer power and attitudes, and finally to measure awareness of the conflict around Tesco's development plans. Section B included two questions (numbered B1 and B2) inviting participants to the follow up interviews. Finally, section C included another two questions (numbered C1 and C2) that concerned personal details of the participants. A copy of the retailer's questionnaire can be found in Appendix 5, p. 301. For a more detailed description of the questions see Appendix 6, p. 303.

Distribution and collection of the questionnaires

In most cases, the questionnaire was handed to the managers of grocery shops by the researcher in person. Where not possible, the questionnaire was handed to other employees so as to be forwarded to the store manager. Follow up visits to remind respondents about the questionnaire were also made where necessary. The completed questionnaires were collected three to five days later (or longer after further arrangements) by the researcher herself.

Compared with other strategies such as electronic or mail surveying, this personal handling of the dissemination and collection of the questionnaires was considered as the best approach for this study. Distribution of this questionnaire via email for example, could have been cheaper and less time consuming due to fast turnarounds (Sue and Ritter, 2007). However, such a technique requires not only that the target population has an email address, but also that this address is available to the researcher. Such requirements are difficult to be met and applied in this particular study. There are strong doubts on whether managers of small convenience shops in Partick do indeed have an electronic address through which they can be contacted. There are even bigger doubts that a list of such electronic addresses could be accessed or even created by the researcher. Therefore, the electronic distribution and collection of this questionnaire was viewed as an inadequate method to adopt.

Similarly, a mail survey approach was also found inappropriate for this questionnaire. Sending and collecting this questionnaire through the post would incur bigger financial costs than the followed method. Moreover, the main purpose for this questionnaire (i.e.

gaining access for the interviews) was thought to be served better by the chosen method rather than a mail or telephone survey since perspective participants got the opportunity to meet with the researcher; her physical presence could increase the possibility of creating rapport, something that in turn can positively influence response rates (Bowling, 2005). Once all questionnaires were collected, data were inserted in SPSS for ease of analysis.

3.5.1.4 Retailers' Interviews

Managers of grocery outlets were interviewed by the researcher at their premises. Interviews lasted between twenty and fifty minutes. A standard open-ended questionnaire with nine questions was used as a guide (see Appendix 7, p. 307) to facilitate these interviews. Where relevant, insights gained from the previously completed structured questionnaire were also used in these semi structure interviews – for example, to clarify certain answers.

Interviews were semi-structured; to initiate the discussion, all interviewees were first asked to say a few things about the organisation or branch they were working in. After that, managers were asked a number of questions - mainly deriving from the interview guide – in a non-standardised order. Questions included commenting on: who they think are the ethical consumers and on whether such consumers are customers of their business; the way an organisation can be perceived as being ethical; the positive/negative impact of business on society and/or the environment; the role of government and governmental policy in regulating this; consumer power and experiences of consumer activism; the conflict between Tesco and STOP.

At the beginning of each interview, I explained briefly the purpose of this interview and the way the collected data will be used. Then, managers were asked to sign a form providing their consent to the collection, use and storing of data generated from these interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in verbatim.

3.5.2 The street survey

This section discusses in detail the process of undertaking the street survey. The objectives and the method of data collection are presented first, followed by a brief overview on the sample size and its demographic profile. The designing of the research tool, i.e. the questionnaire, is then presented along with a discussion on practicalities and issues that came up while conducting the particular street survey.

3.5.2.1 Objectives and data collection

The main aim for conducting a street survey was to generate data from the side of the general public that can feed into a better understanding on the ethical consumer identity. In other words, these quantitative data were gathered so as to complement and put into a context the data collected from both retailers and self-identified ethical consumers. Therefore, this survey aimed to collect both:

- views of people who buy ‘ethically’ branded/labelled products but did not respond to my calls for interviews (because for e.g. they were not informed of the study; felt that an ethical consumer identity did not apply to them so they didn’t respond to the calls; were not interested, etc.) and,
- views from those who do not buy ‘ethically’ branded/labelled products

The questionnaire was designed to elicit information in order to explore:

- the use (and reasons for use) of supermarkets and other retailers for grocery
- important factors when shopping for food related items; products and services
- self-identification of ethical consumers (and dynamics between this identity and other identities)
- boycotting and buycotting as a form of political engagement

- any relationships between consumption of ethically branded products and other lifestyle practices; political orientation; as well as traditional demographics

The decision to carry out the survey in the streets of Partick was taken primarily because of the lower financial cost and the relatively easier – and more controlled - access into the population compared with other methods of quantitative surveying, such as mail and electronic surveys. Conducting the survey in the streets of Partick also held a major advantage; it allowed the researcher to spend some time in the area under investigation thus becoming somewhat more familiar with the context within which participants are living their experiences. For example, the researcher was able to gain a feeling of the area in terms of everyday situations and particularly that of shopping. In this sense, it provided the opportunity to collect some ethnographic aspects which - even if not used in the analysis - were valuable for understanding better the context within which the researched constructed and acted out their consumer identities.

The street survey made use of a structured questionnaire and was administered by the researcher in the following locations with a high volume of pedestrian traffic – weather permitting: entrance of Partick Library on Dumbarton Rd, Mansfield Park; entrance of West End Shopping Park on Crow Rd; around the entrance of Partick Underground station; entrance of Glasgow Credit Union on 434 Dumbarton Rd; open space next to a dead end road along Dumbarton Rd. When raining, questionnaires were also administered and collected inside a local grocery store along Dumbarton Rd. Figure 3-3 in the next page illustrates the exact locations within the area of Partick where I administered the questionnaires.

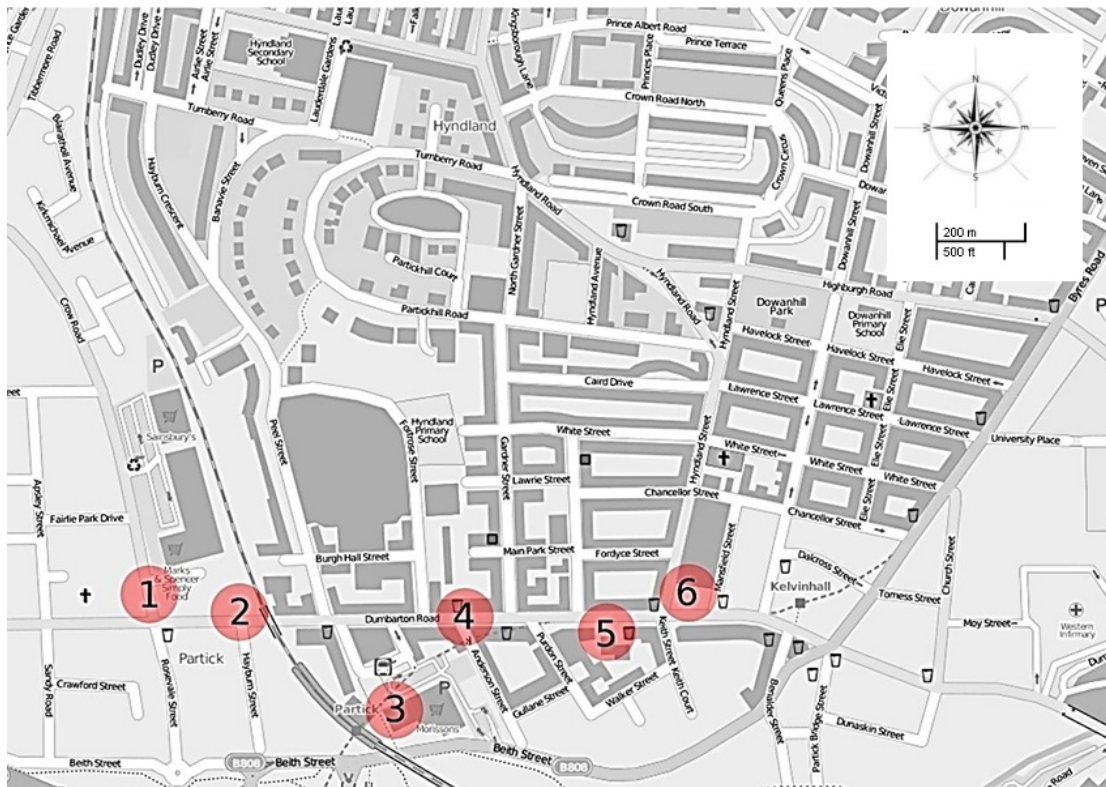


Figure 3-3: Locations where street survey questionnaires were administered. (Map created with the Open Street Map tool, <http://www.openstreetmap.org/>)

Map locations:

1. Entrance of West End Shopping Park
2. Entrance of Glasgow Credit Union
3. Entrance of Partick Underground station
4. Open space next to a dead end road.
5. Partick Library
6. South side of Mansfield Park

These ‘central location/street interviews’ (Malhotra, 2005) were carried out in various days on the week, and at various times of the day (ranging from 10:00 am until 21:00 pm) for just over a month (from 26th of October to 29th of November 2009). Since the researcher was positioned on the pavement - which is considered in legal terms a public space - there was no real need to grant permission for carrying out the research in the street. However, formal letters to ask for consent for the researcher to stand in front of

the entrance of organisations and companies were handed in where appropriate. A copy of these letters can be found in Appendix 11, p. 317.

The mode of survey administration followed (i.e. researcher-administered questionnaires) proved to hold additional advantages which have not been considered during evaluating alternative ways of conducting this survey. By being there and interacting with each respondent, the researcher was establishing a two-way communication which could be argued to have – to a certain extent – influenced positively the quality of data. For example, it allowed for a clarification of questions or available answers when needed. Additionally, it eliminated problems of trust, communication, or data interpretation that may arise when more than one researcher is involved in the process of conducting a survey.

On the down side, the presence of the researcher may have – to some extent - influenced the quality of data in a negative way. The possible effects a survey administrator may have upon the quality of the collected data have long been documented in the literature. Under what has been frequently referred to as ‘interviewer bias’, various aspects in which the survey administrator can negatively influence responses have been examined. In an experiment carried out by Hildum and Brown (1956), the interviewer’s use of verbal reinforcing was documented as playing a significant role in the quality of the collected data. In particular, they illustrated how the use of “*Mhmm*” in comparison to “*Good*” as an interviewer’s response to a telephone survey yields more reliable data. In another experiment, Davies and Baker (1987) demonstrated how the perceived views about the survey administrator from the side of responders can impact their actual responses. In this experiment, twenty adult heroin users were twice administered a questionnaire within a fourteen day interval by two different administrators: a locally known heroin user and a ‘straight’ interviewer. Davies and Baker suggested that data showed a substantial clear-cut difference in the way responders’ portrayed themselves; they were presenting themselves as heavier users and more addicted when interviewed by the ‘straight’ interviewer rather than the ‘known-user’ one.

This second example of ‘interviewer bias’ could be considered as also falling under the general term of ‘social desirability’ bias. Social desirability is generally understood as a tendency to admit to socially desirable traits and behaviours. Social desirability is one of

the most common sources of bias affecting the validity of findings in research, and specifically that which involves sensitive topics such as the study of ethics (Randall and Fernandes, 1991). Nederhof (1985) distinguishes social desirability bias introduced by respondents in two types: self-deception and other-deception. For this study, both types – and particularly the first one – are considered as important sources of potential bias. Attention was paid so as to minimise the effects throughout the research process but more importantly to recognise them during analysis and interpretation of all collected data (including data from retailers and self-identified ethical consumers).

3.5.2.2 Sample size and demographics

A total of one hundred and twelve completed questionnaires were gathered with a completion rate of one to three questionnaires per hour. Within the obtained sample, forty five respondents were male and sixty seven female. The vast majority of the respondents were British nationals residing in Partick. A more detailed description of the sample demographics (including residency, income, nationality, employment status, education, and age) is provided in Chapter 5 (section 5.2, p. 178) which discusses the findings of this survey. A more detailed overview on the survey demographics can be found in Appendix 12, p. 318.

‘Street-intercept’ (Miller et al. 1997) or ‘Person-on-the-street’ (Crawford and Novak, 2013) surveying is a non-probabilistic convenience sampling strategy that is less time consuming and costly than random sampling strategies, it has however one big disadvantage that data cannot be generalised to a broader population. As a method it also allows for a better response rate and representation of hard to reach populations, in comparison to, for example a telephone survey (Miller et al. 1997). Nonetheless, as Crawford and Novak, (2013, p. 35) highlighted, it raises two major issues: First, it is not really random who is on the particular street at a particular time, and second, the people who agree to participate may have different characteristics from those that keep walking. I have strategically administered the questionnaires at different time locations and days of the week so as to facilitate, as much as possible, for a diverse population to be sampled (Folz, 1996). Additionally, while conducting the survey I tried to identify and

keep account (in my field-diary) of any patterns regarding people who were for some reason excluded from the survey (I elaborate further on this in section 3.5.2.4 (p. 123), where I discuss some practical issues when carrying out the survey). Despite the ways I attempted to control the above, it should be noted that in general, the data elicited from this survey are mostly for exploratory purposes and by no means can be generalised to a broader population.

3.5.2.3 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire used for the street survey incorporated a total of twenty three questions that were broken down into two sections: the main body of the questionnaire and demographic questions. Before administering it to the public of Partick, the questionnaire was reviewed by the researcher's supervisors and also piloted amongst ten people (students of the University of Edinburgh and by-passers in front of Aldi supermarket on Gorgie Road, Edinburgh).

The questionnaire made use of a variety of different types of questions, ranging from close ended multiple choice ones, to grid and open-ended questions. Since the questionnaire was administered by the researcher, survey cards (see Appendix 13, p. 322) with the available answers were also used in order to facilitate the participant's responses where appropriate. The final version used in the survey can be seen in Appendix 14, p. 330. Some questions used in this survey were adopted from the Scottish Environmental Attitudes and Behaviours Survey (2008), Robinson et al.'s (2000) study on access to shops, as well as The Co-Operative report (2000). A detailed account of the development of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix 15, p. 333.

3.5.2.4 Practical issues when carrying out the survey

Carrying out the survey was a great experience for me, but it was also something that provided me insight which otherwise I would not be able to gain. In particular, it gave

me a more pragmatic understanding of the time and quality issues related to this method of research.

A plethora of practical issues which are not usually easy to estimate before actually engaging with a street survey revealed themselves during the process. For example the weather conditions were a somewhat important factor; I carried out the street survey during the months October and November, and the weather conditions imposed some difficulties. Sometimes it was raining and particularly at the end it was cold. The rain meant that I had to select places in the street which could keep both me and my participants dry so as to complete a twenty minute questionnaire. The cold limited the time I was able to be in the streets – as well as the willingness of the people to participate in my survey.

Apart from the weather, other issues which influenced the availability and willingness of my potential participants were apparent. For example, people carrying heavy bags, or people walking in groups were difficult to engage. Intoxicated individuals were not even given the opportunity to express their opinion, since I decided to avoid asking them as I was feeling it could end up in my wellbeing being threatened. The potential for bias introduced by interviewers' passing by eligible, but "undesirable," respondents is one limitation of street surveys (Miller et al., 1997). Another funny but annoying issue was the earphones which I found rather popular amongst people walking in the street and which in some sense affected the recruitment process.

An example of the problems I encountered during carrying out this survey can be seen below, in an excerpt from my diary:

“In the streets of Partick

For the last four weeks, I have been wandering around the streets of Partick inviting people to complete my questionnaire...

The initial plan of getting around 300 questionnaires completed was so optimistic that reaches the state of being utopic. The new target to be met is half way, i.e. 150 questionnaires but still seems optimistic considering I have only one week left really to complete the stage of data collection.

Until now, 85 people have taken part in this survey; there are days when people's response is great, that is I get approximately 3-4 questionnaires completed in one hour. Other days, however, response is poor and if I am lucky I will get 2 questionnaires completed per hour. I

haven't really spotted any patterns in terms of the response rate, although when raining I feel people are somewhat less happy to spend some minutes filling out a survey.

One particular problem I have been facing during conducting this survey is getting people to stop in the first place. On the one hand, I must admit I have been somewhat selective in terms of who I try to stop and invite to participate in my study. For practical reasons, since the beginning of the survey, I have refrained from trying to stop and ask for participation certain categories of people. These include people walking in groups (meaning more than one), people carrying heavy bags, people who appear of a young age, people who might be too cold to stand in the street for several minutes (usually very old people), people who look to be in a hurry and, very rarely, people who might not be in a state of answering a survey (e.g. under the influence of alcohol)."

Being in the streets also gave me an indication that a specific group of the population is not easy to approach through this method of research. I am referring here to people that fall into a category which I managed to identify and which I would describe as people between 16 and 40 who most probably are on benefits. This raised my attention and made me think that those who are more willing to participate in an academic study might also be more understanding of the whole concept of an 'academic' study.

Another important insight gained from this experience, was the opportunity I had to talk to the people taking the survey. This meant that I was able to clarify any questions they had with relation to the study or the questionnaire per se, but also to understand a little bit more of their reasoning behind their answers.

This might be better illustrated in the following letter that I wrote to my supervisors during that period:

"I get the sense that there are some segments of the population which I feel I have not managed to get them to stop and fill out my questionnaire. These include people between 16 and 40 years old and on social benefits.

Other than that, I am enjoying the benefits of doing the questionnaire face to face since I get interesting details that help me understand a lot better what people think and mean. This is proving valuable, for example because I have already started to get a better sense of what the answers to my questions represent and what not, if that makes sense."

3.5.3 Interviewing ethical consumers

This section discusses in detail the process of undertaking the interviews with ethical consumers. The objectives, method of data collection and recruitment process are presented first, followed by a brief overview on the sample size and participants' profile.

3.5.3.1 Objectives, methods and recruitment process

The main objectives for interviewing ethical consumers were to generate data from the point of view of consumers so as to:

- a) Explore the meaning ascribed to the ethical consumer identity by self-identified ethical consumers, and
- b) Examine the processes of constructing meaning and engaging with such identity through lived experiences

The limited existing academic knowledge, coupled with the nature of the topics of enquiry (i.e. identity, meaning and experience), suggested that a qualitative research approach – or at least a mixed method approach with a heavily qualitative output - was the most appropriate means to collect data that could help achieve the above objectives.

In terms of methods for collecting data, conducting one-to-one interviews with ethical consumers was considered the best alternative that could serve the research purposes while consistent with the practical constraints in terms of resources (including, but not limited to, time, money and number of researchers involved in this research). Other qualitative methods of collecting data, such as (participant) observation, focus groups¹¹

¹¹ Compared with one-to-one interviewing, focus groups had two main disadvantages. Firstly, any additional insight they could provide (for example the ability to explore tensions or differences on views by drawing together self-identified ethical consumers from different backgrounds and put them to discuss) was considered valuable but not directly relevant to the research questions of this study.

Secondly, focus groups include the danger of missing out views that could be essential for understanding the varying views on ethical consumption. Focus groups sometimes allow only certain types of socially acceptable opinion to emerge and certain types of participant to dominate (Smithson, 2000). Avoiding such danger will depend to a considerable extent on a successful moderation of the focus group

and document archives are able to provide data that would fit to a certain extent with the research aims. But it is in-depth interviewing that was considered as the method that can provide a 'thick' and holistic account of consumers' perceptions, understandings and experiences while giving the interviewee the flexibility to intervene - for example, in order to clarify or direct the generation of data as she views at the time as more appropriate.

Techniques used to recruit participants included: a) putting up posters at 'culture hubs' within the area of Partick b) distributing flyers c) uploading invitations at two websites of local interest (Gumtree and Evening Times Partick). A copy of the posters and fliers used to recruit participants can be found in Appendix 8, p. 310.

3.5.3.2 Sample size and participants profile

Sampling in this research was purposive; it involved a series of interviews with consumers residing in or close to the area of Partick. A total of twenty consumers were interviewed; a sample size which is double in number comparing to some previous qualitative research with 'ethical consumers' (e.g. Shaw et al., 2006; Shaw, 2007; Moraes et al., 2011). Previous research has provided evidence that data saturation can occur within the first twelve in-depth interviews (Guest et al., 2006). This proved to be valid for this study, with data saturation starting to emerge after the first ten interviews. Nonetheless the sample size for this research was set to twenty interviews so as to allow capturing variation following Kuzel's (1992, p. 41) suggestions. Participants' characteristics in terms of age, gender, occupation, family/household status and educational background are illustrated in Table 3-3 (to preserve anonymity, the names used here are fictional):

discussion by the researcher. Directions and suggestions on how to carry out a focus group can be found in the existing literature (e.g. Krueger and Casey, 2009; Steward and Shadasani, 1990). Nonetheless, no matter how well a researcher/moderator is prepared or trained to master the developing complex group dynamics, there will always be an uncontrollable element.

Table 3-3

Profile of the self identified ethical consumers

	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Family/ Household situation	Educational Background
1	Ronald	M	21	Luthier	Single, living with flatmates	College Degree
2	Mairy	F	Early fifties	Support Worker	Single, living with daughter and son	A level
3	Hannah	F	27	Sales (part time)	Living with partner	Postgraduate Degree
4	John	M	Early fifties	Clergyman	Married with three daughters	Undergraduate Degree
5	Paul	M	30	Community Worker	Divorced with two children; living alone	A Level
6	Linda	F	66	Retired	Married, with one daughter, living with husband	Postgraduate Degree
7	Audrey	F	27	Sales manager (part time)	Living with partner	Undergraduate Degree
8	Kirsty	F	30	Author	Living with partner	University degree
9	Thomas	M	48	Photographer	Living with partner	Studying towards college degree
10	Steve	M	23	Postgraduate Student	Flat share with another person.	Postgraduate Degree
11	Julia	F	39	Civil servant	Partner, but lives by herself	Postgraduate Degree
12	Andrew	M	27	Civil servant	Live with partner	Undergraduate Degree

Continued to the next page

Table 3-3

Profile of the self identified ethical consumers

Continued from the previous page

	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Family/ Household situation	Educational Background
13	Rebecca	F	58	Alternative medicine practitioner	Living alone	Postgraduate Degree
14	David	M	36	Academic	Living with partner	Postgraduate Degree
15	Lucy	F	36	Academic	Living with partner	Postgraduate Degree
16	George	M	65	Clerical	Married, living with wife and daughter	A level
17	Neil	M	49	Civil servant	Single	Postgraduate degree
18	Nicola	F	43	Assistant Secretary	Living with partner	Post A level
19	Lyle	M	23	Unemployed	Living with parents	Undergraduate Degree
20	Philip	M	52	Librarian (part-time)	Living with one of two daughters	Diploma

Table 3-3: Profile of the self identified ethical consumers.

An interview guide incorporating twelve open ended questions was developed and used. The guide served as a framework for the interviews and assisted in the generation of data that could then be compared across the responses of participants in a systematic manner. Interviewees were asked to put forward their views of who is an 'ethical' consumer and to comment on their experience of being one; their consumption practices; their power as a consumer; as well as their awareness and views on the local conflict with the supermarket chain. A copy of the interview guide is provided in Appendix 9, p. 312.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were explained the purpose of this research and the handling of their data; they were then asked to sign an informed consent form which is provided in Appendix 10, p. 316. The length of interviews varied - but not significantly, with most interviews lasting approximately an hour and a half. Most interviews were conducted in a seminar room within the premises of the University of Glasgow which is nearby the area of Partick. When that was not possible, interviews were carried out at cafeterias as well as interviewees' private residence. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

3.5.4 Other primary data

During the whole course of the research, a fieldwork diary was kept in order to document ideas and information that were thought to be relevant to this study and which were not able to be captured by the methods described above. Such information was generated for example during the completion of the street survey, or informal talks with residents of Partick.

Another source of primary data was the two formal interviews conducted with the president of STOP campaign group which took place prior to commence of the formal fieldwork period. These interviews took place in June 2008.

Literature in the form of leaflets, documents etc was also gathered during fieldwork, but was used only in order to provide information that would help me understand better the context of this case study. Some of the data from literature was also used in the

development of the research methodology (for example, in order to identify places where the researcher could recruit self-identified ethical consumers).

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed and presented with the aid of the proprietary Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 12). Analysis was mainly descriptive with some testing of correlations where relevant.

My analysis of the qualitative data could also fall under the term descriptive but in a more complex sense. In general, approaches to the analyzing of qualitative data differ in terms of basic epistemological assumptions about the nature of qualitative enquiry and the status of researchers' accounts, but they can also differ between traditions in terms of the main focus and aims of the analytical process (Spencer et al., 2003). However, such distinctions are not always clear cut, and "*qualitative traditions, and indeed individual studies, often cross boundaries*" (Spencer et al., 2003, p. 201), thus making it challenging for a researcher to ascribe to a single approach. Moreover, the sometimes different focus attached to approaches makes it even harder to decide upon any labelling. Under these circumstances, I would label the approach through which I analysed my qualitative data as 'phenomenological hermeneutics' (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004), and this categorization mostly reflects the primary aim and focus of my research, the ontological and epistemological assumptions I embrace and the acknowledgment of my positioning in the process of analysis.

The phenomenological aspect of my research in general is reflected in my intention to understand social phenomena "*from the perspectives of people involved*" (Welman and Kruger, 2001, p. 189). Interviews with self-identified 'ethical' consumers and retailers aimed at understanding 'ethical' consumption in their own terms as reflected through their practices and experiences. Similarly, interviews with retailers aimed at understanding their views of ethical consumers. My research was interested in capturing and interpreting meaning rather than focusing on language for the construction of social reality (construction and structure of talk, text and interaction) that discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and some forms of narrative analysis aim to do (Spencer et al.,

2003). Instead, the emphasis was on experience as it emerges in the context of my research, or to put it in Thompson et al.'s words (1989), as it is "lived." (p. 135). Hence, it is in this sense that I describe my research as phenomenological; as a direct description of conscious experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Jopling, 1996) rather than any subconscious motivation.

The hermeneutic aspect of my data analysis approach is expressed in the analysis of the interviews, where meaning is studied and revealed in the interpretation of text. I identify myself within the data analysis process as the interpreter, embracing Lindseth and Norberg's (2004) views that there can't be any 'pure' phenomenology that is 'uncontaminated' by interpretation. My intention was to interpret data in a way that is close to the realities of my participants, although I echo Ricoeur's (1976) view that texts are always open to multiple interpretations. Accordingly, I paid attention so that my interpretations are consistent with the aims motivating my study, that they can be directly supported by reference to participant descriptions, and that provide insight into the phenomenon being investigated (Thompson, 1990; Thompson et al., 1989; Giorgi, 1989). Additionally, I am not interested in any 'pure' hermeneutics, i.e. text interpretation that does not transcend the text meaning to reveal essential traits of our life world (Lindseth and Norberg, 2003). Here, the hermeneutical aspect of my analysis is closer to Thompson's (1997) hermeneutic framework used to interpret "*consumer's consumption stories in relation to their broader narratives of self-identity and a background of historically established cultural meanings*" (p. 452). I too embrace a stance that acknowledges an indissoluble unity between a person and the world (Koch, 1995) resulting in an understanding that, to put it in Laverly's (2003) words: "*Meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our own background and experiences*" (p. 29). Under a phenomenological hermeneutic approach, analysis of the data is often performed by applying the so-called 'hermeneutic cycle' that constitutes of reading, reflective writing and interpretation in a rigorous fashion (Laverly, 2003). My approach to data analysis entailed this process to some degree, not only during the analysing of interview texts, but throughout all the process of generating, collecting and analysing data. Other data that were acquired or generated during my fieldwork (e.g. brochures, fieldwork diary, pictures, and personal experiences of 'being' in Partcik) were also used during this process of reflective writing.

Although I wouldn't define my approach as grounded theory (Goulding, 2005), I had no intention to define certain measurements or hypotheses before conducting the interviews. Overall, this approach facilitated the generation of data that allowed me to identify important categories in the data, as well as patterns and relationships, through a *process of discovery* (Schutt, 2012, p. 322).

Analysis of qualitative data (both for retailer and consumer interviews) involved coding by pencil and paper. At a later stage the open source software Weft QDA was also used to assist with some of this analysis. The qualitative data from interviews were analysed in two distinctive ways: a cross-sectional 'code and retrieve' analysis, and an in situ, non-cross sectional way (Mason, 2002). In the first one, my thematic analysis followed the four steps suggested by Aronson (1994) - see Diagram 3-2. It was carried out across the twenty interviews with consumers and separately across the ten interviews with retailers in order to identify patterns of experiences, concepts and ideas. This approach of breaking up and reconstructing the data enabled an analytical understanding of the repetitiveness and patterning of identified themes and concepts, thus - to use Strauss's words - "*forcing interpretation to higher levels of abstraction*" (1987, p. 55).

As implied by the use of the double arrows in the connectors in Diagram 3-2 in the next page, the process followed for the thematic analysis was not done in a linear manner, but involved going backwards and forwards between these steps until the final themes crystallised. This represents a vital 'ladder like' movement for analysing qualitative data, since there is a constant need to revisit the original or synthesised data in the search for new clues, clarifying assumptions or identifying underlying factors (Spencer et al., 2003).

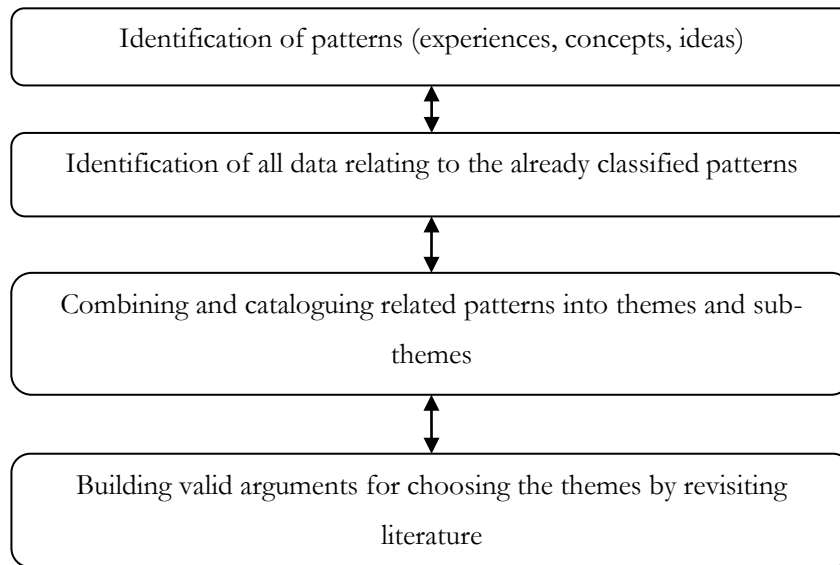


Diagram 3-2: Followed process for the thematic analysis (adopted from Aronson, 1994).

The second way of analysis (non-cross sectional) involved selecting particular consumer cases (eight in number) and all the retailer interviews in order to analyse the data at the level of their life-stories (biographies) individually. The major advantage of this approach was that, to some extent, it helped overcome one major criticism of cross-sectional ‘code and retrieve approaches’ as grouping and comparing chunks of data outside the context in which they occurred (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). This way, it was to some extent possible to reconnect the abstract findings of the coding process to lived experiences.

3.7 Summary of this chapter

This chapter has offered a detailed account of the methodology that was followed so as to extract primary data that could address the study’s aims. The dynamic nature, in terms of the way the particular research developed through time was illustrated and discussed. This chapter also presented in detail the reasoning behind certain choices with regards to the methodology including the locale of the research, the methods used,

the development of the research tools (i.e. interview guides and questionnaires) and the recruitment techniques. Descriptions of the sample sizes and participants' profiles, as well as practical issues that arose when conducting the research were also offered. Limitations of the particular research design that was developed were acknowledged, where appropriate. Further limitations of this study as a whole are discussed in Chapter 8, section 8.2 (p. 277). The chapter to follow introduces findings from the interviews with Retailers.

Chapter 4: Retailers' views on 'ethical' consumption

The present chapter aims to introduce some first insights on the phenomenon of 'ethical' consumption through the analysis and discussion of data gained by primary research - and in more specific, with data collected from the side of supply (i.e. the retail sector). As mentioned earlier in the methodology chapter, the views of retailers on 'ethical' consumption were sought so as to complement data acquired from consumers- and hence, advance our understanding of the particular consumption-related discourse. For this reason (it is reminded that) ten in-depth interviews were conducted with local retailers operating in the area of Partick. This chapter begins with a brief presentation of the retailers that were interviewed, along with some more details on how the analysis of the specific collected data was executed. A presentation of the data gathered through these interviews is then put in place. The chapter ends with a discussion on the main findings and a conclusion section that re-connects findings with the research objectives.

4.1 Introduction

Ethical consumption involves consumer behaviour, and as such, the views from the side of supply are deemed necessary if we are to get a more rounded understanding of the particular phenomenon. With this in mind, the research for this study was designed in a way so as to generate information on the views of individuals that work within the retail sector. As discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1 (p. 94), the main objectives for eliciting information from local grocery retailers were to explore their views on the framing of ethical consumption and ethical consumer (who are the ethical consumers?) as well as to examine their practical experience of ethical consumerism in their everyday operations. Data from this part of the research provided indications on the degree to which understandings of 'ethical' consumption and consumers matches understandings of the actors themselves in all three levels of frames and meaning (Research Objective 1), practices (Research Objective 2) and to some extent the politicising of ethical consumption, by seeking for example their views in other consumer practices such as boycotting (insight which fed into Research Objective 3). This chapter presents and discusses the main findings from this part of the research.

Before presenting these data, it might be useful to remind that research with retailers was undertaken in two stages; first, retailers in the area were identified, approached and handed questionnaires (15 retailers completed the questionnaire). Then, interviews with ten retailers, who agreed to take part, were conducted. The questionnaire provided a good way to approach retailers and get them familiar and interested with the research; in this respect, it served as a recruitment strategy for the interviews. It also provided insights (such as the stocking or not of 'ethical products', perceptions on consumer activism and demand for ethically marketed products) that were explored further in the interviews. Due to the small sample number, the questionnaires were not further analysed.

A brief overview on the ten individuals that were interviewed and the process of analyzing the collected qualitative data is offered next.

4.1.1 Overview of the ten retailers that were interviewed

Although some general information were already presented with regards to the retailers' interviews in the methodology chapter section 3.5.1 some additional cumulative information which help to create a more detailed account of the subjects (interviewees) of this study are offered here. Since some of the interviewees expressed their wish to remain anonymous, pseudonyms are used here to conceal their identities. For the same reason, the true names of the organizations within which the retailers where working are also anonymised. The following table provides a summary of the ten interviewees and the corresponding organizations, as well as specifics on their position within the organization, experience and ethnicity background:

Table 4-1
Retailers' profiles

Name	Organisation	Role	Experience (in retail sector)	Ethnicity
Abhi	Symbol group retailer 1	Store Manager	Between 1 and 5 years	Non British (Asian)
Anne	Large grocery retailer 1	Store Manager	More than 5 years	British (Scottish)
Asif	Specialist grocery retailer 1	Owner	More than 5 years	Non British (Asian)
Jane	Specialist grocery retailer 2	Store Manager	Between 1 and 5 years	British (Scottish)
Kamal	Independent non- affiliated convenience store 1	Owner	More than 5 years	Non British (Asian)
Kerry	Specialist grocery retailer 3	Store Manager	Between 1 and 5 years	British
Lee	Symbol group retailer 2	Store Manager	More than 5 years	British (Scottish)

Philip	Large grocery retailer 2	Store Manager	More than 5 years	British (Scottish)
Suzan	Large grocery retailer 3	Store Manager	More than 5 years	British (Scottish)
Zamir	Symbol group retailer 3	Customer Service Assistant	Less than a year	Non British (Asian)

Table 4-1: Retailers' Profiles.

One may ask why details on the type of organisations and the ethnicity background of the interviewees were included in the table above. A quick answer would be: Because these two factors appear (in this study) to be somewhat important in the attempt to understand a particular aspect involved in the process of ethical consumption from the side of the supply, namely the choice of what to stock. But this will certainly become a lot clearer through the presentation of the interviews and the subsequent discussion of the findings.

4.1.2 A few words on the process of analysing the retailers' interviews

I have already discussed the process of qualitative data analysis in Chapter 3, section 3.6. Before moving into presenting data gathered through interviews with the retailers, however, I briefly comment the way the analysis was carried out, and which is consequently reflected in the structure with which these data are presented in the present chapter.

After transcribing the retailer interviews, a decision needed to be made regarding the process of analysis of the specific data. The two prevailing approaches that could be followed at that stage were: first, to treat the interviews as autonomous cases and analyse them as separate entities; and second, to carry out a thematic analysis across all interviews in order to identify themes (that is, "*patterns found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the*

phenomenon" Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4) that are relevant to the enquiries this study seeks to address.

Finally, it was decided that the process that best served the purpose of this study was to analyse the data in two stages. In the first stage, each interview was analysed separately – and in an inductive manner, so as to extract from the data themes that appeared to be the most important for each case. For this reason, ten separate 'profiles' for the ten retailers were produced – and are presented later on in this chapter. Treating the data in this way allowed for a more context specific understanding of each case of the retailers, thus resulting in the identification of a variety of themes.

In the second stage of analysis, these themes were brought together and - with the help of existing literature – any connections amongst them were examined. The outcome of this was the production of a structure of 'master themes', which tied up the themes from the previous stage in a manner that was consistent with the research enquiries.

The writing up of the data collected from retailers reflects this process. Hence, in the chapter sections to come, the profiles of the retailers are first presented, followed by an explanation of the 'master themes' identified through this specific piece of primary research.

4.2 Ten stories from within the retail sector

This section focuses on the stories of ten people working in the retail industry in Partick. As it will become obvious throughout its reading, each story is different and in this way interesting as it provides a glimpse on the variety of issues associated with the phenomenon of 'ethical' consumption. Moreover, the variation of these stories here confirms the need to respect and take into account the context specific nature of 'ethical' consumption, not only from the side of the consumer but also from the side of business, if we are to advance our understanding of this phenomenon.

4.2.1 Abhi

Abhi is the store manager of a small shop (Symbol group retailer 1) on Dumbarton Road. Up until the interview was conducted, he has been working in this shop for almost two years. From what Abhi claimed, the store in which he works is privately owned and operates under 'policies [that] are from India'; nonetheless it carries the brand name of a supermarket chain operating world-wide. In fact, contrary to the majority of other supermarkets with international presence, the particular chain is not centralized in terms of its organization, but rather a network of independent retailers and Regional Distribution Companies (RDCs). In simple words, it can be described as a network of independent retailers who operate under the same brand and the same business philosophy of localization: "*The products, services and layout of each store are designed by the store owner or by local managers who understand local needs*"¹.

The size of the store is rather small and the stock of products offered is therefore limited. In this sense, it is closer to the idea of a convenience shop rather than a supermarket. The proximity of the shop to the customer's households and the low prices compared to other nearby shops are the two major reasons why consumers do their shopping in the particular shop, as Abhi argues.

The particular shop doesn't stock any organic or environmental friendly labelled products, but it does sell goods that are labelled as fair-trade. When asked about the range of products stocked in the store, Abhi explained that it was all down to his boss's (the owner's) decision. To his knowledge, the owner would look at the sales and accordingly would order the goods to be stocked in this shop.

I: Do you think that consumer demand can change what you stock on the shelves or is it at the end of the day a decision that only your boss will make?

Ehh.....the same thing, it's all up to the boss checking the system...what we are selling best and um, what we are selling.....so....bad....so...if we are not selling good...boss will ubh...boss will stopped that things and ub bring the other things, the new things to attract ub, customers and ub, sometimes the customers says eh, 'you need to give us that things' so boss get the idea and bring some things here.[Abhi]

¹ The quote is taken by the Network's website and it's slightly rephrased so as to preserve anonymity.

There are some rare occasions which Abhi recalled when consumers have asked for a particular product to be brought in; sometimes this has been met by the owner. However, such cases were rare, according to Abhi, and never had to do with organic, fair-trade, local or environmental friendly labelled products.

When asked about the terms 'ethical consumer' and 'ethical consumption' Abhi was unfamiliar with them. In fact, when he was initially asked to comment on his perception about ethical consumption, he seemed to have confused the words 'ethic' with 'ethnic' (a mistake that another interviewee, Kamal, also made)

You mean about uh...the...English people and Asians?

I: No, no, no I mean about ethical, meaning, umm. Ethical, not ethnical... Have you heard the term ethical consumption before?

No...uh...no. Don't know that one... [Abhi]

In the same way, he was unfamiliar with other business jargon such as 'ethical business' and 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR). This, however, does not necessarily mean that aspects of what other retailers may frame as measures of CSR were not present:

I: I can see on the till there, umm, you had like uh... "we thank you from Princes Hospice"... something like a charity box that was saying thank you for collecting this money for us umm... I'm just wondering how is this policy? Is this something your shop decides that we're gonna help a charity or was it the charity that came and asked for help?

Ehh..a lady comes here every month, end of the month and ehh...she brings a card and she came here with a card from the charity and eh..she said oh, we want to keep a charity box here...

I: And you said that's fine?

...Aye that's fine. And uh... customer comes here and uh...they put their pennies, two pennies, five or empty their bag, customers put in the charity box and every month she get I think more than sixty, sixty five pounds every month.

I: Do you as a shop contribute at the end of the month to this or not?

Yes, that's right, see on the tills...where you can uh, on a, pay 2 pence for the carrier bag, is going to, it goes to the charity.

I: That's nice; oh I didn't see that....

(interrupting) So end of month...no, oh we just put it in the tills....so all the two pence's for the bag, every single bag, two pence goes to the charity. [Abhi]

Overall, out of the ten interviews with retailers, the interview with Abhi was perhaps the most challenging one, simply for the reason that Abhi was not aware of the discourses on 'ethical' consumption, nor those on business 'ethics'. Moreover, he appeared to have no understanding of the concepts of 'fair-trade' and 'organic', as well as the reasons why consumers would opt for such products. But exactly this lack of awareness provides a different perspective on things which is certainly valuable in understanding the phenomenon under investigation more thoroughly. (This is discussed in more detail later on in section 4.3)

4.2.2 Anne

Anne has been working in the grocery retail sector for almost five years, and is now the manager at a branch store of a well-known chain (Large grocery retailer 1). The shop is rather small in size and, as Anne informed me, it's categorized as a convenience store – something that is reflected on the prices of the offered products which are a bit higher than what you would get in a larger store of the same supermarket chain.

The limited space doesn't prevent the shop from stocking a few products carrying fair – trade and organic labelling. In fact, Anne feels the store has a good selection of products which are not “*just the normal, standard stuff*”, such as organic vegetables and herbs, and fair-trade coffee. Organic milk (which is “*always on offer*”) in particular seems to be a 'seller' according to Anne, who nevertheless considers that while supply for organic and fair-trade products has increased, demand has stayed in the same levels for the last five years:

we've brought in some more products like organic cucumbers and stuff like that which have been selling really well, so we have increased it generally but really, in general it's just the same.
[Anne]

Anne explicitly stated that she is not familiar with the term or the meaning of 'ethical consumer'. But unlike Abhi above, she is well informed about certifications such as fair-trade and organic. Such knowledge is essential for Anne, since sporadically there have been customers asking for more details on fair-trade products offered in the store. She asserted that she does have an idea of what fair-trade and organic means, but she is not

aware of all the specifics for each of the products on offer in her store. That is the reason why, for her, detailed information on the packaging of products is important in this respect.

The forty minute interview with Anne provided valuable insight into how the specific company operates with respect to customer feedback.

I: As a business policy, do you get to give some feedback from the customers?

No, there's nothing like that at all no, all of our prices are done down South so we just put all of the prices down that they tell us to so there's not really much we can do as in, in the store but there's just not really anything like, that we can do, nothing we can report or anything.

I: So, how did you get feedback from consumers if they are not....?

(interrupting) They just tell us.

I: Yea, but after telling you how does it reach the headquarters?

(interrupting): They don't, unless we take it, like, unless it gets really bad and lots of people umm complain about it we'll go to my store manager's boss which is the area manager and then he would take it further, so you'd like take it to the area manager after that so...but it's rarely that ever happens. [Anne]

Anne explains that occasionally they do get the “odd” customer who will complain at the till about “ridiculous” prices. Such complains, however, are not powerful enough so as to initiate any changes in how Anne’s business operates. As illustrated in the quote above, the centralized organization of the specific supermarket coupled with the lack of aggregated numbers of customers with the same complaint are responsible for this.

Anne also narrated an incident of consumer activism that took place three months before the interview. That was an incident where a group of around twenty people gathered at the shop’s entrance and staged a small demonstration asking for the retailer to stop stocking the type of chickens that they offer and instead start supporting locally produced chickens:

it was about twenty all of them. There was a man...there was a man running about in a chicken suit...(laughing), so...it was really funny. [...] they had banners and all of that saying support our local farmers and stuff...it was strange [...] we had to phone the area manager and say like 'look this protest is outside, we need to do something about this.' [...]I was like panicking but my area manager says... 'let them do it'...and...then he took it to his further, his manager, but then it went too far and I don't know anything else about it. [Anne]

Anne believes that it was a 'one-off thing'. She did not see any leaflets being distributed and thus she is not sure who organized this protest event. Three months after this event nothing has changed in terms of the types of chicken offered in her shop, although she does feel that the headquarters of Large grocery retailer 1 might act upon such a request.

4.2.3 Asif

After running his small grocery (Specialist grocery retailer 1) for four consecutive years, Asif decided it was about time to renovate his shop – both in terms of what he offered on stock and in terms of the shop's appearance. The idea was to differentiate his shop from his competitors by jumping onto the bandwagon of what at the time (2007) seemed to be a growing fashion – organic produce.

Asif first found out about organic produce through a free magazine provided at the Morrison's counter – where he did his supermarket shopping. For him, this magazine is a treasure of information. Although the magazine is primarily targeted at consumers, for this owner of a small grocery shop it is also an inspiration for business planning.

You go sometimes to the Morrison's, they got one magazine in the Morrison's ... you know, really, I start from there. Really, I start from there...You can find a free magazine, free magazines they put there on the counter ...so many things you can find from there. You know, for your research you can find so many. I start from this magazine. When I see, I get them. [You] say 'oh you can read them', oh you can help them', you know, 'this thing organic', you know. And after you say 'oh, so organic is better stuff'. We start buying most organic stuff. [Asif]

With expectations that this was bound to succeed, with everything in the shop certified as 'organic' (some 'fair-trade' too), and with a brand new 'name' for the business that communicated this explicitly, Asif re-opened his shop. It was not until two-three months later that he realised this was actually not a sustainable solution for his business. His customers started complaining about the high prices. This did not only decrease earnings but also forced him to have to throw out a considerable amount of products which he did not manage to sell before their expiry date. Asif was urged to re-consider

his approach of 'all organic', and introduce cheaper choices that would attract customers back to his business.

If you buy one organic strawberry you must pay three pound, four pound for it and they [customers] come looking for two for a pound, ninety-nine pence and I say 'not any more organic', like you know just 'no'. In the start, I put fruit, veg, everything was organic, tomato, everything I could bring them. It is expensive. Price was there, double in the price and my regular customer take them and the bill come and I tell them, I say them 'everything organic', you know everything, until next time they not come back and they say 'very expensive'. 'You're too expensive'. [Asif]

The premium price connected with 'organic' certification is the major barrier that prevents Asif's business from offering only 'organic' produce. In contrast with other places, most residents of the specific area – according to Asif – are not able to afford only organic certified products; those few that do, are not enough to generate a healthy balance-sheet for his business. It is not only that people who prefer to buy organic versions of products are few in number; the amount of organic alternatives they can afford to buy is also limited as Asif asserts:

People asking for organic everything...but when they come, they buy, they spend money one time... people like maybe go some shop and spending maybe one, two item organic. They buy maybe one item organic and [think] 'that's all I can buy organic'. [Asif]

As the owner and manager of the grocery shop, Asif views his business as operating within a niche market - which is highly price-sensitive. The credit crunch experienced in 2008 was for him an additional reason why his sales of organic products – which is for him similar to “designer stuff” – decreased.

Within the two years of operating the shop and offering organic alternatives, Asif has developed a cynical attitude towards the consumers who buy organic certified products, as well as the certification itself. Organic for Asif should mean “natural”, in the sense of complete avoidance of pesticides, and thus to be connected with other “wild”, “special” and “healthy”. But Asif knows that that is not the case with organic certification and hence his expectations are not met:

organic is a brain wash thing. Not any naturally organic now. [If] you gonna find a proper organic, must mean organic. Organic is a natural thing.

I: Natural?

Natural. Hundred percent. But organic is not natural. They putting chemicals for this stuff as well, they can put and spread everything on, they do. But they tell organic, maybe one thing they [are] not putting in and they put 'organic'. Organic, maybe you gotta grow some wild stuff. That's called organic. And-uh...but they...brain wash you with all that claim with that 'organic' you know. That stuff was organic and just people say 'oh that stuff it's organic, must be there's something special'. [Asif]

Even though Asif is not familiar with the terms 'ethical consumer' or 'ethical consumption', he does recognise a consumer segment which seems to match what is often considered to be the ethical consumer segment. Throughout the interview, Asif refers to these consumers as the 'green people', the 'fair-trade' people, or the 'organic' people. This segment of the population is defined by Asif as people who claim to care about the environment and the wellbeing of others, and who assert this interest through their buying organic and/or fair-trade products.

As the owner and only worker in this shop, Asif has spent a considerable amount of time observing consumers (whether when making their choices in his shop or when walking by in front of his shop window). He is aware of the practical limitations - and particularly that of price as explained earlier - involved with the purchasing of organic and fair-trade certified produce. Nonetheless, he is critical of consumers who do eventually choose such products when it comes to the genuine reason behind their consumer choices. It's not a matter of using consumer power as a tool for change; it's rather a matter of style and distinction, a matter of "showing off [to] each other" (Asif).

While inside his shop, Asif can distinguish 'green' consumers by their preference for organic/fair-trade, as well as by their practice of re-using shopping bags - or better the use of re-usable bags for shopping. Outside his shop², one way for Asif to distinguish this consumer segment is again through their carrier bags:

they're putting [their] bag and walking in the street ... Fair trade bag, putting[it] on their arm and looking like 'I'm a fair trade person'. [Asif]

² Outside his shop, in front of the windows, Asif piles everyday a number of fruit and vegetables as well as seasonal items such as Christmas trees in the winter and flowers in the summer. Since he operates the business by himself, he spends a considerable amount of time – even in the winter – outside his shop in order to attract customers as well as to make sure his products are in place.

Being seen to walk down the street with a re-usable shopping bag is a good example of how people can communicate to others visually their support to this practice. Doing this though, positions them outside of what is the norm. In this sense, such consumers expose themselves to scrutiny- something that can easily lead to criticism and particularly when their actions are not consistent. Asif views these inconsistencies with cynicism - as an indication that the consumers' claims of being interested about the environment and other people's wellbeing are not genuine. This in turn reinforces his critical view on ethical consumerism as a whole

I: (interrupting) so, you mentioned that, you said 'green consumers' what is your understanding? Could you explain to me again? What is your understanding, who is the green consumer then?

I just, if like, you see, like, for me, that's like only showing off. People showing off. Like I say to you ' Oh, I'm a green person', another one, sure, another one....this kind of system they make, I say no, green people, like, making peace, they making things better for everybody you know. You making like, you know, what it's called them 'stop wastage' you know, like, so many things, that's like people like you know when they come they showing off, you know, they bring...'I can use my own bag' you know. But otherwise you see, they, when you, pass them in the street, they got [a] can of coke; they throw them in the street. No, umm...this I see so many people, like you know, like that, and so many I see, like, you know, like you know, what you see, like, nothing... see one thing, but it is another thing. Only like showing off. [Asif]

All interviewees confirmed that the choice of what to stock in their grocery shop is up to each business to make. When Asif decided to stock organic certified products it was strictly a business decision he had to make himself. There seems to be no incentives from the government or the council to stock 'ethically' marketed products. At the same time, there seems to be a considerable amount of public funds supporting initiatives aiming to promote a change in consumer culture (e.g. Scotland Fair Trade Nation). For Asif, the state is only there to receive taxes; he feels he gets neither help nor advice.

Struggling financially to make ends meet, Asif sold his business a few months after I met him and is now running a grocery shop without any organic produce in a different part of Glasgow. His previous business was bought by another person who re-innovated the shop and introduced a bigger variety of organic and fair-trade products. Almost a year later (June 2010) I visited the shop and chatted with an employee running the business. This employee was a friend of Asif and was frequently helping Asif in the

past. He could not comment on the viability of the new re-innovated shop, since it has only been a few months of operating this new business.

4.2.4 Jane

For the last two years, Jane has been working at a grocery store (Specialist grocery retailer 2) which offers organic, fair-trade and local produce. At the time of the interview, Jane had just been promoted into an Assistant manager – after the leave of the previous assistant manager which was also a friend of hers³.

The shop she is working in has been operating for the last eight years. The cornerstones of this shop's ethos are locality and seasonality – which are the 'ethical' alternatives that the shop offers to its customers: *“for us, it's more ethical in the sense of people that want to avoid processed food and want to support small farms and small organisations that don't sell to supermarkets”* (Jane). The whole essence of the shop, the space and interior arrangements as well as the products offered, support this notion of a small independent grocer which stocks local and seasonal products; it's a rather small space with minimalist inspired decoration packed with a range of local and non-local products; communicating freshness, community spirit, authenticity and a touch of romanticised past.

Putting an emphasis on the local and seasonal qualities of the products it stocks, the specific shop manages to differentiate itself from rival shops stocking fair-trade, organic and local produce in the area. It is a business strategy that appears to have worked out successfully. Jane though clarifies that the decision to specialise on these two qualities was initiated by the owners' interest and *“commitment in using local ingredients in their own cooking”* rather than a strategic decision over the shop's positioning in the local market.

Having a clear focus and building up a strong brand name as a 'responsible' retailer has also helped in developing loyalty and trust between the shop and its customers. As Jane explains, acquiring the Soil Associations 'organic' certification is a strict process that requires a certain amount of time within which specific procedures are followed. For

³ Working in a small 'ethical' shop to some extent involves being in a community of likeminded people. It is often the case that employees/employers of such shops are interested in 'ethical' consumption themselves – unlike with large supermarkets where individual beliefs about consumerism can be as diverse as the range of the products in stock

this reason, she asserts, the shop stocks products that do not meet the 'organic' certification criteria but are yet carefully produced under methods that could be considered as 'organic': *"we sell a lot of [product] that has been organically produced but the [place where it was produced] doesn't have organic certification so we can say this was made according to these methods but it doesn't have certification, so it doesn't say on it 'organic'"*. If that's the case, then how does this 'ethical' purchasing works? Well, it seems that everything is down to trust:

I think the majority of our customers taste, packaging and price are more important to them than whether or not something's organic or...ethically produced but maybe that's because they are relying on us to make those decisions in the first place about what we offer in this shop so they don't feel so much of a need to ask. [Jane]

By building up the reputation of a caring, 'ethical', 'responsible' retailer, consumers can rely on the choices that are made by the retailer in the first place; hence, they only have to make choices about the more traditional issues of price; taste etc.

Jane is familiar with the 'ethical consumer' – a term that *"has been around for a while"* and which is frequently being used inside pages of newspapers and trade magazines that reach the shop she works for⁴. A major part of being an ethical consumer, according to Jane, involves minimising waste. One of the ways to do this is by shopping for fewer products at a time and more frequently:

I: How would you define it, an ethical consumer?

In my view I think there's a strong argument for shopping more frequently and less rather than going to supermarket and buying two week's or a weeks' worth of food. Trying to shop daily to minimise waste, and going 'right, if I fancy, potatoes or whatever for dinner then I'll go and buy that on the way home from work', something like that, I think it's a better way to shop. [Jane]

Buying a week's – or more – worth of grocery at a time is for Jane a practice that should be avoided because she feels it contributes to generating more waste. What Jane refers to here is the situations where consumers have to throw out products - particularly with

⁴ Reference to an 'ethical' consumer is usually done by organisations and institutions such as academics, private business (in marketing/market research), media (articles etc), governmental and non-governmental institutions (e.g. policy reports, campaigns etc). Interviewing both retailers and consumers indicated that descriptions of consumption practices or consumers as 'ethical' or 'non-ethical/unethical' is (at the best) rarely used in everyday life situations; for example when someone wants to refer to practices of boycotting or buycotting (with the latter again not being used in everyday language).

short life span (such as fresh vegetables, fruit or milk) - because they did not manage to consume them before they expire. Such situations can be rather common, particularly when consumers buy bulk quantities of groceries to cater for their needs for a week or two. Supermarkets often encourage such bulk buying with their offers which may result in consumers ending up buying large quantities of products which they don't manage to use in time. Being able to predict the quantity and types of products to be used for the week's meals and sticking to a principle of 'eating what is there and not buying new stuff' could help reducing the amount of products people have to throw out of their fridge at the end of the week – but it is not an easy task. Jane feels that in order to avoid such waste and to have the flexibility to cater for impulsive cravings, shopping in smaller quantities and more often is the key to reducing household waste of this type.

For Jane, ethical consumption is about 'striking a balance between where you can afford to put your money and always trying to make the best choices'. Being on a rather restricted income herself, Jane recognises that making 'ethical' choices when shopping is not as straightforward as it might seem, and particularly when facing financial constraints:

I think if you can afford it then buying organic is a good way to go. But then, I think shops like Lidl sell organic and I shop at Lidl, but then you look at like their business practices in Germany and they are really awful umm.. There is sort of this vicious circle of when people are poor they don't have the same freedom to make choices umm...about how they shop. [Jane]

Jane's quote above also illustrates another challenge which ethical consumers often have to face; 'ethical' trade-offs – this is examined further in Chapter 6 where insight gained from the side of consumers is examined in section 6.4.4 (p. 229).

The shop Jane manages extends its services beyond the 'traditional' grocers' activities. It does not only offer products to be used as ingredients for home cooking, but also provides a take away service of freshly cooked meals as well as cookery classes in order to further educate and cultivate the love of quality food amongst its customers. The shop runs a particular cookery class aimed at students who constitute a considerable proportion of the population in that area. The idea behind it is that students – for a fee – are shown how to cook their own food while keeping a low budget:

[we show] how to make the most from a tight budget. How to feed yourself really well without a lot of money. Teaching people how to make bread, how to make pasta and things like that. So yea, there is a kind of education there as well.

I: And do you do this for free or is there a small fee for something like that?

No, people pay for it. I mean, you pay once to learn how to make bread and we give you the recipe and you will always know how to do that if you've spent three hours being shown...

[Jane]

Offering cookery classes might be a good business strategy to attract customers and enhance customer loyalty through encouraging the participants to use ingredients offered in that same shop. The interesting point here, however, is that there seems to be at least some demand for those classes or else the incentives of running such classes (and in particular requiring to pay a fee) wouldn't exist. The reason it's interesting is because it offers an example illustrating a shift in the way people in contemporary times are educated with respect to making (cooking) their own food from scratch. This shift involves the means through which people develop the basic skill of preparing and cooking food; a skill which was traditionally developed within an individual's home during his/her upbringing, or later on in schools as well, and which is now commoditised into a 'service' offered by business. In this respect, it might be appropriate to describe it as the 'outsourcing' of what was been for ever a practice within the more 'private' or 'communal' spheres of life rather than the 'economic/business' one. This leads to discussions about capitalism; the capitalisation of knowledge - including technology and 'know-how' - and the creation of a monetary system within which this notion can be sustained.

Such insight helps us to understand 'ethical consumption' as it reminds/ frames the context within which ethical consumption works. In particular, it reinforces the need to explain ethical consumerism as a phenomenon intrinsically interwoven within this capitalist system of production and consumption, while raising the question of who currently hold(s) the 'know-how' of being ethical as a consumer. A know-how, that is constantly developing (it's not static) and which is being increasingly commoditised and branded by the business world whilst previous institutions primarily assigned to create and impose moral codes (such as religion) are losing ground. A 'know-how' that is being promoted and even sold (just like the bread recipe in the Jane's shop cookery classes) in the form of e.g. consumer magazines. A knowledge that develops hand-in-hand with

contemporary 'moral panics', much of which are carefully manufactured and maintained by social institutions with diverse and sometimes conflicting interests. It is possible to talk about 'ethical' consumption because this has been already branded and thus gained flesh, body and ideology. Because ethics, like power, are everywhere and have been as a concept for thousands of years. But 'ethics' in consumption per se has acquired meaning very recently because of the way capitalism as an economic system has developed, the way it operates and influences cultural aspects in societies today. It is possible to talk about 'ethical' consumption, because there is a tendency for production and consumption to evolve separately both as concepts and as practices. Nonetheless, when interviewing ethical consumers it became evident that it is unfruitful to talk about ethics in consumption without taking into account the bigger picture, the field/the system within which consumption is operating today.

Descriptions of companies as being 'ethical' are another aspect of the system within which ethical consumption operates. Here however, according to Jane, the label 'ethical' to describe a business or a company is somewhat inappropriate. Based on the assumption that 'ethical' means 'doing good', Jane explains why appropriating the term ethical to refer to a business is not adequate:

We used to talk about the Body Shop being an ethical company before it was bought by L'Oreal. I don't know. I think there's some companies that are more ethical than others - I wouldn't say the notion of being an ethical company is ever particularly ethical, because your bottom line isn't to do good, it's to make money really.

I: So what would mean ethical for you then?

I think, in an organisation where there is equal pay for equal work... I wouldn't say it applies to ours [to our shop], but where huge profits are being generated, some of that money has to be pumped back in to make it sustainable through education or through supporting farms or forestry or whatever the particular nature of the business is. [Jane]

In Jane's narrative above, the main aim for a business is to generate profit⁵. For Jane, profiting and being 'ethical' as a business are on the face value two somewhat incompatible concepts. However, Jane feels there can be made distinctions; some

⁵Maximisation of profits has been and remains a fundamental principle for business economics, even though it has been extensively criticised for a long time.

businesses can be *'more ethical than'* others⁶. (So perhaps it is better to talk about degrees of ethical conduct).

Doing business in an ethical manner means - for Jane - that a company manages its employees fairly and injects a proportion of its profits back to society by supporting initiatives of social interest.

I think they can but I think you know, the point of business is always to make money basically. Umm...and some things do suffer, you know, if you're a small business, umm...you can't pay your staff huge amounts, you can't give them the sort of benefits they might enjoy in, say, public service employment. I think that's a real shame, umm...because if you were doing things like that, then... well especially this kind of thing, it is really hard to make-make a profit because the food you buy is expensive to begin with and how do you, how do you sell that, umm, you know and if you want organic umm... maybe maple syrup or whatever its ten pounds a bottle and people say 'I'm not spending that.' [Jane]

4.2.5 Kamal

Kamal is the owner of a grocery and newsagent shop (Independent non-affiliated convenience store 1) located just off Dumbarton road in Partick. He used to run a fruit shop for 18 years in another area of Glasgow, Gorbals. In 2002, Kamal bought the specific store which he now operates by himself with some help from his wife.

Kamal identified his customers as being mostly locals (and a few overseas students) who usually buy a few things such as *"tinned stuff and soft drinks"* while the rest of their food shopping is done at supermarkets (Kamal). In order to satisfy their demand, Kamal chooses to stock products which are *"the most selling ones"*, that is products which have a proven record of sales in his store. Kamal's shop doesn't offer any organic, fair trade, or environmental friendly labelled products. He believes that his customers are price sensitive; the (usually) higher retail price for these products will prevent his customers from buying them.

On face value, it might seem surprising that Kamal's knowledge on the 'ethical' branded products proved to be very limited. He explains that previously, in his fruit shop, he did

⁶ In interviews with consumers, perceptions of being *more ethical than* other consumers – whether they were ethical consumers or not – were also quoted.

stock fair-trade bananas and carrots. Nonetheless, he confesses he is not aware of the reasons why people would buy such produce:

I know some people buy organic and fair-trade... I don't know why.

I: Ok, why did you stock such products then?

Just because of the demand...

But Kamal's lack of awareness of the 'ethical' discourse and its related aspects in retailing and consumption is quickly revealed

I: umm...would you like to tell me if you've heard the term 'ethical consumption' before?

No...

I: Or an ethical consumer?

Ethical consumers, yeah.

I: Yea? And um...what do you think an ethical consumer is?

It's a.....what umm, to buy something from the shop.

I: Yea, uh, I don't..uh...what do you think they mean when they say ethical consumer?

That means people who are in minority. Come from other country.....

I: And um...would you like to talk a little bit more about that?

That's it, no uh...that's only I know. Ethical, that means people are minority...mostly overseas.

I: Have you ever read that an ethical consumer is somebody that comes from a minority background?

I know people come from other country.

I: But why do you say they are ethical?

Ethical means, uh, people who are in minority...no?

I: I don't know...

Yeah, I think people who are minority, come from other country, they call ethnic.

I: Not ethnic. Ethical.

Oh ethical is it?

I: Ethical.

No I don't know the meaning.

I: Ok, because I was like asking you, wondering about...ethical, not ethnic.

Oh right, I was thinking about eth-nical? That's different isn't it? That's for people in minority.

I: Yeah, yeah.

Oh right.

(Kamal serves customers in the background)

I: Yeah, so, have you heard the term ethical consumer before?

No [Kamal]

A change in the type of products that this shop stocks is not an easy process. As Kamal explains, he is not willing to introduce new products in his shop since he is not confident that consumers will buy them and he is not willing to take such risk. However, if a sufficient number of customers ask for a specific product Kamal will consider ordering it, as in the case of the soft drink RockStar:

Sometimes [customers are] asking for Rock Star soft drink, they come here. So the customers asking for it, so I order it, I sold them, they [are] selling very well... [Kamal]

4.2.6 Kerry

Kerry is the manager of a local independent deli (Specialist grocery retailer 3) in the area of Partick. She has been interested in ethics and consumption for several years now, and this was one of the reasons she has always consciously sought work in small independent shops. It was through working in such an environment that Kerry first heard the term “ethical consumer”, around five – six years ago.

For Kerry, ethical consumers are: “*richer, more educated people*” who choose to purchase organic and fair trade certified products. Money is a topic that came up several times during the interview, whether when talking about conceptualising the ethical consumer, about consumer power, about using consumption to pursue change. Kerry agrees that to be able to purchase fair-trade and organic products means someone has the adequate spending income to do so.

Through her experience as a manager in that local shop, Kerry acknowledges that there is a proportion of consumers who are interested in the organic and fair-trade aspirations but who are not as wealthy to sustain such a purchasing habit. The examples below illustrate how Kerry clearly distinguishes between people who are able to afford it and those that cannot:

you can tell people who...I mean, I've had customers who bring stuff back and say 'I was just caught up in the moment and I didn't mean to buy this and I really can't afford it, so can I just return it?' Just kind of impulse buys because you were there in the moment and you saw all this wonderful stuff and you wanted to have it...umm...but there is, you can tell the difference...umm...and the bottom line is, like, I had a customer just then who was buying something from the counter which is freshly made beautiful stuff, saw the price and went 'oh, I'll just leave it.' and eh...People are free to say, to say that, but there is definitely a group of people who don't have a problem with spending whatever...and they are...you can tell the difference. [Kerry]

Available income is directly relevant with available choice of what and where to buy products and services. This also implies a greater consumer power from the behalf of those that have more income to spend. As Kerry explains, if you have money you have more power as a consumer “because you can choose to shop anywhere, whereas the end of the month...umm...if you've not got money then you'll have to go to Iceland and buy some sausages” [Kerry].

Some of the wider implications of the restraints imposed by available income can be drawn from the quote below where Kerry talks about the potentiality of pursuing change through consumerism:

...well maybe not change but change their habits of, so that umm, so that person by person grass-roots change...it's, it's umm...I, I don't think anyone thinks that they are going to have a revolution, or, anything but people with a bit of extra money would rather buy ethically than not. [Kerry]

So, the change Kerry is talking about is not a complete change of the system, or as she words it “a revolution”, but a change in shopping habits so that more ‘ethical’ options available in the current market are being supported by those that can afford it. The fact that this ‘change’ is mediated through non-traditional channels of political participation is perhaps why Kerry chooses to describe it as ‘grass-roots’. But the extent to which such description is adequate should be contested, because grass-roots is usually more connected with agency from the people from below (the more oppressed) who have the least resources and opportunities; whereas participation in ethical consumerism as just buying ‘ethically’ marketed products and services and avoiding ‘unethical’ ones is practically available to few; perhaps more available to those in the middle and upwards of the social class system, those with the adequate resources.

The commercialisation of 'ethics' through the proliferation of brands and labelling schemes associated with ethical consumption, has resolved in a fashion trend with regards to shopping and lifestyle. Although there are people who might be 'genuinely' interested in ethical issues related to their consumption, at the bottom line, for Kerry ethical consumerism to some extent has to do with fashion "a lot of university types, a lot of media types are more ethical just because it's more fashionable just now I think..."

Defined as fashion, Kerry also discussed the impact of the economic crisis experienced in 2008 on ethical consumerism:

it's interesting because when the economic crisis first happened this time last year or a bit later in the year...I think we decided to be a bit less ethical and just get the prices down so that people would continue coming in and it worked for a couple of months but the longer it...the longer it goes...the...umm...the more its coming back into use, I think it went out of fashion here for a bit and now it's coming back in just now...[Kerry]

When the global economic crisis started in 2008, economic activity in the UK was vulnerable. To enable consumers to continue shopping in their shop, Kerry admitted making a strategic decision to become "less" ethical in order for their prices to be more attractive. This appeared to work for a few months, as Kerry remembers, something that in a way implies also the willingness of consumers to sacrifice some of their 'ethical' shopping standards in difficult times. Perhaps the most important point the above discussion can make is that it reinforces the thought that the 'ethical consumerism' phenomenon is situated within an economic system and as such is to a great extent dependent on economies and their functions and fate. Hence, as a tool and generator of aspirations that people through their consumption can achieve social change, ethical consumerism appears limited.

Finally, another issue that came up in the discussion with Kerry was the scale of a business and its role in accommodating ethical consumerism. She explained:

I suppose by using suppliers that you know the divination of their products...I think also having a duty to the community, to...umm...bring stuff in that people want to bring in and we're small enough that we can cope with that, that we know where things are coming from...

I: (interrupting) so you think that size matters?

Yea, I do, I think great big places can't control, I mean they are going through so much stuff. I mean I know when we are really busy there is less of an emphasis on...on umm...on ethical, on ethical items in the shop. Umm...but I think that the smallness of the business has allowed us to be quite careful with where we are getting stuff. [Kerry]

Kerry supports the idea that smaller scale shops can accommodate ethical consumerism better than large scale ones. She feels that the smaller the scale of a business, the easier to control the products in stock. In this sense, she feels that a small scale business could direct its efforts on promoting and supporting ethical consumerism- choose what products will go on its shelves, control the 'ethical' features of the products on offer and accommodate needs of its customers - easier than a larger scale one. This of course is the opinion of Kerry, which comes from her experience in working within small independent shops. Phillip who works for Large grocery retailer 2 has a complete opposite view on this.

4.2.7 Philip

Philip has been working in the retail sector for almost twenty years now, most of which were under the same employer; a leading organisation in the supermarket industry in the UK. In 2008 he left that organisation in order to work as the store manager of Large grocery retailer 2, an upmarket supermarket store in the West-End of Glasgow, where he also resides.

Unlike other interviewees, Philip's narration throughout the interview had a strong professional feel; both in terms of the business terminology he used and the rationalisation of his answers. There are plenty of instances where Philip is using the word 'we' when explaining a position or justifying his answer, indicating a strong identification with the organisation he works for. Moreover, there is an interesting interplay between the roles he is taking and the corresponding answers he provides during the interview: on the one hand there are answers shaped by his personal opinion and on the other answers shaped by the business strategy and branding of the organisation he represents.

Philip explained the centrality branding has for Large grocery retailer's 2 business approach. A brand⁷, according to Kotler et al. (2002) may represent "a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of these, which is used to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" [p. 470].

A core value for Large grocery retailer 2's brand is the establishment of trust between the company and its customers⁸:

one of the most important parts of Supermarket 2 is its brand, yea? And its brand, the marketing of its brand and one of the strongest links that Supermarket 2 believe they have is the trust of our customers. [Philip]

To enable building up this trust, Philip argues that the size of a company is crucial; the larger the company the bigger the trust. One reason is that the larger the size of the retailer, the more resources can the company make use of in order to safeguard quality; Philip claims Large grocery retailer 2 is capable of tracing all their offering products down to the actual farmer/producer and thus able to make a quality check on behalf of their consumers, something that he believes is not possible for example for a local butcher to achieve. At the same time, building up their brand on their ability to go through such quality check results in a higher degree of accountability towards customers according to Philip. This might put more pressure on the retailer to deliver the promise of quality so as to retain the trusting bonds with its customers.

Our customers really trust Large grocery retailer 2. So in times of, to give you an example, in times when there are food scares out there, so, whether it be eh-the pig-eh, the-the, there was a pork epidemic last year in Ireland, or if its, umm, you know, BSE, many years ago, umm, them Large grocery retailer 2's actually see these product groups increase. Because more customers, so customers can trust the Large grocery retailer 2's name so actually increase

⁷ Brands can be conceived as the meaning of products to their customers, that is, their cognitive and affective structures concerning those products and their use (Muhlbacher et al., 1999, p. 572). A brand may serve customers as a means of orientation among a great variety of potential choices. Brands ease customers' choice processes because they reduce the amount of information to be searched, retrieved and processes to make a 'good' decision (Muhlbacher et al., 1999, p. 573). The meaning of a brand also allows a customer to identify with it or to use it as a means of self-projection (Muhlbacher et al., 1999, p. 574). The challenge of branding is to develop a deep set of meanings or associations for the brand (Kotler et al., 2002, p. 470).

⁸ Trust is one of the five core brand values formally set by Large grocery retailer 2; the others being quality, value, service and innovation. [In order to preserve anonymity, the source of this information is not included here]

consumption with us, because maybe feel they can trust us better than the local butcher or the supermarket. So because of that, we, take great-great pride, because our trust, because our customers trust us-we have to-we have to deliver that trust so we follow everything right back to the-to-to the start of the supply chain whether it be umm, the cotton that we're making for our garments in the Middle East and we go probably...you know, umm, a bit further than any other retailer to ensure that everyone's trading fairly throughout the whole supply chain. [Philip]

During the interview, Philip portrayed Large grocery retailer 2 as a 'responsible' retailer; responsible in terms of safeguarding the trust built between the company and the consumers by making sure that the expectations of consumers in terms of the type, quality and labelling of the products on stock are met. In terms of their social corporate responsibility, Large grocery retailer 2 has set an official plan targeting the five following themes: climate change, waste, ethical trading, sustainability and health. One of the ways for Large grocery retailer 2 to fulfil these set targets is by making sure products certified as organic and fair-trade are on offer in their stores. Philip commented on the availability of organic and fair-trade marketed products in his shop. Similarly with Anne (who works in the branch of Large grocery retailer 1) Philip too raised the issue of labelling; specifically with regards to environmental friendly and against animal testing products. He feels more steps could be taken towards a clearer display of information concerning these issues on the packaging of products.

...we stock quite a number of fair trade products because Large grocery retailer 2's are a...are-eh, quite, as part of their plan aye, we try and support fair trade as much as possible. Um-our organic range although popular probably not as popular as our fair trade products. Um, I think customers who wish to consume organic, certainly in our stores, will come looking for it. But it's not umm, as big as in some other businesses I've worked in the past. Um-environmentally friendly, very important to our customers but I think we can do more to umm...my customers do ask... umm about the ...the carbon footprint that products leave and we don't, our labelling is not quite as advanced that we have-that we are at the stage where we can provide that on all our packaging however that is something we are looking at. Um, against animal testing, well, I think-I think umm, as a responsible retailer I think most of our-most of our products if not all of our products have a very strong eh...link, right back, right down the supply chain, right back to the actual farm. So we would not support any farm or any producer that-that has supplied that-that-umm tests on animals. Yeah? However we do not label or umm...have a list of umm, products that are I guess are animal tested, so actually I guess that's probably a yes rather than a no. When I-when I think about it. [Philip]

4.2.8 Lee

Lee is the store manager of a convenience shop (Symbol group retailer 2) along Dumbarton Road in Partick. Much like the shop where Abhi works, this shop is independently owned but is part of a country-wide network of independent retailers who joined forces in order to achieve better prices at certain wholesale Cash and Carry. Despite the fact that “*no one has really explained*” to Lee what an ‘ethical’ consumer is, in his attempt to “work out” its meaning he provides arguments (using words such as fair-trade, exploitation, etc.) which match with the ‘hegemonic’ framing of ethical consumption:

I presume it means umm...taking into account factors on how the stuff's been produced, fair trade, whether exploitations went on or whatever, I take it that's what it means but I'm only guessing... [Lee]

In a similar manner, business policies can incorporate aspects of ‘ethics’ according to Lee, who imagines ethical corporations as businesses that

... keep up with the news, keep up with the times and, you know, buy accordingly. Boycott whatever countries or whatever... exploiting workers or not giving them fair wages, or even buying, you know products where the animals were treated badly... [Lee]

When filling out the questionnaire that was given to him before conducting the interview, Lee stated that ‘ethical business policies’ play an important role for his business. Within the ‘ethical business policies’ Lee includes decisions on the products to be offered by a retailer; nonetheless, shelves at Lee’s shop are empty of ‘ethical’ labelled products.

Lee identifies the mechanism of supply and demand as mainly responsible for this situation

...it's all down to demand isn't it...there is...the type of people that stay around here, eh-older people or people maybe claiming benefits off the government and that, maybe not got a job,

because the ethical stuff is maybe that wee bit more expensive...they tend to just go for the cheaper....cheaper quality...

I: So when you said also that demand, for example, in fair trade has increased but you seem to not stock something like that, why is that?

Because of the area; I realise supermarkets and you know bigger places like that, that attract a wide range of customers can stock them and possibly make a profit off them, I'm guessing, but umm...certainly around here because we've got, you know, a very limited customer base probably three streets square and uh...it's really not worth our while giving them shelf space. I mean we could put something else in that space and sell it quicker, for more profit. [Lee]

Limited shelf space, coupled with price sensitive customers, is according to Lee the reason why 'ethical' products such as fair trade labelled ones – despite a general rise in demand – are not offered in his shop. In principle, through demand customers have the power to dictate what will be stocked on the shelves of a shop; “*We only get it in for the consumers. If they want something we will get it in for them*” (Lee). Nonetheless, if the numbers of customers requiring a specific 'ethical' labelled product are not high enough – so as to be profitable for a small shop to allocate space for it on their shelves – a change in the products being offered in the shop that Lee works will hardly be sustained, as the example below illustrates:

there was a customer that asked for free range eggs and we got them in for her. But of course they were ten or fifteen pence dearer than normal battery eggs and she was the only one that bought them so we didn't get them in again...I'm afraid that's how it works... [Lee]

4.2.9 Suzan

Suzan is the floor manager in a branch store of the Large grocery retailer 3 chain operating in the West-End. Large grocery retailer's 3 priority, according to Suzan, is to 'serve the customer'. This for the local branch where Suzan works, means focusing on the needs of single and particularly older people, by keeping the prices low and applying adequate marketing strategies, for example concentrating on promotions of the kind of 'half price' offerings rather than 'buy one get one free'.

Large grocery retailer 3 has not specifically focused on catering for the 'ethical' consumer; on its shelves, customers could find an ethical alternative for some of the product lines, but the range was limited in comparison to other supermarkets, such as

Large grocery retailer 2. The corporate identity of Large grocery retailer 3 also has not strategically associated itself with an 'ethical' consumption ideal. Large grocery retailer 3 was acquired by another Large grocery retailer in 2009, which is more tuned in with the 'ethical' aspects of consumerism. In her interview, Suzan claimed that because of this acquisition, the particular store would adopt the new name and along with it the corporate culture of the parent supermarket – expecting thus to shift attention in promoting 'ethical' retailing. Nonetheless, the specific store was ultimately bought by another supermarket chain which re-furnished the store and open for business in late 2009.

Suzan has heard the term 'ethical consumption' being used before. It's something she claims she's not paying much attention to, although she appears to have a clear view on what it represents:

the way things are brought into the supermarkets, umm...how they're, the products are produced, who is producing them what we're doing to the environment with all the sort of stuff, like the packaging that was talking about, the wrappings all this sort of thing and how to reduce it all. [Suzan]

Suzan believes that it's the side of the demand (the consumers) that has led into 'ethical' alternatives being offered on the supermarket shelves. Nonetheless, while she recognises that there is a growing trend in more and more consumers asking for 'ethical' products, the number of 'ethical' consumers' today is still very low.

I don't think there's a lot, I don't think there are a lot of people, that way, at the moment. I think it's an education for people to actually learn just exactly what's happening but I don't think there's a great deal of people that actually understand what we are doing to the country, the world. [Suzan]

Realising how our consumption influences the country and world we live in is for Suzan a learning process - or a matter of 'education' as she puts it. Such awareness, she feels, is lacking from the majority of the population.

4.2.10 Zamir

Zamir works as a Customer Service assistant at Symbol group retailer 3 on Dumbarton Road. Although he has been working in the specific organization for approximately six months (up to the date of our interview), his knowledge and experience of the retail sector is not as limited; he has had a two years experience working at a branch of a Large grocery retailer, and during the time of this interview he was pursuing a postgraduate degree in Business Studies.

During his time working in the retail sector, Zamir has noticed that consumers normally go for the price and the quality and do not really care of whether the product is ethical or not. He does however identify a small segment of consumers who are interested in the “ethical” characteristics of a product and /or the producer:

Some of the consumers think about the ethical thing, and sometimes they discuss that product, this company's doing this, and this, so we won't go for this company and we want the products from that company... But a very few cases, one in a hundred or one in two hundred, something like that. [Zamir]

Such consumers usually belong, according to Zamir, to a specific age-group, namely the elderly people. They are the ones, according to Zamir, who would sometimes comment on the ethical aspects of a specific product or brand and would ask the retailers accordingly to stop or start stocking a specific product on their shelves.

The principle of consumer sovereignty over the products that will be on offer at a retailer store is identified by Zamir as being quite complex. On the one hand, as the theory also implies, consumers are the sole responsible agent for what is stocked on a shelf: supply is there to serve demand.

As far as the retailers are concerned, this decision can't be made by the retailers. Because if a product is demanded by the customers in a market, the retailers are obliged to put this product in their shop regardless if it is ethical or not. So the first priority of this selection goes to the customer not to the retailer. The retailer is only an intermediary; he is just providing a service so he's not making any decisions, whatever the customers demand they will definitely provide these products... [Zamir]

On the other hand, however, such a principle is not that watertight when the scale of the business of a retailer is brought into the equation:

I think customers have the power to shape up what is on offer, but this is mainly with the small retail shops. Because in the big retail shops, [it's] the supermarkets. Actually they are driving the customers. So there is a different perspective. Because when a supermarket wants to promote a thing - whether it's organic or it's non-organic - they can promote it very well and they can sell it to any customers because they have a lot of resources and they know how to display their products and how psychology [works so that] the customer will go for this product. The small businesses are driven by the customers. [Zamir]

In the above comment, Zamir gives a brief illustration on how resources (and particularly advertising) can help shift the power of dictating what to supply from the consumer to the retailer. Hence, a small retail business might be more customer-oriented, in that it will strive to supply what is already in demand, whereas a large retail business is able to also interfere by shaping demand (and needs) so that it meets supply.

Finally, the role of government in stimulating and shaping demand of ethical products is another issue that came up during the interview with Zamir:

...there was a very hard debate on the cigarettes and it started in the Scotland, you know, that they just want to completely change the packaging of the cigarettes, they want it to be completely white and they don't want it for the retailers for to be displayed on the shelves they want it to be displayed under the counter and if somebody asks, and now they want, they want, they thinking about changing the age from eighteen to twenty-one for buying the cigarettes and the alcohol. So if these policies are implemented by the government and if now what they are doing they are discouraging the consumers by increasing the price of these products by implementing huge duties, so definitely if they want the other ethical products to be promoted for the definitely what they are doing with the cigarettes is for the social purpose not for the economical purpose so if they want eh...the products...eh to be consumed by the consumer on the larger scale definitely they have to use the same policy but on the otherwise, they have to give the subsidiary on these products then they have to definitely, the consumers are price sensitive in this kind of economic situation, they are not ethical sensitive right now they think about how their can save their money for their weekly consumption instead of how many ethical products they consume in a week so if they want the consumers to definitely they should provide some subsidiary on the product, if I go and I find a product with a ten percent price difference not the fifty or hundred percent price difference. If I go into the shop and I see that the ethical products are there and they are only ten percent higher than the normal price definitely I will go for the ethical products, whether I know or not what social benefits it's given to the society but I'll go for the ethical product. But if there is a very huge difference, normally when I go to the Tesco and the other supermarket I saw the normal product is for one pound and the ethical product or any product which is protecting the environment or doing anything like this or the organic product they are for three pounds or four pounds this is a very big difference. [Zamir]

Taking as an example governmental interventions that seek to shape private consumption of tobacco and alcohol, Zamir believes that through adequate policies governments can support and promote consumption of ethical products. One way could be through governmental subsidies so as to help lower prices of ethical products. This would, for Zamir, definitely affect price-driven consumers in their decision making, since it will result in minimising the price gap between 'ethical' and other products. In these lines, government intervention in actively implementing reforms and promoting activities which make ethical products a 'convenient choice', not only in terms of price, but also supply and visibility, for example, are thought to facilitate ethical consumption (see Hjelm, 2011).

4.3 What can these stories tell us about the 'ethical' discourse in consumption?

Subsequently to looking closely at the ten stories of the retailers, it is a logical adjunction to zoom out and wonder: what can these stories tell us about the 'ethical' discourse in consumption?

Some first insights have already been highlighted while presenting the ten stories above. In this section, findings collected from the individual interviews are brought together. The 'master themes' which resulted from such process are presented and discussed below. These master themes represent the fishbone that connects the ten (so diverse) stories together and, as such, help us draw a more rounded picture on how the ethical consumption phenomenon is both perceived and facilitated from the side of distribution (i.e. the retailing sector).

4.3.1 Awareness of the 'ethical' discourse in the retail (grocery) sector

Perhaps unsurprisingly - and despite all efforts from business, academia and third sector institutions in the UK to raise awareness of this terminology, terms such as ethical consumer, ethical consumption or ethical consumerism are not necessarily known to every single person working within the retail (grocery) sector. In this study, six out of ten of the interviewees admitted to know, or at least to have heard, the term 'ethical consumer'. This holds true even if retailers do not offer products that are generally thought to belong to the ethical consumption range (such as fair-trade or organic labelled products), as it was illustrated in the case of Lee. On the contrary, there's the case of Kamal who is aware of Fair-trade and organic labelling, but who appears not to be familiar whatsoever with the framing of 'ethical consumption'.

With regards to the factors that influence such awareness, the sample size is rather small and thus inadequate to provide evidence that can be generalisable. After all, this study was not designed to facilitate for something like this. Nevertheless, from these ten interviews there seems to be at least three indicators that could potentially explain (to some extent) a person's - that works in the retail sector- awareness of such discourse: the type of organization and business strategy, the person's position within the organisation and experience, and finally, nationality.

For example, when working within a business that has 'ethics' as a core value for its brand (as in the case of Asif, Jane, Kerry and Philip), the probability of being familiar with such discourse appears high. The other two people that admitted to have heard the term 'ethical consumer' before are Suzan and Zamir. Both actually work in stores that appear to be more price-driven in their business strategy. Nonetheless, Zamir is a full time business student within a UK University; by being a member of such an intellectual circle, he is more likely to be exposed to such perceptions, discourses and terminologies. And Suzan works for a Large grocery retailer, a business which can cater (even just because of its larger shelf space) for more diverse customer needs than a convenience shop (which has to operate with a limited shelf space). Moreover, the fact that she is a British possibly raises even more her possibilities of awareness, since the particular discourse is apparent to some extent within the UK (but it would be a huge mistake to say that is a popular discourse world-wide).

Ethnicity could also explain to some extent why Anne and Lee (who both denied being familiar with the ethics discourse) appear to have at least some knowledge (and even support) of the discourses behind organic and fair-trade produce and consumption. The exact opposite we see in the stories of Abhi, Asif and Kamal. In particular, Abhi and Kamal both mistaken the word 'ethical' with the word 'ethnic'. The researcher's mother tongue is not English, and her accent is not that of a native speaker. Thus, one could assume that it was just a matter of misunderstanding of the spoken word; English was the mediating language between the interviewer and the interviewee, and misunderstandings because of accent can happen. However, this mistake was not made by other interviewees. Both Abhi and Kamal are of non-British background but work and live in Britain. Perhaps, the issue of ethnicity is felt as important to them; they were not aware of the term ethical consumption and in their mind 'ethic' was automatically replaced by the word 'ethnic' (which does sound close enough and deals with catering for the needs of different ethnic groups, minorities etc as stated in their interview).

To my knowledge, there are no previous studies on ethical consumption that have sought the views of people working in the retail sector in the same manner that this research did. So, it is difficult to compare findings with previous research. Nationality, has been found to affect engagement with ethical consumer practices. Turcotte (2010), for example, in his study about ethical consumption in Canada, he found that in 2008, 29% of his sample born in Canada had purchased or boycotted a product for ethical reasons, compared with 24% of immigrants who arrived in Canada before 1990, and 12% of those who arrived between 1990 and 2008. He concluded that the longer non-Canadians lived in Canada, the more probable it is that they engage with ethical consumption. Although this cannot be translated to apply directly to retailers, it seems that to some extent, awareness of the ethical consumption discourse in general may be affected by nationality and/or ethnicity.

4.3.2 Who are their 'ethical' customers?

Views of all interviewees (who attempted to explain who is an ethical consumer) meet at a certain point: ethical consumers are consumers who incorporate in their shopping

decision-making features of products/services that go beyond price and quality. With the exception of Jane, most of these features are believed to have something to do with the organic and fair-trade certification, with animal rights and environmental impact. Such a perspective is very close (if not identical) to the framing of this discourse that is hegemonically produced from the institutions involved in one way or another with the 'ethical consumerism' phenomenon.

Jane is the only person to introduce a somewhat different perspective towards the meaning and practice of consumer 'ethics'; her approach follows that of her business and focuses on aspects of locality, seasonality and diy. Ethical consumption according her view also means supporting small farms/businesses as well as avoiding processed food and supermarkets. Jane's story provides a prime example of how practices in all spheres of consumption, production and distribution can deviate from the more 'usual' framing of 'ethics' in the business context. Jane feels her business to be an ethical one, and her customers to be ethical too, not because they buy for e.g. organic produce, but because they chose to make their own food from scratch and/or because they boycott supermarket stores.

Where all perspectives from the retailers meet again, is the financial issue that consumers who wish to engage with ethical consumption are facing. Being ethical in their shopping behaviour presupposes that customers are able to afford it; in other words they have the necessary financial capital. All interviewees acknowledged that sustaining an ethical consumer lifestyle (for e.g. shopping for organic products, local or seasonal ones, avoiding supermarkets etc.) can be expensive. Kerry explicitly states that ethical consumers are wealthier and more educated people. They are people who can afford making these kinds of 'ethical' choices as consumers.

The views from the side of retailers on the reasoning behind choosing an ethical product or service vary. Some retailers like Jane, Kerry, Lee and Philip feel that consumers intrinsically care about issues such as working conditions, environment preservation and animal rights. Retailers who do not see how ethical features may increase the perceived value of a product (like Abhi and Kamal) admit to not understand why people would pay a premium price for ethical products. And for others, like Kamal, ethical consumers are just "*show offs*" who in one instance appear to care

about the environment by bringing their own re-usable shopping bag and in the other instance throw away their cans of coke carelessly on the pavement.

4.3.3 Who decides what's on offer?

For 'ethics' to be applied in all spheres of production, consumption and distribution, certain structures need to exist. Such structures will offer the opportunities for people/organisations to act 'ethically' as consumers, producers and middle-persons. The type of products placed on the shelves of a supermarket or convenience store will directly affect the ability of a consumer to act out his/her 'ethics' through his/her consumption. But who decides what is on offer?

The interviews with people working within the retail sector brought into the surface the already known complex relationship between supply and demand. At one level, supply is there to satisfy demand. At a different level, however, demand can be shaped by supply. With examples taken from these ten interviews, this section discusses the role of retailers in satisfying and stimulating demand, and the role of consumers in following or shaping supply of ethical products/services.

4.3.3.1 The active/passive role of retailing in shaping demand

Businesses adopt different business strategies according to their aims and resources. The interviews provided evidence that in the area of this study, different business models and brand values are pursued by organizations. 'Ethics' are incorporated in varying degrees across the brand values of each of these ten organizations. There are organizations which have a high interest in facilitating ethical consumption (like Jane's, Kerry's and Philip's). Such companies actively strive to support an 'ethical' take in both consumption and business. They offer 'ethical' products and also appear sensitive to business 'ethics' in a variety of ways; Philip's organization is capitalizing on this by claiming to be a 'responsible retailer' with a corporate social responsibility plan in place; Kerry's small scale store is thought to allow for a better control on the 'ethical features'

of the products that they stock; Jane's shop caters for those who wish to avoid supermarkets and support local produce. There are also organizations with a medium interest (such as that of Anne's and Suzan's), as well as organizations which do not explicitly aim to facilitate ethical consumption (such as Abhi's and Kamal's).

The scale of an organization appears to affect to some extent the degree of which a company would cater for ethical consumers. A large grocery retailer with a large floor space is able to stock a variety of substitute goods. Thus, it can offer more choice to its customers and in this way cater for the needs of a diverse customer base. On the contrary, the limited space of a convenience store limits the number of goods on offer. As Lee explained, it is for him thus impossible to stock products with 'low sales'. However, floor size doesn't necessarily impede Large grocery retailer 1, as Anne explained, from stocking ethical produce although the shop is rather small in floor size. Here, the interest of the Large grocery retailer 1 in offering 'ethical' products could be an explanation for this.

Finally, demand (as reflected through sales) of organic and fair-trade products in the area of this study is not high enough so as to make retailers choose such products to be displayed on their shelves. All retailers stretched the price-sensitive nature of their customers. Perhaps this is best illustrated in the stories of Asif and Kerry, who had to re-consider their 'all organic' approach once their shops were facing low sales.

4.3.3.2 The active/passive role of consumers in shaping supply

Low sales might be an indication that consumers for one reason or another are not happy buying specific products. Sometimes though, consumers need to communicate their needs in different ways; for example they need to communicate that they wish a specific product to be offered. Through the interviews, it became apparent that feedback from consumers is a complicated issue.

First of all, not many instances of consumer giving feedback were reported from the retailers. The interviews point out that the instances where customers ask for particular products to be included in a shop's shelves are somewhat rare. This is also supported from the evidence acquired from the interviews with self-identified ethical consumers

(this is discussed further in the next chapter). Furthermore, only Anne reported an incident of customers asking for particular products to be excluded from the shelves. In other words, incidents of consumers giving feedback to retailers are limited. Does that mean that consumers are happy with the service and offerings? Or they simply go elsewhere to get what they want? Do they want to give feedback? Do they change anything by giving feedback?

Even if feedback is communicated, the request of the consumer might not be taken forward. Anne illustrated this by saying that only when large numbers of complaints are apparent the request will reach the area manager of her supermarket. Apparently, only the protest incidents at her store managed to exercise the necessary pressure so as to reach the supermarket's headquarters. The situation, however, is different when the shop is small and decisions of what to stock are taken by people working or owning that shop. Kamal's story of the RockStar soft drink is a nice example, and a successful one since both retail and customers are happy; it is a seller!

4.4 Conclusions

The ten stories from the side of the retailing sector that were presented here provided a series of valuable insights that advance our understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Most of all, the data illustrated the complex nature of applying 'ethics' in all consumption, production and distribution.

With respect to the framing of 'ethical consumer' (Research Objective 1), six out of ten of the interviewees admitted to be aware of the 'ethical' in consumption. Their awareness did not seem to necessarily reflect their offering of 'ethical' products, i.e. there was at least one retailer who was aware of ethical consumption and still did not offer 'ethical' framed products and a retailer that offered 'ethical' choices but was not conscious of such framing. Instead, three indicators that could potentially explain (to some extent) a person's - that works in the retail sector- awareness of such discourse seemed to be the type of organization and business strategy, the person's position within the organisation and experience, and finally, nationality.

The views of those who were familiar with such meet at a certain point: ethical consumers are consumers who incorporate in their shopping decision-making features of products/services that go beyond price and quality. With the exception of Jane, most of these features had to do with organic and fair-trade certification, with animal rights and environmental impact. Hence, with respect to practices (Research Objective 2) retailers viewed 'ethical consumers as the *shoppers* of 'ethically' framed products. Such perspective is close (if not identical) to the framing of 'ethical' consumption that is hegemonically re-produced from institutions involved in one way or another with the 'ethical consumerism' phenomenon, as already identified in the literature review. Despite their personal feelings about 'ethical' consumption (that ranged from being in favour of to being discarding), retailers also admitted that buying 'ethically' may be an expensive sport. Again, despite personal views on ethical consumption, some retailers acknowledged the distinction that affordability (to shop ethically) introduces between ethical and ordinary consumers (e.g. Kerry and Asif). Affordability translated in demand of 'ethical' products was also the reason why some retailers had to re-organise what's on offer; the case of Kerry admitting to have to 'dilute' their strictly ethical offerings with some less ethical and cheaper alternatives, as well as the case of Asif who's business only 'ethical' aspect became to be the 'name' of the shop are illustrative of this.

Finally, the interviews with people working within the retail sector brought into the surface the complex and 'co-constitutive' relationship between supply and demand (Van Vliet et al., 2005). The previous section in this chapter discussed the role of retailers in satisfying and stimulating demand, and the role of consumers in following or shaping supply of ethical products/services. In an area where demand of 'ethical' framed products appeared through these interviews to be relatively low, retailers such as Lee refrain from stocking products with 'low sales'. The structures upon which consumers may perform their practicing of 'ethical' consumption (translated into ethical shopping) are not always available. Findings from this research also indicated that in Partick other forms of consumer activism such as boycotts and site protests, and even plain consumer feedback appear also to be limited in volume, and most importantly, in power. As a tool and generator of aspirations that people through their consumption can achieve social change (Research Objective 3), ethical consumerism appears thus, confined to economic structures.

An understanding of 'ethical consumerism' as equated to 'ethical shopping' automatically situates the phenomenon exclusively within an economic system and as such is to a great extent dependent on economies and their functions and fate. Moreover, it is under this perspective that scholars such as Schrempf and Palazzo (2011) explicitly assert that the ethical consumer '*needs*' to be created, and thus propose ways in which '*corporations can co-create the ethical consumer*' by influencing external institutional and internal psychological factors (p. 532).

To sum up, findings from the interviews with retailers indicated to some extent an awareness of the 'ethical' frame of consumption, a frame which primarily translates into the economic terms of shopping 'ethically' framed products, particularly organic and Fair-trade. The interviews with retailers, as caterers of 'ethical' consumption in this sense, helped uncover some of the limitations of 'ethical' consumption by forcing a perspective of consumption as a strictly economic act. Having presented and discussed the insights generated from interviewing retailers (belonging to the supply side), it is now time to take a look at the views of consumers themselves. The next chapter (Chapter 5) presents findings from the street survey and discuss views of both 'ethical' and non-'ethical' consumers, before narrowing down the investigation to examine in-depth the views of self-identified 'ethical' consumers (Chapter 6).

Chapter 5: Public perceptions of the 'ethical' and other consumer framings

The previous chapter presented findings from ten in-depth interviews with local retailers operating in the area of Partick so as to examine the 'ethical' discourse of consumption as perceived from this side of supply. Shifting now the spotlight to the protagonist, i.e. the consumers, this chapter presents and discusses findings from the street survey that aimed to examine what is considered as 'ethical' in consumption by the general public, both from the side of those that subscribe to an 'ethical consumer' identity and those that do not.

This chapter begins with a discussion on the demographics of the population of this survey. The findings are then presented, starting with the different consumer identities and their interconnections as resulting from the survey data. The degrees of identification with the four relevant consumer identities (ethical, green, political and socially responsible) are then discussed. The chapter ends with an exploration on the perceptions of what it means to be an 'ethical' consumer and some insights connecting identity and consumer practices based on the data collected through this street survey.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter makes use of primary data obtained through the street survey. A detailed account of the methodology followed has already been provided in Chapter 3, section 3.5.2 (p. 118). For a quick reference, the aim of the street survey was to explore the ethical consumption (and relevant identities and practices) from the side of the general public. Data from this survey were elicited so as to explore self-identification of the 'ethical' and other relevant consumer categories as well as to examine the extent to which these categories are known and shared amongst people in the public sphere (feeding towards Research Objective 1). A quantitative indication of how identification/framing and practices relate (connecting Research Objective 1 and 2) was also sought.

The survey was carried out in the streets of Partick - an area in the West-End of Glasgow - from 26th of October to 29th of November 2009. The survey involved a researcher-administered questionnaire resulting in a total of 112 completed questionnaires. Since the survey incorporated a non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique, the insights presented here are used mainly for explorative purposes and should not be considered as categorically 'representative' to the general population.

5.2 Demographic profile of street survey participants

The street survey was carried out in the streets of Partick, and as expected not all of the participants were residents of this area; most of them were though, as illustrated in Table 5-1 in the next page. Since the aim of this survey was to get an opinion on ethical consumption from the public, all the 112 administered questionnaires were used in the analysis. It is important to remember however that the findings reflect opinions of people that happened to be (for example because their working space was in that area) at the points where the questionnaire was administered and not strictly based on the residency.

Table 5-1**Residency**

	Frequency	Percent
Partick	87	77,7
other area of Glasgow	18	16,1
other	7	6,3
Total	112	100,0

Table 5-1: Residency.

The following tables present the demographic details of the sample population of this survey according to age and gender (Table 5-2), economic activity (Table 5-3) and educational background (Table 5-4). To get a feel of how the demographic profile of this survey fits the general population, in other words to provide some indication of the representativeness of this sample) I have used data from Scotland's Census 2011 (<http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/> [Retrieved 14/11/2013]). In the following tables data referring to Partick are based on the geographical level of the Census Standard Wards, whereas data on Glasgow are based on the geographical level of Scottish Parliamentary Regions.

Table 5-2**Gender and Age Groups**

	Survey		Partick		Glasgow		Scotland	
	People	%	People	%	People	%	People	%
Population	112		6796		632959		5062011	
Males	45	40.18%	3169	46.63%	297933	47.07%	2432494	48.05%
Females	67	59.82%	3627	53.37%	335026	52.93%	2629517	51.95%
Age Groups								
0-15	N/A	0.00%	630	9.27%	117003	18.49%	972065	19.20%
16-19	2	1.79%	283	4.16%	34133	5.39%	252090	4.98%
20-34	54	48.21%	2802	41.23%	149898	23.68%	1013784	20.03%
35-49	15	13.39%	1417	20.85%	136178	21.51%	1118333	22.09%
50-59	21	18.75%	663	9.76%	65792	10.39%	639106	12.63%
60-64	11	9.82%	240	3.53%	30131	4.76%	261733	5.17%
65-74	5	4.46%	420	6.18%	55372	8.75%	446033	8.81%
74 and over	4	3.57%	341	5.02%	44452	7.02%	358867	7.09%

Table 5-2: Gender and Age Groups.

Table 5-3

Economic Activity (aged 16-74) [†]									
	Survey		Partick		Glasgow		Scotland		
	People	%	People	%	People	%	People	%	
Part-time	15	13.89%	366	6.28%	40156	8.52%	414989	11.12%	
Full-time ^{††}	51	47.22%	2763	47.43%	184441	39.12%	1748046	46.85%	
Unemployed	10	9.26%	294	5.05%	25159	5.34%	148082	3.97%	
Retired	16	14.81%	472	8.10%	59433	12.60%	518403	13.89%	
Student ^{†††}	15	13.89%	1110	19.06%	44290	9.39%	272838	7.31%	
Other ^{††††}	1	0.93%	820	14.08%	118025	25.03%	628721	16.85%	
†	1	0.93%	820	14.08%	118025	25.03%	628721	16.85%	
Total	108	100.00%	5825	100.00%	471504	100.00%	3731079	100.00%	
Not aged 16-74	4		971		161455		1330932		
Total	112		6796		632959		5062011		

Table 5-3: Economic Activity (aged 16-74).

Footnotes:

† Data of the Scottish Census 2011 were available for these age groups

†† This category includes the 'employee full time' and 'self-employed' categories of the Scottish Census 2011

††† This category includes the 'full-time student' and 'student' categories of the Scottish Census 2011

†††† Includes the 'looking-after home/family', 'permanently sick/disabled' and 'other' categories of the Scottish Census 2011

Table 5-4

Highest level of qualification (aged 16-74) [†]									
	Survey		Partick		Glasgow		Scotland		
	People	%	People	%	People	%	People	%	
No qualifications or outwith these groups	1	0.93%	1137	19.52%	190814	40.47%	1239947	33.23%	
Group 1	5	4.62%	628	10.78%	100073	21.22%	921074	24.69%	
Group 2	19	17.6%	1199	20.58%	68506	14.53%	584060	15.65%	
Group 3	83	76.85%	2861	49.11%	112111	23.77%	985998	26.42%	
Total	108	100.00%	5825	100.00%	471504	100.00%	3731079	100.00%	
Not aged 16-74	4		971		161455		1330932		
Total	112		6796		632959		5062011		

Table 5-4: Highest level of qualification (aged 16-74).

Footnotes:

† Categories are based on the Scottish Census 2011 as follows:

Group 1: 'O' Grade, Standard Grade, Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, City and Guilds Craft, SVQ Level 1 or 2 or equivalent.

Group 2: Higher Grade, CSYS, ONC, OND, City and Guilds Advanced Craft, RSA Advanced Diploma, SVQ Level 3 or equivalent.

Group 3: HND, HNC, RSA Higher Diploma, SVQ Level 4 or 5 or equivalent, First Degree, Higher Degree, Professional qualification, SVQ Levels 6-8 or equivalent.

Since the findings from the street survey are not going to make any representative claims, the discussion on the demographics and how they compare to the general population will be kept brief. Thus, there are four major observations to be made. First, in terms of gender, the survey sample includes slightly more females (59.82%) than it is found in the general population of all Partick (53.37%), Glasgow (52.93%) and Scotland (51.95%). This is in accordance with other research from other fields which has reported that women are more likely to participate in studies (for example, see Galea and Tracy's (2007) review on participation rates in epidemiological studies).

Second, almost half (48.21%) of the survey sample is between 20 and 34 years old. This age group represents a significant segment of the population in Partick (42.23%), but is a lot lower if we consider Glasgow (23.68%) and generally Scotland (20.03%). With respect to this age group, it is arguable that the sample is to some extent reflecting the fact that Partick has relatively high numbers of this age group. As with the rest of the age groups, the survey is overrepresented by people between 50 and 64 years old (28.57%) and underrepresented for age groups 16 to 19 and 65 over (9.82%) in comparison to the general population [Partick (13.29% and 15.36%), Glasgow (15.15% and 21.16%) and Scotland (17.8% and 20.88%)].

Third, in respect to economic activity, the survey appears to have attracted more people working 'part-time' and 'in retirement' than the rest of the population. Another interesting point reflected in Table 5-3 and worth mentioning here is the high percentage of the student population both in the survey sample (13.89%) and in Partick (19.06%) in comparison to the population in Glasgow (9.39%) and Scotland (7.31%) in general. This, however, is not surprising since, as mentioned earlier in the methodology chapter, Partick is in the West-side of Glasgow neighbouring with the University of Glasgow. As a rather cheap area to live in, it should be expected to be populated by a higher percentage of students than other areas.

Finally, the survey sample has attracted participants with rather high educational background. The table suggests that almost 77% of the survey population have been educated to a Scottish Vocational Qualifications level 3 or and above. Partick in fact appears an area with higher percentage of high qualified population in reference to Glasgow and Scotland as a whole. This might explain partly the educational background

found in the street sample. Another reason though, could be that people with higher education might be more willing to participate in academic research¹.

To recapitulate, the sample of this survey has slightly more women than men participants, almost half of which are between 20 and 35 years old, and of which, the majority has a high educational background.

5.3 Consumer identities

During the street survey, participants (N=112) were asked (Question 12) to choose amongst 17 descriptions which they felt depicted them best as consumers. The descriptions - presented across an A4 sheet in a random order - included: ethical, political, socially responsible, green, thrifty (bargain hunter), frugal, practical, pragmatic, empowered, self-indulgent, sceptical, well-informed, unpredictable, moral, lazy and excessive². If they wished, participants could choose more than one of these terms and/or provide their own.

The most popular description - by far - amongst participants was that of a practical consumer (56.8%), followed by socially-responsible (33.3%); thrifty (33.3%), traditional (33.3%); lazy (32.4%) and well-informed (31.5%). Ethical and green were chosen by more than a fifth of the sample population (23.4% each), while political was perceived to describe just 9% of the sample - although a considerable amount of participants

¹ Although referring to epidemiological studies, Galea and Tracy (2007) have reported that educated persons are found to be more likely to participate in research regardless of the type of study or the mode of data collection.

² Initially the researcher put together a list of adjectives that could describe a consumer, making sure to include identities which she - inspired by the literature - thought relevant to the topic of the research (such as ethical, green, socially responsible, political, well-informed, empowered etc.); these were discussed with the researcher's supervisors, and a list of 15 adjectives was then produced and used in the pilot survey. A further two adjectives (that of lazy and pragmatic) came up from the pilot survey and were subsequently added to the final questionnaire that was used in the main street survey.

(74.8%) claimed to be at least somewhat interested in politics³. Two of the participants provided additional alternative descriptions (healthy and impulsive). The popularity (in percentages) of each of these consumer descriptions is provided in more detail in Chart 5-1 below:

Chart 5-1

Popularity of consumer identities

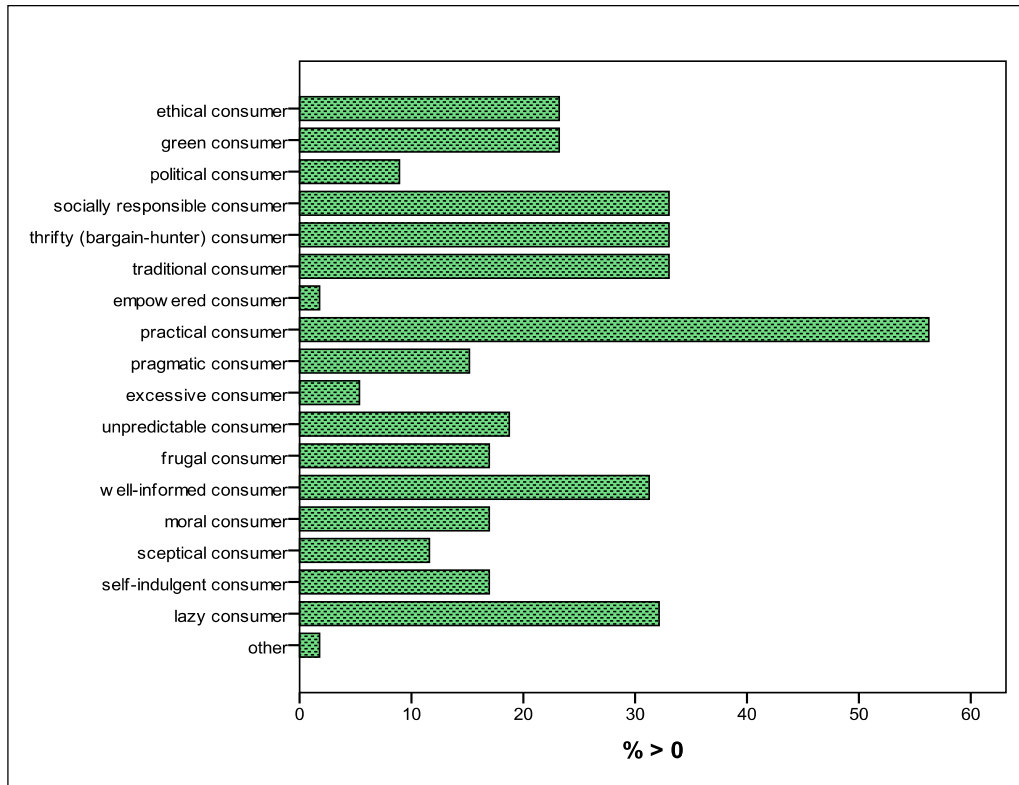


Chart 5-1: Popularity of consumer identities.

To further examine identification with the four consumer identities which are closely related with the ethical consumption discourse (ethical, green, political and socially-responsible), participants were then asked (Question 13) to indicate the extent to which such identities describe them. Available answers included: to great extent; to some extent; to little extent; not at all; don't know; don't know what it means. Table 5-5 illustrates the relevant findings.

³ Interest in politics (N=111): very interested (27.9%); somewhat interested (46.8%); hardly interested (17.1%); not at all interested (8.1%).

<p style="text-align: center;">Table 5-5</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Identification with ethical, green, political and socially-responsible identities</p>												
	ethical consumer			green consumer			political consumer			socially responsible consumer		
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
great extent	4	3.6	3.6	6	5.4	5.4	5	4.5	4.5	11	9.8	9.8
some extent	57	50.9	54.5	55	49.1	54.5	23	20.5	25.0	49	43.8	53.6
little extent	25	22.3	76.8	25	22.3	76.8	24	21.4	46.4	19	17.0	70.5
not at all	4	3.6	80.4	17	15.2	92.0	37	33.0	79.5	9	8.0	78.6
don't know	1	0.9	81.3	4	3.6	95.5	4	3.6	83.0	5	4.5	83.0
not sure what it means	21	18.8	100.0	5	4.5	100.0	19	17.0	100.0	19	17.0	100.0
Total	112	100.0		112	100.0		112	100.0		112	100.0	

Table 5-5: Identification with ethical, green, political and socially-responsible identities.

As can be seen in the Table 5-5, just over half of the survey participants found the ethical, green and socially responsible identities adequate to describe them – at least to some extent, whereas only a quarter (25.0%) of participants perceived political as a consumer identity they could relate to at least to some extent.

Compared with the data presented earlier in Chart 5-1, there is an interesting observation to be made; results from these two questions (Q12 and Q13) highlight the importance of questionnaire design and the need to explain results in a careful manner. When participants were presented with a list of different consumer identities, less than a quarter of them chose the 'ethical consumer' identity as adequate to describe them. Nonetheless, in the next question Q13, the same identity was considered by almost the double amount of participants to apply to them at least to some extent. A similar pattern is also apparent in all other three relevant identities (social responsible, green and political). A large scale study by Cowe and Williams (2000) found that more than one third of consumers in the UK described themselves as 'ethical purchasers'. Given the growing market of ethical products and the growing interest on ethical issues from the part of the consumers in the last ten years, one would expect that a larger proportion of the population would self-identify as an ethical consumer, something that is supported by the findings of the second question, but not the first one. Cowe and Williams (2000) explicitly asked consumers to indicate the extent to which such an identity can describe them – in a similar way that Q13 of this survey did. But when consumers had to choose among different identities (Q12), a much lower amount of participants chose to self-identify as such. This raises doubts on the extent to which researchers in this field are encouraging such an identity to appear more popular among the general public, or even to exist at all.

Another interesting finding illustrated in Table 5-5 above deals with the familiarity with these four identities from the side of participants. In particular, there is a considerable difference between the amount of respondents that admitted not being sure of the meaning of the ethical, political and socially responsible consumer identities (21, 19 and 19 respondents respectively) in comparison with the amount of respondents admitting the same thing for the green consumer identity (only 5 respondents). In other words, there seems to be a stronger confidence amongst participants on what a green consumer

is, even if the perceived meaning varies from individual to individual. This is an important finding for understanding the ethical discourse in consumption, as it suggests that a considerable amount of respondents (18.8%) claimed not to be certain of the meaning of such an identity. One possible way to explain why fewer respondents were unsure of the green consumer identity is by assuming that the 'green' discourse has existed for longer, it is more high profile and has acquired through time a clear-cut focus, namely caring for the natural environment.

Another interesting insight presents itself when examining identification with the political consumer identity. Here, almost a third of the respondents (33%) felt that political consumer is an identity that did not represent them at all; this percentage is considerably greater than the ones found in the other three identities (see Table 5-1). This finding was rather surprising for two reasons. On the one hand, since the term 'political consumer' is used predominately within academia, it was expected that respondents in this survey would be most likely to choose the answers "I don't know", or "I don't know what it means". The insight gained from the twenty in-depth interviews with self-identified consumers contributed to such expectations since the majority of the interviewees claimed unfamiliarity with this term. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, a considerable amount of people in this survey admitted to be interested in politics, while around a third of respondents claimed to have boycotted and buycotted for ethical, political or environmental reasons at least once in the last 12 months (32.4% and 36% respectively). Hence, at the same time there was an expectation that a greater percentage – from what was actually found – of the respondents would identify with the political consumer identity.

There are at least two possible explanations why such a great proportion of respondents in this survey appeared to have strong feelings for not subscribing to a political consumer identity; reluctance to be explicitly associated with politics, and/or a perceived strong disassociation between consumption and politics. The last explanation is further supported by data gathered from the in-depth interviews, where relations between consumption practices and the practicing of politics were not always readily identified in the minds of interviewees. Such explanation raises questions on the extent to which consumption practices reflect (are able to reflect and/or should be considered to reflect)

political participation, as it is often argued in political consumerism literature. In other words, how can we measure political participation through boycotting and buycotting if the relationship between consumption practices and political action is not explicit in an individual's consciousness? And how can we measure such consciousness in quantitative terms?

The findings here match those of Tobiasen (2005), who also through a survey sought to explore the perceptions of political consumers with regard to the extent that they feel certain practices represent political acts. In particular, Tobiasen asked the extent to which people felt that boycotting a firm that exploits child labour and buying organic had something to do with politics. His results were clear: boycotting a firm that exploits children was perceived as a far more political act than boycotting organic. He concluded: *"It is, thus, not straight forward that respondents think of acts as political even if it may be argued from a theoretical point of view. All in all: on the one hand, "objective" measures largely confirm that political consumerism is indeed political. On the other hand, it is more ambiguous when asking people themselves what they think of as political acts – at least it cannot be taken for granted that just because an act may be defined as a political act by scholars, it is also considered to be this by people themselves"* (p. 131). Although such concern was raised almost ten years ago, scholars continue to overlook this, significant, 'detail'.

Moving on, data from the survey revealed positive statistical associations between these four identities – as can be seen in Table 5-6 in the next page. Pearson's correlation coefficient values did not exceed 0.6, but for this study are considered adequate to illustrate a relatively high significant association amongst the respective identities. No claims or predictions of causality can be made; however, it can be argued that a rather linear relationship seems to be present.

Table 5-6
Identity correlations

Extent you consider yourself...		ethical consumer	green consumer	political consumer	socially responsible consumer
ethical consumer	Pearson Correlation	1	.504**	.444**	.556**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	112	112	112	112
green consumer	Pearson Correlation	.504**	1	.449**	.378**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	112	112	112	112
political consumer	Pearson Correlation	.444**	.449**	1	.549**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	112	112	112	112
socially responsible consumer	Pearson Correlation	.556**	.378**	.549**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	112	112	112	112

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5-6: Identity correlations.

A rather contradictory finding was attained when cross-tabulations between the seventeen identities were tested; in particular, concerning the associations between the four main identities examined here, there was no statistically significant association found between the ethical and the socially responsible identities after conducting a Fisher's exact test for the 2x2 table [$p(\delta) > 0.05$]. The test was repeated using data from the question measuring the extent to which someone would consider him/herself an ethical consumer (answers were rearranged so as to represent three categories: to great/some extent; to little extent/not at all, don't know/what it means). The χ square tests - with 0% of the cells expecting count less than 5 - yield value less than 0.01,

indicating a highly statistical association between the extent of considering oneself an ethical consumer and describing oneself as a socially responsible consumer.

To (un)complicate things, tests were then made to examine the association between answers from the two separate questions on ethical consumer identity – again using the three categories mentioned earlier. Pearson's χ square value was less than 0.01 illustrating a high statistically significant correlation in the observed data. The tables from this test are provided next:

Table 5-7
Crosstabulation
(Extent you consider yourself ethical consumer * ethical consumer)

		ethical consumer		Total
		not checked	checked	
extent you consider yourself ethical consumer	great/some extent	37	23	60
	little extent /not at all	27	3	30
	don't know/ not sure what it means	22	0	22
Total		86	26	112

Table 5-7: Crosstabulation (extent you consider yourself ethical consumer and ethical consumer).

Table 5-8
Chi-Square Tests

(Extent you consider yourself ethical consumer and ethical consumer)

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.284 ^a	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	21.989	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	16.174	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	112		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.11.

Table 5-8: Chi-Square Tests, (extent you consider yourself ethical consumer and ethical consumer).

To examine this inconsistency further, correlations amongst the 17 identities were re-examined and a diagram illustrating their association was generated (Diagram 5-1, see next page). This diagram aims to assist by providing a visual representation of the associations between identities and by no means is capable to explain any causality. There are three observations worth mentioning here. First, there are four identities (moral, well-informed, political and unpredictable) which seem to 'connect' the ethical and socially responsible identities. Second, practical – which was the most popular identity amongst respondents with 56.8% – appears to have a strong negative association with socially-responsible and a less intense negative association with frugal. The negative association between practical and socially responsible is also found in the data acquired from interviews with both consumers and retailers; for example one of the ethical consumer interviewees, Lucy, admitted to have to leave earlier from her office in order to be able to shop in grocery shops with fixed opening times so that she can avoid shopping at supermarkets. Third, well-informed is found to relate with socially responsible, political, moral and ethical identities, but not with the green consumer identity.

Diagram 5-1
Consumer identities network

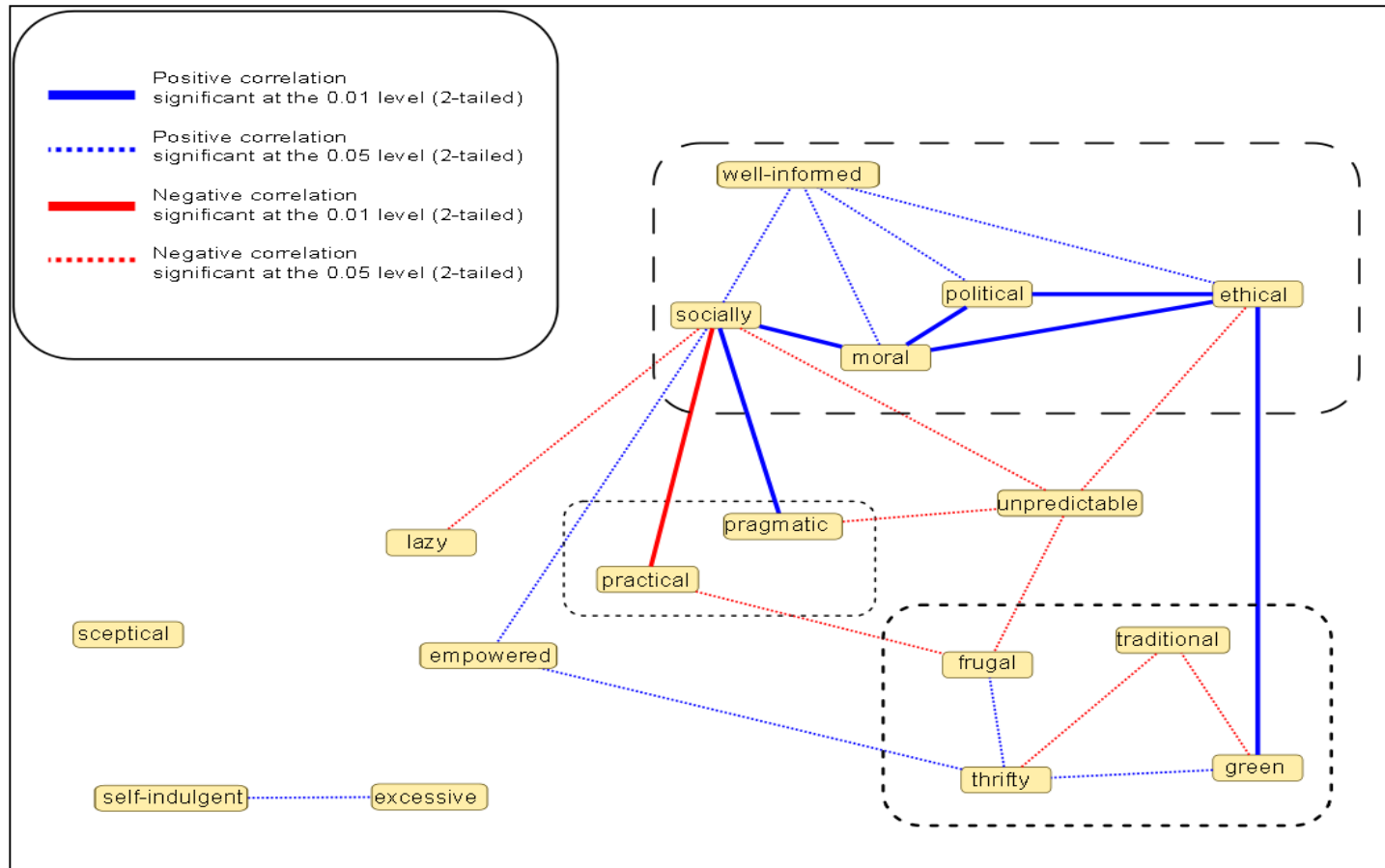


Diagram 5-1: Consumer identities network

What this means is that a considerable amount of respondents describing themselves as ethical, political, moral and/or socially responsible also describe themselves as being well-informed consumers. This finding fits well with theoretical accounts of being an ethical or political consumer where information plays a big role in becoming aware of issues in the first place, as well as in making 'informed' choices within the marketplace (Micheletti, 2003; Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004). It is also consistent with findings from the primary interviews with consumers, where information and awareness emerged as a key theme in those interviews. When tested against the extent to which a respondent considers him/herself to be an ethical consumer, the identity of a well-informed consumer again held a strong association [with a Pearson's χ square value at 0.01]:

Table 5-9

Crosstabulation

(Extent you consider yourself ethical consumer and well-informed consumer)

		well-informed consumer		Total
		not checked	checked	
extent you consider yourself ethical consumer	great/some extent	34	26	60
	little extent /not at all	26	4	30
	don't know/ not sure what it means	17	5	22
Total		77	35	112

Table 5-9: Crosstabulation (extent you consider yourself ethical consumer and well-informed consumer).

Table 5-10**Chi-Square Tests****(Extent you consider yourself ethical consumer and well-informed consumer)**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.304 ^a	2	.010
Likelihood Ratio	9.873	2	.007
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.558	1	.018
N of Valid Cases	112		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.88.

Table 5-10: Chi-Square Tests (extent you consider yourself 'ethical' and 'well-informed' consumer).

The four main identities (ethical, political, green and socially responsible) were tested against demographic data of the participants in this survey (age, gender, nationality, education, and income), but no statistically significant relations were found, except a moderate association between the political consumer identity and gender where more men than women described themselves as being political consumers [Fisher's exact test value < 0.1]. However, due to the very low numbers (10) of respondents choosing such an identity, it would be wise to refrain from making any strong assertions.

Literature often portrays ethical and political consumers as statistically over-represented among women (Stolle et al., 2005; Tobiasen, 2005), highly educated (Strømsnes, 2009; Starr, 2009; Newman and Bartels, 2011; Koos, 2012), well-off (Starr, 2009; Turcotte, 2010; Koos, 2012) politically interested (Tobiasen, 2005; Newman and Bartels, 2011) sometimes leaning towards the leftwing (Tobiasen (2005), mostly belonging to a middle and upper social class (Koos, 2012; Andorfer, 2013). Nonetheless, findings from this survey were unable to catch any of these demographic characteristics of ethical consumers. One explanation is that all the above studies measured the profiles of ethical consumers according to their *practicing* of boycotting and boycotting [and particular mostly engaged with boycotting that boycotting as revealed in Koos's (2012) study], whereas the tests here were based on the *self-identification* of consumers.

With respect to the issue of nationality, which has been introduced in the previous chapter due to the interviews with retailers, no important results came out from this survey. Due to the uneven distribution of the sample, where only three participants in this survey were non EU nationals, any attempt to extract information on this variable is naïve. However, just for the sake of it, tests were carried out to examine any possible associations between nationality and consumer identities, but no statistically significant relations were found. Findings from this survey cannot contribute any insight in this area; future research could actually be designed in such a way so as to test whether nationality does play a role in identification and engagement with ethical consumerism.

5.4 Identity and practices

To explore the criteria upon which individuals base their perceptions of an ethical consumer, respondents were asked to provide (in an open ended question) the reasons they think they are or are not ethical consumers. As is often the case with open ended questions, there were a considerable number of respondents who refrained from answering (27.7%). Of those that answered, 40 respondents put forward reasons related with their consumer practices such as boycotting and buycotting (e.g., “because I buy fair trade”) – here claims dealing with recycling (boycotting plastic bags) or not using a car were included in this category. Another 24 respondents’ mentioned awareness (e.g. “being aware, realise impact and influence”, “selfishness, awareness not all the time”) and 9 respondents based their thoughts on the interest they take in several issues (e.g. “interested in other peoples well being”, “like to know origin of a product”). Responses from a further 8 people fall in the category other since no pattern could be identified (e.g. “as a person I have morals and ethics to live life”, “just the way I have been brought up”). Involvement with an NGO (“I am a member of Amnesty International”) was also mentioned by one participant as the reasoning behind ‘ethical consumer’ identification. Responses were analysed and then divided into five categories: boycotting/buycotting practices, awareness, interest, other and no answer (see chart 5-2 in next page):

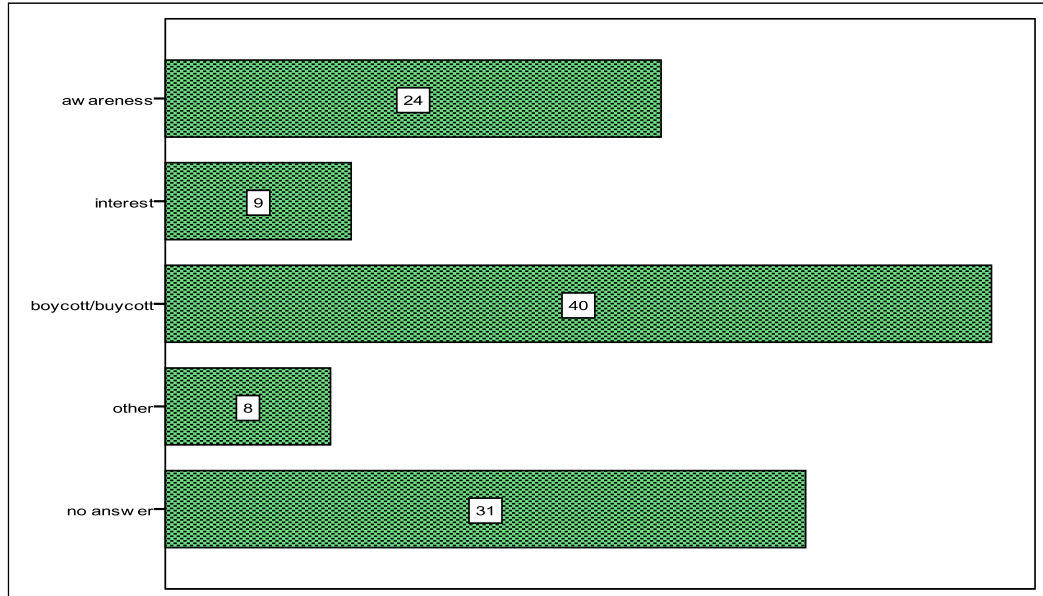


Chart 5-2: Reasoning behind self-identification as an ethical consumer.

What the data above show is that although there is a strong indication that being an ethical consumer is about practices (whether that is boycotting or buycotting), being aware and interested appear to be also relevant. Although from this data it is not feasible to examine the extent to which (and how) awareness or interest translates into consumer practices, it is possible to make suggestions that identification with an ethical consumer identity for individuals does not automatically translate only to performing specific consumer practices. To further explore relationships between the degrees of identification with the four consumer identities and engagement with certain consumer practices, Chi-square tests were then carried out for Questions 8 and Q13.

The following Table 5-11 summarises the findings of these tests by indicating relationships that were found to be statistically significant (i.e. with Pearson's χ^2 values < 0.05). [For more details on these tests consult Appendix 16, p. 340].

Table 5-11
Statistically significant correlations between Degrees of Identification
and
Frequency of consumer practice

Practices (How often do you...?)	Identities			
	Ethical Consumer	Green Consumer	Political Consumer	Socially Responsible Consumer
Buy organic food when available	✓	✓	✓	✓
Buy fair-trade products when available	✓	✓		✓
Buy local produce when available				✓
Recycle paper/glass		✓		
Reuse shopping bags				
Buy in charity shops		✓		
Buy from small independent shops		✓	✓	
Cycle to work				
Avoid flying when need to travel		✓		
Use the car to go shopping				
Avoid wasting food		✓		
Avoid over-packaged goods	✓	✓		✓
Make or mend own cloths		✓		✓
Eat red meat		✓		✓

Table 5-11: Statistically significant correlations between Degrees of Identification and Frequency of consumer practice.

With respect to the ethical consumer identity, as illustrated in the above table, positive statistically significant correlations were found between the degree of self-identification and the following three practices: buying organic produce (Pearson's χ^2 value <0.001), buying fair-trade produce (Pearson's χ^2 value <0.001) and avoiding over-packaged food (Pearson's χ^2 value 0.020). What this finding suggests is that consumers who self-identify more as 'ethical consumers' seem to tend to buy more often organic and fair-trade produce. They also appear to try and avoid over-packaged goods more often.

Equally interesting, however, is the lack of statistically significant correlations with all other eleven practices. Such insight becomes even more intriguing when comparing findings between 'ethical' consumer identification and the 'green' consumer identification. Test results for the 'green consumer' reveals that the closest one feels to a 'green' consumer identity the more frequently he/she declares to engage with certain consumer practices which extend the traditional boycotting pallet of organic and fair-trade purchasing, and include practices such as recycling, buying in charity shops, making/mending own clothes, avoiding wasting food or eating red meat etc. In other words, results show that people who identify as 'ethical' consumers are translating their identity mostly in terms of a consumer behaviour that is focused around choosing organic and fair-trade produce, whereas 'green' consumers engage in a variety of lifestyle practices which go beyond the narrow focus of shopping organic and/or fair-trade.

That said, there is still one thing that should be taken into account when attempting to understand connections between identification and engagement with certain consumer practices. As presented in the earlier paragraphs, data from this survey revealed connections between consumer identities and engagement with certain practices. Nonetheless, these are just tendencies, and thus linear logic in interpreting and assuming should be avoided; for example, a person who self-identifies as an 'ethical' consumer doesn't necessarily buy organic produce, and similarly, a person that buys organic doesn't necessarily identify themselves as being an 'ethical' consumer.

Data from this street survey illustrate this clearly. The next page presents two Bar Charts using data connecting Question 8 with Question 12 (chart 5-3) and Question 8 with Question 13 (chart 5-4) respectively:

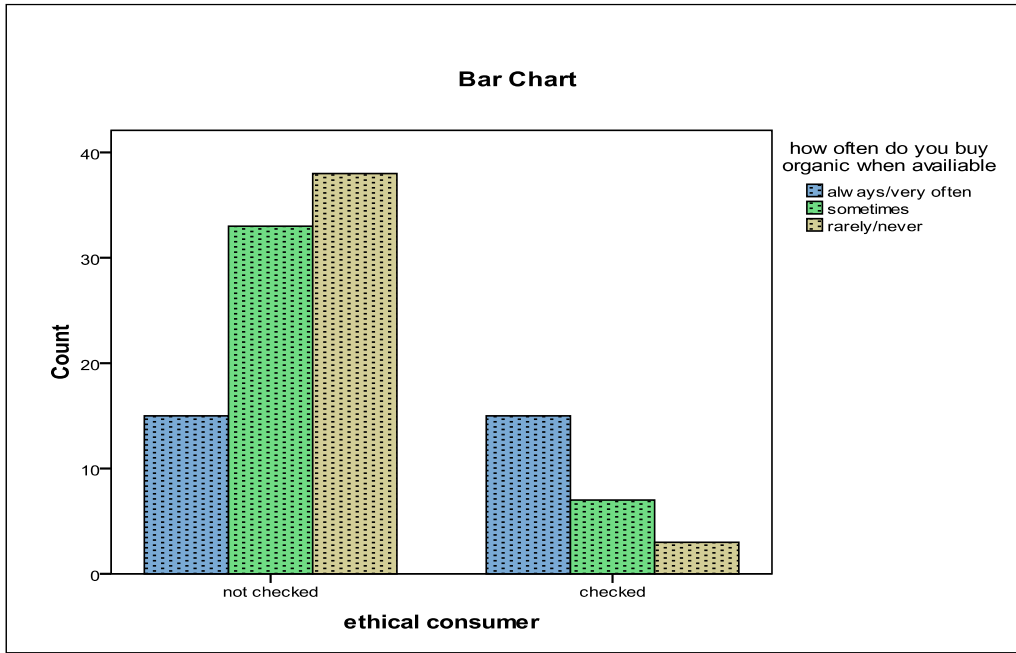


Chart 5-3: Ethical identity and shopping for organic (a).

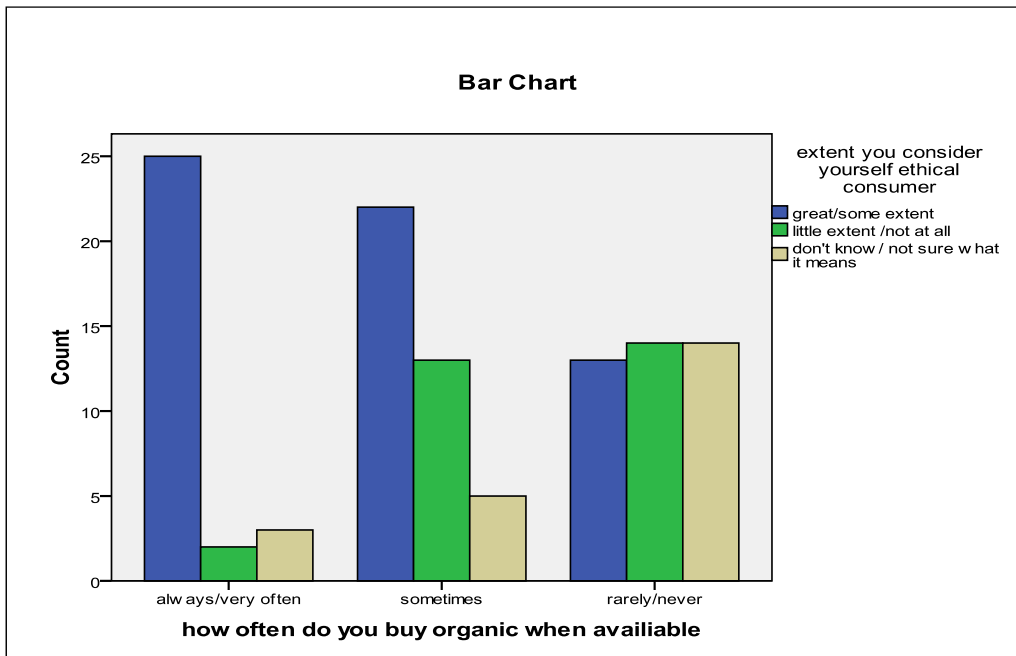


Chart 5-4: Ethical identity and shopping for organic (b).

Both charts suggest that while respondents who identify themselves as 'ethical' consumers tend to claim buying organic produce more frequently, there is still a considerable proportion of consumers who would not identify with this identity but would still argue to frequently buy organic. In the same manner, there are consumers who would rarely or never buy organic produce, but who would nonetheless identify themselves as being ethical. Such findings give evidence that highlight the importance of being careful when making assertions about ethical consumers and their related practices, particularly when making claims based only on sales figures of products.

5.5 Summary and Reflections

This chapter aimed to present the main findings of data collected through the street survey with the hope to get an insight on the perceptions of the general public with regards to the phenomenon of ethical consumption. With respect to Research Objective 1, data from this survey illustrated the relatively low use of the 'ethical consumer' identity to characterise oneself compared to other consumers such as practical, lazy, thrifty, traditional or well-informed. Nonetheless, when asked to comment on identity salience of four given identities (ethical, green, political and socially responsible) more than half of respondents claimed that they would at least to some extent characterise themselves as 'ethical' consumers. This is argued to reflect the sensitive nature of questionnaire development, analysis and interpretation of findings. More than anything else, it also raises doubts on the extent to which researchers are forcing such an identity to appear popular among the general public, or even to exist at all in the first-place.

Data also revealed a statistically significant correlation between these four consumer identities, thus suggesting that people who self-identify as ethical consumers, for example, are more likely to self-identify with a green, political and socially responsible consumer identity than the rest of the population. By using data from Question 12, it was possible to draw a diagram mapping the connections between the 17 different consumer identities and get a closer look on how they are interrelated. One important insight gained through this analysis is the connection that was revealed to exist between the three identities (ethical, political and socially responsible) with that of a 'well-informed' consumer. This finding fits well with existing theory on the role of information within

the fields of ethical and political consumerism, as well as with the data collected in this study through in-depth interviewing.

Information, under the term 'Awareness', was found to be the second most popular reason that participants gave when asked why they think they are/aren't ethical consumers. The most popular one was because they engage in boycotting and/or boycotting (feeding to Research Objective 2) – two practices which have traditionally be connected with the idea of ethical and political consumerism. Consistent with this seem to be also findings from another question (Q8) in the street questionnaire which focuses on fifteen consumer practices. Analysis of these data suggests that shopping for organic and fair-trade are two out of only three practices which were found to be related with an 'ethical' consumer identity (the third being with avoiding over-packaged products (feeding to Research Objective 2). Does that mean that certain practices such as recycling or buying from a charity shop are not 'ethical' enough? Or is there a fixed idea or narrative of what constitutes 'ethical' consumer behaviour and which is reflected in the data gathered for this street survey?

Before attempting to answer this question, it would be fruitful to have a closer look in the data gathered through the in-depth interviews with self-identified 'ethical' consumers. These interviews, which are presented in the next chapter (Chapter 6), offer a more contextualised understanding on both the identity and practices of ethical consumers.

As a last note, it seems appropriate here to remember some of the limitations connected with the findings presented in the current chapter. Social desirability bias is most probably one issue which was expected to interfere with the participants' responses. It is assumed that the answer will not be an easy one when facing the question "To what extent you consider yourself to be an 'ethical' consumer?"; can someone consider themselves to be 'ethical' as a person and still not practice their ethics in their everyday life, and thus, in their role as consumers? The relatively low number of this survey population (N=112) definitely does not allow for making any strong universal suggestions out of these data. This survey itself was designed so as to provide indications, and insights from this survey can only serve as such.

Chapter 6: The 'ethical' consumer: identity and practices in context

The previous chapter made use of the quantitative data collected through the street survey in order to discuss main findings including degrees of identification with certain consumer identities.

This chapter incorporates insights generated through the twenty in-depth interviews with self-identified consumers. In particular, this chapter provides a close up on the aspects of ethical consumption through the presentation of stories and experiences of twenty self-identified 'ethical' consumers. First, the process of identification and the frame of the 'ethical' identity are discussed. Then, the aspect of contributing to 'change' via consumer practices is explored. Towards the end of the chapter, the metaphor of 'voting' to describe ethical consumption is examined and challenged.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter makes use of qualitative primary data obtained through interviews with 'self-identified' ethical consumers in order to elicit information on the framing of ethical consumption (Research Objective 1), and associated practices (Research Objective 2), as well as the perceptions on the effectiveness and potential in achieving change (Research Objective 3).

A detailed account on the designing of this part of the research has already been given in the methodology chapter (section 3.5.3 p. 126). For the purpose of refreshing the reader's memory, a brief description is provided here: twenty in-depth interviews lasting an hour and a half on average were conducted with self-identified ethical consumers in summer 2009. Participants were recruited through posters and flyers explicitly inviting 'ethical consumers' to volunteer for this study. These were placed in various venues (mainly shops and libraries) or handed out by the researcher across Partick. Advertisements inviting participants were also placed in a local newspaper website and in the local Gumtree website. Most interviews were carried out in a booked room at the University of Glasgow. A few interviews were conducted in the interviewees' premises and small local cafés. Interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

Due to the relatively small ($n=20$) number of interviews with ethical consumers, the researcher decided that a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (such as CAT or NVivo) would not provide any further advantages. The initial analysis of the transcripts, therefore, was performed without the use of aiding software, but rather through the traditional way of hard copy transcripts and colourful pens. At a later stage, the open source software Weft QDA was used to assist the analysis and particularly to help with grouping together identified themes. Throughout the process of analysis, the researcher aimed to identify key themes and patterns emerging from the collected data, and which contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of ethical consumption.

Analysis of these interviews provided evidence that – perhaps, not surprisingly - ethical consumption is a complex and multifaceted concept, in the heart of which lies a continuous struggle for the control over both meaning and praxis. The existence of varying – and sometimes, even contradictory - views of consumers over certain matters

(such as the use of and meaning of the term 'ethical consumer') reveals both confusion and heterogeneity in the perceptions and experiences of individuals practising ethical consumption. Such heterogeneity becomes even more interesting if we consider that those who volunteered to take part in these interviews were overwhelmingly from niche fractions (educated/relatively affluent)¹ of the general population, and they all responded to the same call, thus perceiving themselves in one way or another in relation to an 'ethical' consumer frame.

The sections to follow present the major themes that came out from analysing these twenty interviews.

6.2 Developing Consciousness (or How it all started)

Interviews with retailers presented in Chapter 4 indicated that a firmly economic view of ethical consumption translates this phenomenon as mostly about the purchase of ethically framed products and, to some extent avoidance of unethical ones. As suggested from the findings (and corresponding arguments) presented in the previous chapter (Chapter 5), a choice of buying, for example, organic or Fair Trade certified coffee doesn't always imply that a person is viewing themselves as being an 'ethical' consumer, or practising 'ethical' consumption. What seems to make the distinction possible is the *consciousness* behind such choices; a conscious decision to act upon moral sentiments through our wallet.

What is the physis of such consciousness? How does it develop? And, which are its main elements, or – better - its features? These are some of the questions which this section attempts to answer.

¹ I would be inclined to suggest that the specific demographic profile of participants in these interviews provides an indication of 'ethical' consumption as addressing and concerning people of a higher socioeconomic background. Nonetheless, there is also evidence from other research suggesting that we should be very careful when considering demographic variance in response rates. For example, people who are employed and of a high socioeconomic status, although harder to reach due to tight schedules, are nonetheless more likely to participate in academic research, partly because of their greater trust in science (Galea and Tracy, 2007). Also, in his research on anti-Iraq war activists in Glasgow, Rüdig (2010) reports higher response rates (in a mail survey handed out at a demonstration) from activists that were better educated, older, and female.

6.2.1 *Living in a consumerist world*

Throughout the interviews with consumers, it quickly became evident that the use of the term consumer is largely associated with that of being a shopper; an individual who is engaged in a relationship of exchanging money for products and services.

Such a relationship appears to be almost impossible to escape from. Living in a consumerist world is a taken-for-granted aspect that all individuals in – at least, western – contemporary societies characterized by a tendency of population concentration in urban spaces have to deal with:

In past years, the term consumption had to do with home economics. Because in my village, for example, we had our seasonal fruit, we had our animals, milk all year round, cheese...the season people were making it so that they could have cheese all year round. We had our vegetables, beans, all this stuff... there were house economics, so it wasn't possible for someone to sell you products you already had. But he could sell you some other products that you did not have, such as sugar for example. But you couldn't eat a kilo of sugar per day, or two kilos per day...It was a kind of need, so we are in need of consuming. We have to consume, so we are consumers (John)

Along with urbanization, the rampant division of labour, the subsequent alienation from the production process of goods and the parallel creation of new consumer needs (e.g. technological devices) are also some of the driving forces which sustain perceptions and experiences of living in a consumerist world. In chapter 2, the birth and rise of consumer societies, and the associated consumer culture were discussed. Some respondents, such as John above, felt trapped in a system of advanced capitalism that forces them to be consumers and to subsequently face a plethora of choices in their everyday life; choices of what to buy (or not to buy) and the –sometimes surface and sometimes well thought – reasoning behind each decision. But how did morality in the form of 'ethical' consumption come about in a person's shopping decision making process?

6.2.2 *The dynamics of the market structure and belief in agency*

As with any relationship, dynamics of power are also evident within the context of consumption. An individual's awareness of the social context of products and of how the economic system works seem key aspects in engaging with acts of ethical consumerism (Micheletti et al., 2005).

Understandings and – at least a degree of – belief in the relationship between supply and demand, consumption and production, economy and politics, as well as knowledge of the working mechanisms of trade, appear to be important in terms of enabling individuals to recognize and act upon their power as consumers.

if you look at the way that we consume it's all about supply and demand. If we demand more, as in if we demand more fair trade or if we demand more ethical, so things then....The truth is that the suppliers will supply for that. They will create it. So, I think it's just, you know, it's a lack of demanding (Audrey)

The majority of the interviewees held similar views to Audrey's regarding consumer power; consumer demand is what shapes supply. This belief, however, went not without criticism. For example, the sovereign role of marketing (and in general of the businesses) as 'cultural engineers' (Horkheim and Adorno, 1996) creating and/or shaping consumer needs, was also apparent in the discussions with participants. In fact, the idea of ethical consumption as shopping the 'usual' products (i.e. Organic and Fair-Trade certified) were repeatedly scrutinised and condemned by several participants as created by the side of supply. Sometimes such belief was left implied along with some traces of suspicion behind the motives of 'ethical businesses'. Other times it was explicitly articulated – like in the case of Paul who argued that ethical consumption “*it's just another market... [that is] using the logic of capitalism to solve the problems of capitalism*”.

Nevertheless, to a certain extent – and despite its limitations, all participants admitted to have consciously exercised their power in their role as consumers. What stems from this observation is that there appears to be belief about individual agency, although it varies from person to person in both terms of degree and means that is manifested (as it will become apparent later on in this chapter).

6.2.3 Reflexivity and empowerment

As already discussed in the literature review, one major aspect of contemporary societies is the process of reflexivity (Giddens, 1991). In the context of consumption, reflexivity facilitates agency (i.e. autonomy and ability to exercise influence) for the individual, that is often embodied in questioning such as How is this product made and for whom? In whose pockets do the profits from sales end up? Why am I buying this? Do I really need it? What are the alternatives?

A person is not born a consumer aware of the answers to such questions. It is only through time and experience that questioning evolves; ethical consumers need to develop the skills for making informed choices (Micheletti, 2003). Insight from these interviews cannot suggest a particular point in time or a specific situation which triggers this reflexivity in consumers' life. Individuals develop their empowerment as consumers according to their own experiences. Being reflexive is not static but rather dynamic in nature. Engaging in practices of boycotting and buycotting involves changes in previous consumer practices and habits. Change is a process; and changing their practices entails for consumers a slow and continuous process where they are encouraged to constantly work and re-work ideas, understandings, and behaviour.

you make small incremental changes...you don't, I don't think I have rapidly changed overnight, I didn't go to one way of being kinda not caring, being selfish, just picking what's cheap and what you like, I mean I didn't go suddenly from one thing to another, you just get slowly aware of these things. So, I think slowly and imperceptibly maybe change your habits and buy these kinds of products (Neil)

Interviewees, however, were able to pinpoint factors contributing to the development of this reflexivity and questioning. For example, reflexivity sometimes went hand in hand with leaving the parental house - where shopping and cooking was to a great extent something that mothers would be responsible for. Becoming more responsible for what they consume and how, seems to have brought individuals closer to thinking reflexively about consumption. Newspaper articles and documentaries uncovering 'bad' practices of certain corporations were also cited as triggering awareness and inviting reflexivity. By being exposed to information for example, on irresponsible corporate policies, individuals were prompt to re-evaluate their choices in the market place (Micheletti,

2003; Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004). Other experiences contributing to this process varied from travelling (as in the case of Audrey) and values gained from family during up-bringing (as in the case of Ronald and Stefanie) to involvement with pressure groups or other interest groups (as in the case of Hannah and Thomas). The story of Hannah below illustrates an example of the process of becoming both reflexive and empowered as a consumer:

when I was in first year in college in 2000 [...] and I joined the ecology society [...] the very first meeting I went to there was a girl there, an exchange student from America, who told us a story about all the trouble that she went to get cloth bags sponsored so they could be produced and given out to students instead of plastic bags. And she told us about how she had tried to get sponsorship from a few places and they said no, they were not interested and she spoke to a man in the college he gave um... a lot of advises and he said, right this is what you will do: "You, um, go to one bank and ask if they sponsor you, and if they don't then you will say you will go to the other bank and you will put the word in the newspaper that they won't sponsor you, the other bank will and they will be considered to be mean to students and students will take their accounts out and they will go into the other bank". So, that bank sponsored her and she went to the other bank and said the same thing to them so they sponsored here as well so it was playing different companies against each other. [...] Em, and that was the very first meeting which was really exciting about getting what you wanted and getting large companies to go along with it even if they disagree, when it's difficult. And using your strengths and perhaps finding ways to use ...to ...maybe mild manipulation, not anything too strong but just, you know, trying to talk sense to them, in a way where you are strong and you have a position of power to say this is going to be good for you because if you don't do it, it will be bad for you. And I thought that was really empowering....Empowering was the word I was thinking of. That was a very first time I thought about how to...how we ...how things are made, why cloth bags instead of plastic bags, and how people do things (Hannah)

In this sense, findings from these interviews seem to support Hjelmars's (2011) assertion that reflexive shopping practices can be sparked by life events, shocking news about conventional food products and similar events, and news capable of creating a 'cognitive dissonance' among consumers.

Feelings of empowerment associated with ethical consumption (Shaw et al., 2006) can then prompt individuals to search and fight new battles. For example, once someone engages with practices of boycotting and buycotting for a specific reason, or to achieve a specific goal, it becomes likely that s/he will recognize and use consumption as a tool to communicate grievances for other issues as well.

The first step was becoming a vegan I would say. Then after that, you know, obviously, then you want to be involved with any sort of thing and you feel...I felt that, you know, you could like use your consumption. Like, you could use your purchasing power to sort of influence things in other areas like for example, at the time the big thing [...] was boycott Pepsi. And the reason for that was that they apparently put money into the Burma sort of military junta. So, I boycotted them (Paul)

Whilst feelings of empowerment may encourage individuals to act upon grievances through their consumption decisions and patterns, the opposite may also be true when feelings of disempowerment come into place. The continuous effort put into engaging with 'ethical consumerism', coupled with the difficulties to recognize any change achieved (perhaps due to the slow pace of change and the narrow perspective of the battles to be fought), can be quite disheartening sometimes.

you know, you've got to be in there for the long haul and I sort of I guess, burnt out, a fair while ago and didn't have anything to do with it all for a while because I just couldn't see any change, I couldn't see and it's just depressing when you feel strong about that sort of stuff, not to see any progress and you just sort of get depressed I suppose. Umm...but uh, yea so it's good, so it's good that you just, you just keep on going umm and know that over the long term things do eventually change and get better so, yea.

I: So did you actually see any change in your consumption patterns, when you stopped for wee bit when you were not very optimistic about that and then you restart or...

Well, yea, umm...probably with soft drinks. Well I didn't know about coca-cola back then, that's more recent umm, but certainly some of umm, the chicken thing never, I still never went to KFC...so...so that was maintained umm...but...generally there is still some sort of like very basic issues that you still can be vocal about even though you know, you're a bit umm downhearted about it all. Umm...things to do with animals will always get my attention and I'll always have something to say about that so, yea, but umm...I know, I certainly don't go out and hand out leaflets in the street and stuff and go to rallies and things so much anymore. (Thomas)

This may lead individuals to disengage from some (as in the case of Thomas above) or all (see Paul's case in the next section) of the practices of ethical consumption. What this may suggest is that being an 'ethical' consumer is experienced as a work in progress; once developed it can evolve, it can fluctuate in terms of engagement (as when the individual gets involved in groups that reinforce such practices), it also never escapes the possibility of ceasing.

6.3 “Who is an ethical consumer?” Understanding the ‘ethical’ consumer identity: eight stories

After having presented the wider context within which individuals consciously decide to use their power as consumers, it is now time to narrow down the discussion and focus on one of the main research inquiries of this project: the ‘ethical’ consumer identity.

Despite the fact that all interviewees were recruited via posters and flyers explicitly inviting ‘ethical consumers’ to participate in the study, their perceptions on the meaning and the extent to which they feel that such an identity can describe them varied. Eight different stories (cases) were selected as most adequate to illustrate this diversity, and are presented next.

6.3.1 John – I am an ethical consumer

For John, a clergyman in his early fifties, ethics is interconnected with a lifestyle that respects the codes of ethics set by his religion.

ethics is one thing....and one way of life. Someone might talk about morality but be very close to immorality. [...] The church is very clear on morality. Ethics doesn't only deal with the personal life of an individual, of course this is important, it has a forcible meaning. Morality is the basis of the life within church. The gospel has been written and based on moral codes. And no one can deviate from those codes. Of course, afterwards comes the law and what is generally accepted within our society and outwits morality. ... so that we end up recognising something that is immoral as ethical... and distort their meanings...and end up not knowing the difference.

John is not very familiar with the term ethical consumption; however he appears to have a clear perspective on the meaning of being ethical as a consumer

For me, it [ethical consumption] has to do with what you can buy and from those that you can buy, which of the products are necessary, and what you can actually use. For example, are you going to throw away food products? Are they going to stay in your fridge and get rotten, and then end up in a landfill? Will you offer part of your shopping to someone in need? [...] But charity has nowadays become two-faced. So, giving someone from your plate instead of throwing

it away is in the moral side of consumption. But if someone wants to talk about ethics in consumerism, we need to think of many issues... like, umm...for example, who is responsible of defining 'ethical consumption'... we, the receivers, in what terms do we accept this... how do we receive this way of consuming, of ethical consuming, and thus become ethical, accepting ethical consumption. Do we become immoral by accepting such a stimulus of consuming?

Much like what happens in the field of law, John is aware and sceptical of forces in the market which attempt to define what should be considered as moral and immoral in consumption. Such forces, he reckons, are capable of distorting the meaning of morality, and in particularly the way that morality is applied in consumption. Being a parent, he has experienced in the past how, for example, peer pressure has created a few troubles with his daughters when they requested to buy products which he felt were not necessary, thus not an ethical way of organising their shopping.

John considers himself a person that is trying to be ethical not only in his role as a consumer but an individual in all aspects of his life. His ethics are based on the moral codes set up by his religion, and it's his task to find the proper ways to apply such codes in all contexts, including consumption. The way John practices his ethics in consumption is for example, by being careful of over-consuming, and in this respect being sceptical about any codes of ethics imposed by the market alone. Being ethical as a consumer is being ethical as a person in general; as a family member and as a father figure to make sure there are no distinctions made between his three daughters in terms of what material goods he will provide to them; to make sure that all the family will sit around the same table and share the same food.

6.3.2 Thomas – I am an ethical consumer, and probably have always been

In a similar manner, Thomas – a photographer in his late forties – seems to be quite firm in his opinion on ethics and consumption. As an activist for many years in the animal liberation movement, he explains that the concept of the ethical consumer existed for many years within the animal liberation literature and has only been picked up by the media in the last five to ten years.

I: Could you remember maybe the first time you ever heard the term 'ethical consumer' being used?

Uh, I think it might be in the nineties or something, umm, I think there is probably some literature in connection with animal liberation in Australia talking about, you know, products that were not tested on animals, talking about ethical consumption...but it's the mass media that's picked it up in the last ten years, maybe in the last...five years even, yea. [...]

What is interesting here is that Thomas claims about the use of the term during the 90's in the animal liberation's literature do not really match Shaw and Clarke's (1999) suggestions that the term was created in 1997 by marketing. Certainly the idea behind 'ethical consumption' has existed before 1997, so one possible explanation could be that Thomas actually remembers the idea and not the use of the specific term back in the 90's literature. One other possible explanation could be that Thomas remembers correctly that ethical consumption was used as a term in the Australian animal liberation movement literature in the 90's. If this is the case, then it actually means that marketing picked up on that, rather than created it. Of course however the struggle for control over the meaning of the term is continuous. Speaking of which, Thomas has a clear idea of:

I: And what do you think it means?

S: It means being thoughtful about...how you spend your money and the choices you make umm...in terms of your ethics...umm...yea and how you spend, how spending your money umm affects those issues umm, yea either in favour of, in favour of or away from certain companies because they do the right thing or the wrong thing.

Thomas is not only aware that he lives in a capitalist society; he actually strives to inform himself so as to sort of take advantage of the consumer choice that he is given by the capitalist system.

...capitalism is supposed to be all about giving consumers choice and stuff like that. Well, we want a choice, we want the choice to umm, choose umm...products and things that don't harm the earth, animals, third world countries stuff like that.

With regards to the ethical consumer identity, Thomas affirms it is certainly something he can relate to and which differentiates him from the rest of consumers;

I: ...would you use this term [ethical consumer] to describe yourself or other people?

Yea, I'd say that I was an ethical consumer.

I: You are or you were?

I am, yea and probably have always been yea.

I: What makes you different from another consumer that you wouldn't say is an ethical consumer?

Oh, well just...I...strive to inform myself about umm...what I buy, the choices I make and umm...try to keep that in mind when I buy things or...

I: Do you have any people around you that are not ethical consumers?

Ah, well...yea most of them probably, most of the people around me, uh...umm, I mean my work mates here uh, uh...I guess half of them would be ethical consumers on some level or another, there's all different sorts of levels of ethical consumerism too, it depends what issues you're aware of, or make yourself aware of, and the people here are fairly attuned to injustices and care about things, care about people so they'll be aware of, like, third world issues to do with clothing and stuff like that, umm...umm...yea so, so I guess half the people around me would also be aware of issues and use that in their choices.

What makes Thomas feel different from the rest of consumers – in his view – is: firstly, his interest and sensitivity in certain social issues (e.g. animal welfare); secondly, his willingness to find related information that will help him shape his consumer choice. As seen clearly in the quote above, Thomas recognises the existence of *levels* of ethical consumption, as he puts it. He explains that people are attuned in different issues of injustice, so different people will get informed about different issues that concern them, and will strive to make informed choices in the marketplace. It is these consumers who, irrespectively of the topic of their interest, are – like Thomas, ethical consumers.

6.3.3 Mairy – Am I an ethical consumer?

The case appears to be different however, with Mairy – a support worker in her early fifties – who admitted volunteering to participate in the study because she is rather confused on what and who is indeed an ethical consumer:

I: Umm, moving on, I'm wondering if you have heard the term 'ethical consumer' before?

Uh-huh, yea, but I'm interested in what is an ethical consumer?...you, you see the Co-op advertising as being ethically correct and also their financial services as being ethically correct as well and I wonder how true that is, is it worth, could I afford to change my mortgage to the Co-op, could I afford to change my insurances to the Co-op where it's maybe been non-exploitative and my husband will say, 'oh for God's sake Mairy, get a life'. But to me it's important, you know? It is important because it's somebody else's child or it's somebody else's life that's being taken advantage of.

I: Yea, who do you think is an ethical consumer?

I don't know anyone who is an ethical consumer, how do you know, how do you know you are an ethical consumer?

I: You said to me that you have heard before the term ethical consumer or ethical consumption?

(interrupting) Uh-huh, because it's advertised on the television that you can be an ethical consumer if you buy, from the co-operative, if you buy Fair Trade for example, Sainsbury's go very much... for example, well, they're one of the first super-you know, took in Fair Trade products but...maybe I'm a bit cynical but I'm looking at that and I'm thinking maybe they are jumping on band wagons and I am thinking maybe it's not just for to be ethical, that it's to actually sell more products, because people, it's in people going well, 'oh, that's ethical so therefore I'll buy it', do you understand? Do you know where I'm coming from? Do you know, they are being more ethical because it'll make them more money so... So what is... who's ethical? Is anybody ethical? Probably not.

Mairy realises the wider impact of her consumption (upon other people and the natural environment) and really wants to do something about it. Being ethical as a consumer is for her closely connected with the different options that the market structure provides in order to act upon her grievances, such as buying fair-trade. She is aware of these options but at the same time sceptical of them; they are options developed by companies whose ultimate aim is profit. Money is a big issue for Mairy, not as much because of her income but because of her occupation; she has to help people on social benefits. She cannot see how her clients can 'afford' being ethical consumers (in the respect of being able to afford premium prices often met in fair trade products etc.), something that reinforces her criticism of the intentions of business to promote ethics in the marketplace.

There seem to be two different 'ethical' consumers for Mairy; first there is the 'ethical' consumer who follows closely the trends that the market (predominantly) dictates:

They may regard themselves as more ethical consumers if they buy Fair Trade products or...or, or that sort of thing or, sort of Fair Trade cotton to keep their things in little cotton bags and all this sort of stuff. But what sort of car do they drive? Is that ethical? What sort of shops do they shop in? Do they support small shops? Do they still go to Tesco's? You know.

I: So like, if you were to describe an ethical consumer in this sense...

(interrupting) Well they would walk everywhere or go on their bikes, they would shop in small shops using the cotton bag and they wear non-leather shoes and umm...I don't know, would they be boring? [laughing] I don't know. You get this horrible idea that they would be, wouldn't ya? ...

And then there is the 'ethical' consumer named Mairy:

...on what is ethical, so...I couldn't identify myself in that way, only by saying 'well, I do what I believe is right by consuming less and disposing less'... in my way that's my form of being ethical, is to consume less. And I've started growing my own vegetables in my wee garden...

Disengaging to a certain degree from (what has been described earlier as) a consumerist world, by shopping, consuming and disposing less, is for Mairy the epitome of her ethical consumption. Ethical marketed products become for Mairy another "Siren" calling her and other consumers to shop, and this is something which doesn't fit to Mairy's understanding of morality in consumption. "They are ethical, because they want to make more money", she highlights. So, she prefers to disembark on her own, and create her own codes of ethics. In this way (and similar to John that was discussed earlier, but also to other participants who's stories are presented next) she is choosing to develop her own interpretation of what ethics mean and how they are practiced in the context of consumption.

6.3.4 Ronald – I am ethical, but I am not an 'ethical consumer'

For Ronald, a 21 year old luthier (i.e. a lute and other string instrument maker), the 'ethical consumer' is a term out of a magazine article. He hasn't really heard this term being used in his everyday life, but he does consider himself to be one because he thinks a lot about what he consumes. Much like Mairy above, Ronald has developed his own understanding of what is ethical consumption and his own code of practices to achieve this; he has re-arranged his consumer behaviour based on what he feels is actually needed for his survival. So for example in the last few years he has stopped buying clothes or - what he views as - meaningless gifts for birthdays and Christmas. Following these set principles allows him to live on a limited student income and at the same time being able to afford some premium prices on food products (which is by far where he spends most of his available income) such as locally sourced organic vegetables and meat from the local butcher.

Some 'ethical' marketed products do exist in Ronald's consumer basket. Others don't as he is not convinced that all 'ethical' products can provide a sustainable solution to the problems they claim to tackle:

I know a lot of people will maybe just buy certain products because they like the idea of doing good. Maybe they are naïve, not in a bad way. They just haven't thought it fully through but they like the idea of buying fair trade and honestly they want something to be equal but in a way I don't really...I don't think it's better than normal stuff.

For instance if you buy some Cadburys chocolate or some fair trade chocolate I don't really think the difference is that great because even though those people are getting a better wage, still all their life is growing cocoa for you, you know? Umm, and I don't really believe that's fair. And there is a lot of other major things. A similar thing, charities for instance, like Red Nose Day and stuff, you know? It's like for one day a year everyone puts money in, to raise money for charity for the children in Africa and it's like for one day you know? And the rest of the year it's forgotten about... you're forgetting that they're getting money umm...but still all they're doing is slaving for you, they don't have the same quality of life as you and I think there is lots of similar things along those lines.

Following the principle of limiting his shopping only to the products that he considers as basic, has in a way prevented him from falling into marketing 'traps' that other ethical consumers do not easily avoid:

I: Do you see any differences with these [ethical] consumers?

(interruption) Yea, it's like I was saying before, they will link onto a lot of umm...marketing maybe is in a way, I don't know, umm, but whereas if I didn't like something, I'd opt just to ignore it and leave it alone. [For] example, going back to chocolate again. I'd be like 'ah, well it doesn't bother me, I don't need it', whereas they would get on and just have things they would normally have in their life but try and find a better version of it, you see what I mean? So, whereas I would choose to shun things and just forget about them, they would choose to try and find a nicer option if that makes sense.

6.3.5 David – I am the educated, middle-class, Guardian reading, left leaning, ethical consumer

Distrust with certain labelling schemes has often been mentioned in the interviews, as with David - a university lecturer in his late thirties – who is very sceptical with Soil Association's organic standards. The ethical consumer is a term that he aspires to but he would rather leave it for others to judge the extent to which it applies to him. He rather prefers to describe himself as a '*sort of self-deprecating, horrendously middle class, nonsense hippy, helplessly hypocritical*' consumer.

I think there is a certain tendency amongst-uh, there is a certain stereotype which I see as applying to myself and to other people which is kind of the educated middle class Guardian reading, left leaning, umm, you know. I think I kind of fit that stereotype.

David explains what makes him, and others who fit into that stereotype different consumers:

.....I guess it's a question of the issues that are important to consumers and often for quite sensible reasons. Price is important sometimes for some people, maximum quality or exclusiveness is important, but things like the environmental impact of purchases, working conditions involved in production...making purchasing decisions on that sort of basis is a luxury of wealth. But I guess I would label other people ethical if they made purchasing decisions based on those factors. And I would apologise but perhaps be quite pleased if people would label me ethical on that basis, as I wouldn't apply that label myself. I am sure there is plenty of hypocrisy if you look not very hard.

I: Ok, so tell me about the hypocrisy then?

Yea, so straight forwardly. Things like clothing from Lord knows where Marks & Spencer, or who knows under what conditions they, these sort of clothes that I wear are made, you see the label made in China anything made by... and how much did these people get paid, umm, you know, umm...uh, I...you see umm, uh, bottles of lager made to German purity standards in Namibia and that costs 50p a bottle and you think, well I think, fantastic! And I also think it's coming from Namibia and it costs 50p a bottle, how much are these people getting paid? Umm, and how much carbon was burnt for this?

In the quote above, David reflects on the principle of 'ethical' consumption as he understands it (i.e. making purchase decisions based on criteria other than price and quality) and compares it with his actual behaviour (through his description of the products surrounding him during the interview which was carried out in his living room). The end result is an observed inconsistency between theory and practice - the hypocrisy, as he puts it. For David, being an ethical consumer is a luxury, a class-based phenomenon, a lifestyle issue of trying not to make things worse by lifestyle choice, although he is not convinced he is *actually* making any difference through this.

6.3.6 Lucy – I don't want to label myself an ethical consumer

A different take on the stereotype of an ethical consumer is Lucy - a 36 year old academic researcher who tries to support small independent shops and environmental friendly products. Lucy is suspicious that her little everyday choices in the marketplace act as a form of illusion for her in order to make her feel better: *it's a comfortable little stroking of your conscience saying, 'oh, you're not so bad'*. Lucy feels the 'ethical consumer' is a marketed label that she does not wish to associate herself with; she believes everyone has their own ethics and thus such distinctions are fruitless:

...everyone has an ethics of consumption and that's different. That's not being an 'ethical' [consumer], you can't just be an 'ethical consumer', like you just sort of embody it... Everybody has an ethics of consumption and it gets affected and thrown off kilter by all kinds of things and it gets distorted...

Nonetheless, Lucy believes there does exist an 'ethical' consumer; a consumer that is a victim of the 'ethical' brand. In that sense, she views no difference with other brand-loyal consumers:

I remember buying a t-shirt once in uh-there is a little shop called 'Bolshe' and they had sort of quite a nice t-shirt that I wanted to buy but it had a little fair trade label on the outside and I took it to the counter and asked 'have you got a pair of scissors? I just want to snip this off' and she said 'most people want to keep the label on' and I said 'yes, but I don't want it' and it's kind of, it's-uh, it's insane. Why would you, you know? it's exactly the same as wandering around with Prada emblazoned on your chest or something and it's, oh God, it's the smug eco version of that, I just hate it (laughing), sorry....you know, why would you put your fair trade label on the outside?

Moreover, Lucy points out that often products carrying the 'ethical' brand cater for certain aesthetics which do not match her taste. The end result is that she will refrain from buying such products although she might completely agree with the principles of the 'ethical' label in the first place:

a lot of the sort of ethical choices in terms of clothing scream a particular kind of position in terms of their aesthetic and for me that's very much the same sort of issue as not wanting to label myself an ethical consumer. I don't want to wear anything that screams I think I'm an ethical consumer. And when they start to make products that have more ethical choices clothing-wise that don't scream those things... that just look like regular clothes, then I'll buy them...

Hence, it is not only the distinction the 'ethical' branding imposes on people which alienates Lucy; the typical 'ethical' consumer is also required to embrace certain aesthetics in order to be able to practice this way his/her ethics in the marketplace. While for Lucy this seems to be restricting her ability to buy certain products, for another consumer – Hannah – this is rather liberating.

6.3.7 Hannah – I am more ethical than the 'ethical consumer'

Hannah, a 27 year old, works part time at a Health food – Herb shop as a sales assistant. She first became aware of her power as a consumer when she joined an environmental

society while doing her undergraduate degree. Having to move into the halls of residence and reduce her *'entire life down to a backpack and a suitcase'*, Hannah was amazed to discover she could actually stop caring that much about what she looked like and what other people thought about her appearance. Moving on to do her Masters in Human Ecology, Hannah was glad to meet more similar-minded people who would fit in her idea of aesthetics. She is a passionate fan of charity shopping and she would only dress up on occasions (e.g. weddings or events where people 'expect you to shave your arms') to please others.

Hannah feels she is more ethical than the 'ethical' consumer. She does recognise that in comparison to other consumers, her consumption practices are ethical in terms of what she buys or doesn't buy and why. Nonetheless, she feels that 'ethical consumption' as a concept imposes barriers to the potentiality of achieving any change through our consumption. Hannah reckons she has transcended such barriers, by reflecting on the whole idea of consumerism:

the word ethical consumer for me is in my mind somewhere in the middle, between someone who is a non-ethical consumer and someone who does not consume. Or maybe makes their own things, grows their own things, trades with people...

The entire corporate, global capitalism is about consumption. And when you use the word ethical consumer it locks into that idea of consumption being who you are. So, in some ways it's the term that I find is stuck in a paradigm that needs to change. And it's a good way of describing people who are ethical. It is a good term to use, but I guess I could say that I think I would like to go beyond it. I think I am starting to go beyond it. Em, and become more than what today's term ethical consumer means. And I think I am being more ethical than an ethical consumer might be in my understanding of the word. I think I fit [in] it but I think I go beyond it, and I think some other people do this as well.

6.3.8 Paul – I used to be an ethical consumer, I am not gonna bother with this ethical shit anymore

From a different point of view, Paul – a community worker in his thirties – made a step back and not onwards like Hannah with regard to his 'ethical' consumption. Paul would

describe himself as a passionate 'ethical' consumer (to the extent that he has had arguments with his partner for owning a mobile phone) up-until his daughter was born and he was unemployed. Being on a low income and receiving social benefits was for Paul an eye-opener; he realised he was not able to afford to sustain an 'ethical' alternative in his shopping basket. So he gave up this idea of trying to change the world through his wallet, as his wallet was now empty.

Paul volunteered to take part in the series of interviews because he felt he had to say his story and his view on 'ethical consumption' and 'ethical' consumers:

The only thing that my daughter ate at that time was yogurt and you are like, so if she couldn't have the vegan yogurt then we have thought sort of "fuck it! We'll get the normal yogurt from Asda". And actually I realised you know I think there is a huge class dimension. We can't afford to sustain this thing, this lifestyle. So, that's when I realised you know that this is like... In order for people to stay in the West End where there is probably a lot of ethical consumption going on. In order for that to happen, they have to be doing better than the class system with other people which allows the exploitation of the lower classes. So in order for them to have the sort of so called ethical lifestyle it has to rely on them you know, exploiting the people below them with the class system. So...

I: With other ways..?

Yea, yea, just by simply, by the fact, at capitalism people at different levels of the class ladder get better slices of the cake so to speak. So, in order for that to happen it has to build on the backs of the people at the bottom end of the things. So, because of that, in order for them to sustain that lifestyle where they can buy fair trade coffee or whatever, they have to be doing quite well on the class system. So, that relies on exploitation. So it's just a substitute, one [form?] of exploitation for another. So when I realised that it was all a lot of crap I thought well that is that. I am not gonnie bother with this ethical shit anymore [laughs].

Paul firmly believes there is no ethical consumer. His argument illustrated above incorporates a class-based analysis, probably stemming from his left political background. To be able to afford to be an ethical consumer for Paul means to be exploitative in the first place. The 'ethical consumer' is for Paul nothing more than another way to keep the capitalist system working; both by exploiting lives on the one side and feelings of guilt on the other.

He sees the term as serving just the marketing system. He is still on a very low income and thus, there is no moral dilemma involved in his consumption choices. Paul has focused his efforts for improving the world we live in through his work in the community which he feels is the only way a real change can be achieved.

6.4 “Mix ‘n’ Match” battles: Emotions, Constraints and Trade-offs in consumer choice

Through the presentation of the selected eight cases above, we were able to examine in some depth the diverse takes on 'ethical' discourses that individual develop with regards to their consumption. It is now time to take a step back, again, and explore further the practising of ethical consumption by presenting some of the major themes that came up in the interviews. Here, aspects of emotions, constraints and trade-offs are discussed.

With regards to emotions, earlier in section 6.2 – where the development of consciousness was analysed – the discussion touched upon the aspect of feelings an individual experiences throughout the process of *becoming* an 'ethical' consumer; both feelings of empowerment and disempowerment due to, for example, difficulties in evaluating change that may dishearten people along the process (such as in the case of Thomas) became apparent. The next section elaborates further into the emotions that individuals experience while practising ethical consumption.

6.4.1 Emotions and Social pressure

A consumerist society, as identified by many participants in this study, requires individuals to be surrounded by more and more products; to consume (as in both shop and use) more products. Needs are multiplying, and the individual is asked to live up to the expectations of a contemporary materialistic lifestyle. For some, this may be 'liberating' in the sense that technological advance, for example, has provided them with a lap-top that facilitates an 'easier' way of life. For others, however, as in the case of our

participant Ronald, this social pressure may lead to feelings of being overwhelmed and tiresome:

although I try and get away from lot of technology and things, I mean I have a laptop, I have a phone that is ringing (phone ringing).

I: You can answer if you want.

No, it's ok.

I: It does work, well done!

Umm...yeah. I don't like the idea of having a laptop; just because of how it's made and sourced and made in a factory and so on. But it's true that I have one, but I'd like to get away from all that and just have a really simple life. (Ronald)

The phone ringing when Ronald was explaining his reasoning for attempting to get away a materialistic lifestyle and envision a simpler life is an ironic coincidence which, nevertheless, illustrates the situation quite clear. Moreover, if we read between the lines, the quote above captures another facet of the contemporary consumerist society which is very relevant to the discourses of ethical consumerism; Ronald's awareness of the 'ethical' issues around producing and owning a laptop, adds to his feeling of tiresomeness and results in him seeking a more simplistic lifestyle. This raises important questions on the extent to which 'ethical' information and discourses *add* to the complexity that 'ordinary' consumption already entails.

And speaking of 'ordinary' consumption, the quotes below illustrate another major theme relevant to the emotions of practising ethical consumption:

people think I am crazy and I am not what I would consider to be the extreme as an ethical consumer. [...] You know, a lot of people say to me: "oh, you're just getting ripped off, you are paying more...it's never gonna change ...it's never gonna work (Audrey)

I am not like the average people, buying organic is not the average. The average is ready made meals and fish and chips. Some people would consider me a "kookie", and I would consider the a "kookie"... Those that are out in the streets drinking beer every evening... (Rebecca)

What the above suggest is that the practising of 'ethics', through for example shopping 'ethically' marketed products, can be perceived by other 'ordinary' consumers as something odd; it may even be criticised as something 'crazy', 'naïve' or 'kookie'. This is

an interesting take on the assumption that being portrayed as an ethical consumer is socially desirable. What we see here is a dynamic interplay between being the 'odd' one and pursuing an 'ethical' take on consumption. Participants in the interviews disclosed this emotion of being subject to certain social criticism from their surroundings. Earlier in this chapter, the framing of an 'ethical' consumer' was criticised by participants themselves. Here, through the participants' experiences and emotions, we also see how 'ordinary' consumers can also be critical of such framing. [The issue is further explored in chapter 7 (section 7.2, p. 245), where the analytical distinction between an 'ethical Shopper' and an 'ethical Consumer' is proposed].

Criticism and misunderstanding is not only experienced from distant others, but also from the immediate surroundings of an ethical consumer. Having to live with a partner who is non-vegetarian for example, who doesn't understand why 'ethical' issues should be reflected in consumption practices, can be tricky. As social animals, people are experiencing their lives through social relations. The emotions of having to make sacrifices and compromises in the practising of ethical consumption in order to facilitate relationships with non-ethical consumers, was experienced as restrictive.

I will not shop at Tesco's. I really prefer not to buy any of their products, but sometimes I do. . ummm...and Coca-cola. I buy Barr cola instead. Umm...things like that he might not think of doing... He might think of me and buy the Barr cola for me, but...So I think I have influenced him a bit, but I have also allowed our shopping to just be Sainsbury's and whatever he [stretch] buys. And, you know, every once in a while I buy something that is fair trade which is way more expensive and he would go, why did you buy that, the other one is cheaper. Ummm... So I actually could do...I feel I could be a lot more ethical and a lot more minimalist in what I buy, but living with someone else it's difficult to be completely independent and to choose everything you buy yourself. (Hannah)

As seen in Hannah's account above, feelings of having to juggle between personal ideals and socialisation, may result in the developing of the emotion of guilt for having to make certain compromises in order to balance these two. In particular, feelings of guilt were – if not from all, at least from most – of the participants explicitly or implicitly expressed in their narratives.

....and at the end of the day I can feel really guilty about buying non ethical, consuming non ethical products or produce. But, I don't think it's healthy. I think what it is healthy is to just

be aware that there is these things going on and intend to do the best you can in your life... It's, you know... and it's the guilt that does sort of drive me to sometimes seek out those things. And it is [emphasis] guilt that makes me think...God I just live in a massively consumerist society and I am one more adding to this huge [emphasis] pit of just horror that's ...you know, it's because there is so much demand for these things that they are able to be produced unethically, because we want and we will buy and we will consume, consume... you know, so I feel guilty sometimes of being a part of all of that. And particularly when you know it's been a bad week or a bad month and I haven't had money and I haven't had the chance to go and buy things that I like, you know, to know [emphasis] that they are fair trade is sort of ...you know.... But that's a personal guilt. I don't think everybody carries that guilt. And I don't think everybody carries an awareness or a consciousness of you know, the right and wrong with consuming because we are just massive [emphasis] consumers and we are in a world where we have so much to consume and its, it's all out there, ready to take, you know...(Audrey)

Guilt has already been acknowledged in the past as one emotion closely connected with the practising of ethical consumption (Bray et al., 2011; Steenhaut and Van Kenhove, 2006; Shaw and Newholm, 2002). Perhaps a unique aspect of guilt which to our knowledge has been mentioned in existing literature and was captured in this study, was that which came up during interviewing Hannah, and which connects guilt with self-punishment:

I think I use my understanding of global trade issues and how trade works and then just my decision on that day will be based on that as well as what is easiest, what's cheapest, what I can afford, and ..em... how ethical I am feeling that day [laughs]. If I am in a very bad mood I will buy coca-cola and Doritos cause I know it's bad...with my... bad thing to do...[...] It's quite funny but if someone has made me angry or upset ...umm...If my mother or my sister made me angry or upset I either go and have a cigarette and not let them...secretly...so they didn't know, or else I would have coca-cola and Doritos and it would be in some ways it's punishing myself in order to punish them. It's self-destructive. I have noticed this trend in myself and I am trying to change it. But , there is an element of going...I am just...I am in a bad mood, I am really angry I just want something bad...I wanna do something bad for the environment, bad for myself and bad for people around me. So I am gonna have this. And this is also because it...you know, I like Doritos, they taste good. But I know they are bad for me. So, it's this feeling of wanting to do something bad for you. Anyway...yeah... (Hannah)

What we see here is a way that 'unethical' consumption can be used, via emotions of guilt, in order to punish oneself. It is perhaps of interest here to add that the interview with Hannah was the most emotionally involved one. Way into the interview, the self-reflection of Hannah became so overwhelming that we had to stop the interview for half an hour and resume in a lighter mood. Of course, using guilt as a way of self-harming depends on personal psychological, and a further analysis on that would take

the discussion away from its main focus. However, the above example suggests that feelings of guilt can open up dimensions which can help understand better the discourse and practising of ethical consumption.

6.4.2 Income and availability

Being able to *choose* means being able to *afford* making choices. Interviewees put forward the issue of available income when justifying what prevented them from consciously engaging with both boycotting and boycotting. Variations in terms of income create variations in the ability to exercise choice, and thus voice, within the marketplace. It is not only the issue to be able to afford to buy 'ethical' milk rather than non-ethical one. Turcotte (2010) also illustrated the greater the quantity of goods and services purchased by an individual, the more likely that at least some of those products were purchased for ethical reasons. Sometimes choice becomes a *luxury*; voicing concerns through consumption seems to be there only for those that can afford it.

They [ethical consumers] probably have an income that supports them, that gives them the choice to be ethical or not, if you have the income you can choose, that's why I come back, come to the clients, they can't choose where they buy, they can't even choose what they buy, never mind where they buy it because you are trapped, you can't choose where you want to live. (Mairy)

I have the luxury to make those choices (David)

Available income affects consumers' decisions amongst available alternatives. In present times, choosing to buy products labelled and marketed as environmental friendly, organic or fair-trade, means you are able to afford paying premium prices. There are even expectations by consumers that an ethical product will be expensive. Something that is cheap, or cheaper than they expected it to be, can raise suspicions.

if you weekly shop at this place and that place maybe is very cheap, but why is it cheap? Is it because they get the fabric really cheaply or is it because they pay people a really poor wage to do it. (Lyle)

It is not only boycotting practices that income can prevent happening. When income is low and it's difficult to make ends meet, the ability to boycott a cheaper product, brand or company for example can be non-existing. When income cannot support such choices, consumption ceases to be an available tool for communicating grievances and pursuing change.

Sometimes, to be able to achieve any change through your consumption means to be consistent with your choices in the marketplace. There are situations where long term commitment with boycotting or boycotting is required from consumers. In those instances, making a change through consumption is a slow process that incorporates continuous effort. But sustaining choices is also subjected to available income.

if it's a week where I know I haven't got much in the bank, I won't buy the expensive one [fair trade labelled coffee], umm, and I'll just buy a normal brand kind of coffee (Kirsty)

Levels of income can determine residency of a consumer - which introduces another important aspect influencing the ability of making choices as a consumer; that of availability. The amount and type of shops, as well as the products in stock and the services offered, differ from place to place. Interviewees regarded the market structure of their area to some extent facilitating their engagement with political consumerism.

Those interested in buying organic and fair trade products for example, do so in a variety of shops within the West End. Individuals not willing to have a car because of environmental reasons are able to do their weekly shopping by foot. The market structure of the area creates opportunities for consumers to use their consumption as a tool to communicate a wide range of grievances.

I think the West End has got quite a good selection of charity shops, and it's quite a lot of them selling fair trade products, you could buy a choc bar or fair trade goods, not just clothes. So, there's quite a lot of choice I think in the West End, it's all around you, so that does influence your behaviour as well (Julia)

On the contrary, market structure in other areas in Glasgow was viewed as limiting, to the extent that can prohibit practising political consumerism.

my daughter was born, right? And me and my ex-wife were like on a low income, we were on benefits kind of thing and we found it really difficult to sustain us all to be vegan. And the final sort of straw that broke the camels' back so to speak was the health food shop that we bought stuff from closed down in the south side and it meant that to go and get the stuff that my daughter needed we had to go to the West End and just that extra bus fare that we just couldn't afford to do. So, I just thought that we will have to go into the dairy bits and love it, you know what I mean? [...] The only thing that my daughter ate at that time was yogurt and you are like, so if she couldn't have the vegan yogurt then we'll have her, sort of "fuck it, we'll get the normal yogurt from Asda" (Paul)

Nonetheless, an issue dealing with availability which interviewees raised was the limited range of products and services that already exist in the marketplace and which could be used as tools for change. This was particularly the case with individuals wanting to support fair trade and organic initiatives which at least to date are not available for a variety of product and service categories.

6.4.3 Information and time

Interviews also revealed the importance of information in enabling consumers to use their consumption as a communicative tool and as a way to push forward change. Information contributes both in terms of developing grievances as well as for acting upon existing grievances. The use of certification and labelling schemes such as organic and fair trade are a good example illustrating this twofold nature of information. Categorisation of products according to such features both publicises and promotes awareness of those issues to consumers, and at the same time provides a medium through which consumers can act upon such issues.

Consumers claimed to get information from a vast variety of sources including newspapers, television programmes and documentaries, advertisements, specialized consumer magazines and guides, internet web pages, various campaigns groups and peers. In particular, word of mouth appears to be a popular strategy in accessing information raising awareness both of grievances and solutions available in the marketplace for them.

it's a good thing... to know what is out there and how many really good things there are that you don't normally find out about them unless, you know people, or you know someone who will tell you about it (Hannah)

Information on goods and their availability can pose constraints to consumers willing to engage in actions of political consumerism. This is mainly because raising awareness of the availability of products and services is primarily a business marketing issue. The data from this research shows that consumers complained they are sometimes not aware of products that they believe are already being offered in the market. This is a possibility when thinking, for example of a small sized enterprise with limited available funds for marketing purposes. Other issues involved insufficient information on the packaging of products and inability to get hold of information on companies and their policies which they thought were important for making an informed purchasing decision.

Time is another important issue when practising political consumerism. One aspect that can require a considerable amount of time is collecting information to help consumers in their purchasing decisions. Published consumer guides and websites offering concentrated information are sometimes used by consumers in order to help them acquire the information they need. Nonetheless, it is often the case that consumers will ultimately do a bit of research themselves (usually via the internet) tailored to accommodate their needs.

The actual shopping in general is an experience that also requires time; how much time will ultimately depend on the individual. For political consumers who have already made their mind about what to choose and from where, one-stop shopping is not an easy thing to do. Consumers willing to support fair trade and organic produce, for example, described their shopping as a time consuming experience because it often involved the need to go to several specialized shops (in addition to a supermarket) to get them. Time is even more of an issue for those trying to boycott supermarkets and support local independent shops.

Umm, deliberate shopping, shopping that I choose to do in a more or less planned way, uh, would probably involve a number of shops on Great Western Road, so Roots and Fruits, big Roots and Fruits and little Roots and Fruits, because I usually go to the veg shop first and then the bigger store that does the bread and the-the dairy and the meat and things like that, umm...I get quite a lot of things from there, umm and that's an incentive to leave work on time

to reach the shops before they shut because I know that if I don't get out of there I am going to have to go to Tesco's and buy food items I don't want and then I'll, you know, I'll be pissed off with myself, [laughing] so, it's uh, that-that's an incentive to be, to be slightly more organised about the shopping, in that, the-the-times that you can shop in those shops is shorter and otherwise you end up in the supermarkets giving them your money (Lucy)

Shopping can also become very time consuming when decisions between alternative products need to be made. Interviewees mentioned price, quality and taste as important criteria in their shopping decisions. According to the grievances and the change they wanted to pursue through their consumption, other criteria were added often resulted in furthering the complexity of their decision making.

The first time I moved here it took me two hours to do my first weekly shop. I went to Marks and Spencer's and I was appalled...everything was in individual wrapped packages for single people...and I just was thinking how much plastic is there...I don't want any of this...and I couldn't decide between two things. I stood there for ten minutes, umm...my boyfriend [...] just goes mmmm...I will have that, that, that, that, that...and he drives me a bit crazy (Hannah)

6.4.4 Trade offs

Adding to the complexity in managing all the above different factors in order to reach a decision, individuals are also faced with dilemmas stemming from the sometimes conflicting goals they want to pursue through their ethical consumerism:

I guess we are all looking for some certainty in where it's come from or what's happened to it, and often there's so many other issues, I mean, the classic one is about the organic mushrooms from the Netherlands or the non-organic mushrooms from the local farm, which one is more ethical? Yes one isn't produced in an organic way so it might have more effect on the environment, but organics are being shipped in from another country, then that's... that's for the environment a consequence for the distance it has to travel. So...I always find this quite hard to, you know...emmm...like, you know, these labels, it's ...sometimes it's almost so much to, you have to think about it if you are gonna go down trying to achieve complete...a complete ethical viewpoint on a product you are trying to buy. (Andrew)

Andrew's dilemma, as illustrated above, on whether buying imported organic mushrooms or going for the local instead, is perhaps a classic example of the trade-offs

often developed in the practising of ethical consumption. The more an individual expands the list of grievances and goals that he/she wishes to express through engagement with ethical and political consumption, the more trade-offs he/she faces. Here, the role of the varying social sources that the individual draws from in order to develop 'ethical' consumer behaviour is highlighted.

The framing of 'ethical' in contemporary sociological approaches of morality, as Caruana (2007) explains, requires the individual to cultivate their own sets of virtuous moral practice. In this attempt, individuals are often faced with dilemmas such as Andrew's above which, as he explains, are often due to the diverse *assumptions* upon which 'ethically' framed and 'marketed' products and practices (that is both brands and approaches such as DIY) rest. Another example is the one below given from Rebecca:

I would say I am about 30 to 40 percent an ethical consumer. In theory I am an ethical consumer but in practice I am not sure about it. In theory things are more straightforward but in practice they are "confusing". For example I have heard arguments about food-miles, is it better to buy something that was produced here or abroad? ... But then there are arguments that the production of that specific product is less environmentally friendly here than abroad.
(Rebecca)

Here we see the dilemma of buying a product that is locally produced (thus avoiding 'food-miles'), or a buying a 'foreign' (thus adding food-miles) but more 'environmental friendly' framed product. Both options concern minimising impact on the environment. However, different institutions and discourses ('food-miles' Vs. 'environmental friendly production') are suggesting conflicting alternatives for practising environmentally conscious consumerism. A similar observation is made by Boström and Klintman (2009), who explain that consumers can choose 'domestic and local' or 'foreign and fair', and yet both consumer groups may legitimise their shopping behaviour by 'political', 'ethical' and/or 'green' principles.

Moreover, the issue of consistency again comes to play; the individual is called to prioritise conflicting 'ethical' and/or 'political' discourses, and ultimately make a sacrifice of one over another. At some point the individual is compelled to make some compromise. And this, in turn impacts on the degree the individual perceives him/herself of being 'ethical' as consumers. Not being able to develop an 'absolute' ethical viewpoint and translate it into practice in a consistent manner, the individual is

experiencing the conflicting and subjective nature of 'ethical' discourses that are apparent today within the marketplace as 'confusing'.

6.5 Consumption and the metaphor of 'voting'

Awareness of the impact of consumption (or the possibility of having an impact) to the consumer him/herself and to the world around him/her, enables individuals to connect decisions in the marketplace with aspects of politics. This relation, however, is sometimes tricky to recognize. Findings from the street survey already indicated that acts of 'ethical' purchasing are not necessarily perceived by individuals as practicing politics. (This was also illustrated in Tobiasen's (2005) study, as mentioned earlier).

Politics are often equated to participating in elections, to vote, and are heavily charged with notions of parliamentary politics and parties. Increasing doubt in the effectiveness of conventional participation and loss of trust in political institutions is often associated with engagement in what Beck termed sub-politics (Beck, 2000). When the idea of doing politics extends beyond formal political concepts to denote a more general notion of agency in how society runs, the link between consuming and practising politics in the mind of individuals becomes clearer.

making any choice in the market place is a political act. I think making an uninformed choice in the market place is an equally political act and therefore I feel I make both positive and negative political acts all the time about my, you know... every aspect of your life impinges on other people in some way and you know, that's the curse, you're no less responsible if your uninformed if you know that you ought to be informed (Lucy)

For consumers, consumption patterns represent a political act because of the opportunity it offers to be used as a tool to pursue change in society - whether that is in the economic, political and/or social sphere. In return, bringing consumption in the field of politics places consumers in a position which can involve or require a great amount of responsibility taking (Micheletti et al., 2005).

Seen as a tool, ethical consumption is sometimes paralleled with voting (e.g. see Shaw, 2007). In these interviews, consumers use 'voting' as a metaphor to try and explain the mechanism of boycotting and buycotting. If voting in elections implies power, then

choosing in the market can also denote power. Purchasing (or not) a product or service is a way to communicate approval (or disapproval). Consumer choice is seen as a way to provide a 'vote' of trust in the agenda or the way of doing things (whether that refers to a company, policy, nation, culture etc).

...it's exactly the same power that you have when you vote [...] by what you purchase you are voting for this product or this company, you are giving them your money and it's the same as giving a political party your vote (Nicola)

The voting metaphor helps to highlight the sometimes needed aggregate 'numbers' in order to achieve change through consumption. Much like in the case of voting, the overall outcome will be the result of a collective effort. Consumers imagine and place their hopes in this collective effort. Change for them depends on co-action; without that, their own actions are in danger of being fruitless.

my buying stuff is not going to change it...change anything on its own, but if everybody thinks that buying a particular way or a particular thing, if they think it's just a little bit that makes a difference, then it will make a big difference so...(Nicola)

if lots and lots of people make those tiny, tiny, choices every day then you hope that there will be a mass, a critical mass which changes what kind of behaviour occurs (Lucy)

One voice is probably not easy to be heard, while more voices joined together stand a better chance. It is in this respect that SMOs and campaign groups play a major part in this because they can collectivise individual voices (Holzer, 2006).

For consumers, the voting metaphor in explaining political consumerism raises the issue of inequality in the distribution of votes. To use consumption as a tool for change, both when deciding to purchase or not purchase a good, requires first of all sufficient financial capital. Unlike the suffrage motto 'one person one vote', those who cannot afford it will not vote and those who can afford it will exercise their right with more than one vote in the market.

I think everyone has the same amount of power. If you like, that is one...one person. Because everyone is one person, if you like. If you can...Although it's perhaps not true in terms of people buying more than other people, and or people who are suppliers and that sort of thing (Lyle)

Available income proves to be a significant practical problem when engaging with political consumerism, but is not the only one. This research identified four major constraints that may limit the ability of an individual to engage with boycotting and buycotting practices. These are discussed next.

6.5.1 Limitations of political consumerism: Comparing boycotting and buycotting with other types of protesting

The whole idea of political consumption rests on the assumption that the market can be a field within which individuals as consumers can pursue change. But this requires first of all that the nature of a grievance for an individual is such that it can be resolved or at least communicated through economic means. This is not always the case, or at least is not easy to be identified by consumers.

I'm slightly boycotting Italy at the moment because of the way they are treating Roma...but, umm[...] I feel like I should, but I don't think, I don't think it would be-it would be obvious that was what I was doing and why I was doing it, so...[...] I suppose that we're not, we're not big consumers of products from Italy anyway I don't think, I mean probably buy a bit of pasta but that might be produced in Durham, probably, you know, I don't know if it's necessarily made there and uh-pasta sources and things like that aren't necessarily Italian. And we don't have an Italian car, so we're not going to be consuming a lot of Italian things anyway, I suppose, umm [...] I really don't know if there would be a product that could do that, that I can boycott, if there as I would do it, if someone told me what it was I would definitely do it (Kirsty)

Secondly, it requires that the supply side of the market is willing, capable and actually does offer the means (products and services) to allow individuals to practice political consumerism. Findings from the interviews with retailers touched upon this issue. A more holistic insight comes from a study conducted by Koss (2012) in his attempt to explain the vast differences observed in political consumerism across European

countries. By testing political consumerism (as boycotting and boycotting) against economic opportunity structures (operationalised by three constructs measuring national affluence, the availability of environmental and fair-trade labelled goods and the dominant retailing structures) in 19 countries he illustrated the significant role of retail structures. In particular, his findings suggested that “increasing concentration of retailers and shopping outlets, as manifested in the spread of large supermarket chains, provokes a counter movement, as it enables the consumer to use market exchange as a political statement”. The supply of ‘ethically’ framed products such as eco, organic and fair-traded goods were also found to significantly increase the chance of individuals in buying positive. (In this study, Great Britain scored in the 7th place among the countries in terms of engagement with political consumerism, with scores more than double than the last one in place 19th which was Greece).

Moving on, compared with other types of protest such as marches and demonstrations, consumers find political consumption as an *easier* way to voice their objections on issues that are important to them. Shopping is part of our everyday life, a practice that needs to be done anyway. In that sense, people find practising political consumerism easier rather than having to show up at a march or rally which is an event, a special thing, outside everyday practice for them.

I am an armchair campaigner. You know, I will do a little bit of standing outside some supermarkets but basically...em... you know...I don't do any of the hard work myself. [...]Anything that has to do with leaving the comfort of my house, or the immediate environment on a Saturday morning for a couple of hours. Anything that is going to cause too much effort... So, well ...when I was younger I was doing more direct action (Rebecca)

Political consumerism in the mind of the participants although to some extent a political act, is not considered to constitute a form of direct action or activism. In this respect interviewees often distinguished their consumption from other forms of protesting. Interviewees find the cost of involvement with other forms of direct action higher than that of political consumerism. For example, direct action and activism for some participants translated into something negative, an action that can involve violence and/or dissent: “...it wasn't violent enough to be activism” (Lyle). For those individuals, the repercussions of engaging with direct action are thought as something serious.

the problem of doing the direct action is you can be arrested and have a criminal sentence [...] it's a bit awkward being arrested, you know? And to have to go to court and things (Ronald)

The views of participants in terms of the effectiveness achieved by different types of action varied. Some people felt that political consumerism is a more effective way to pursue change than more traditional political participation like taking part in elections. This was particularly the case when the changes sought by consumers were more explicitly related with issues in the sphere of economics, for example with sweat shop labour. For others, political consumerism was seen more as complementary to other political actions they were involved in.

Commenting on effectiveness, participants in this research stressed the need to match political consumerism with other types of action. Letter writing, signing petitions, organizing and participating in events and demonstrations, lobbying, filling out consumer complaint forms, voting and joining campaign groups are some of the actions participants have been involved in the past and which they think can complement their political consumerism. These findings match insights from previous quantitative research on the perception of efficacy of political consumerism. Stolle et al.'s (2005, politics in the supermarket) survey amongst 1015 Canadian, Belgian, and Swedish students revealed that even those practicing the acts of boycotting and buycotting most rigorously do not believe that political consumerism is the most effective way of bringing about political and social change. Instead, political consumers perceived the acts of voting, volunteering, donating money, joining a party and joining a demonstration as more effective ways to influence society. The authors concluded that "consumers seem to be quite 'realistic' about the potential effectiveness of this participation instrument and thus boycotting and buycotting should, in this sense, be perceived as an *addition* to the political participation repertoires" (italics in original, p. 262).

I: If you were to compare doing direct action and consuming as a form of changing things...?

You need both. You need every fund. You need every fund. And you need to somehow get under the skin of the masses (Rebecca)

Both views, however, seem to rest in the assumption that different issues require applying different approaches in protesting and engaging with different types of action.

if there is protesters outside Tesco making you feel bad about going in you are going to be angry with the protesters, because they question your lifestyle. And I think people don't like to be questioned by the outsiders in a negative way (Hannah)

The same holds true when examining the situation with the local conflict between a big supermarket chain and residents in the area where the research was conducted. The way to object to the supermarket in that area was not mobilizing people to boycott that chain but to fight through the formal and established – and the one which also could be the more effective – path of objecting to the planning application for that development. The area did not have any other Tesco's close by during the time of that conflict. This meant that consumers did not have the opportunity structure to effectively use their consumer power in order to communicate that objection. Residents did claim boycotting the particular chain at that time. But it was more a matter of complementing their actions, being consistent with their opposition with that chain, rather than actually feeling they could achieve an outcome through their boycotting.

Well, we are fighting Tesco and it would look bad if the actual people who are in the STOP, Stop Tesco taking Over Partick, right... so it would look bad and you're [inaudible] the protest for it (George)

The biggest criticism in the use of political consumerism was the possibility it created for people to become engaged only with this practice and to ignore other practices as available tools for change. In the literature, there are conflicting views on this. For example, Carrier (2008) illustrated through an examination on ecotourism how ethical consumption can be an “anti-politics machine” (p. 46) in the sense that it displaces collective political action and leads people to perceive the marketplace as the primary arena for change. In the opposite side, a recent survey by Willis and Schor (2012) found

greater levels of political consumption to be positively related to a range of political actions (such as signing petitions). They did, however acknowledge that political consumption may be more significant as a means (of raising awareness, deepening interest and commitment, and encouraging other forms of involvement) rather as an end.

For some participants who envision radical change of society, consumption can be a tool but not a sufficient one. Hence, the very fact that political consumerism can be an easier way to deal with grievances was seen as potentially problematic; it could lead people away from other types of political participation and that could impede achieving any change at all. Political consumerism for some of the participants entailed the danger of relieving guilt, soothing consciousness and providing the impression that the responsibility of the individual to society was acted upon.

And it's considered as, that's your bit, that's a dot. That's all you have to do.[...] there's a danger that the more mainstream society takes on this environmental climate change green issues, the more it's going to be acceptable to do a very small amount, and that the message of [inaudible] change will be lost. So, I do feel like, a lot of housewives buy fair trade coffee or tea or sugar and then do their ordinary shopping in Tesco's. And they think they have done their bit and they feel good (Hannah)

it makes people, it take [inaudible] people of the hook. Instead of actually going out there and getting their hands dirty and do stuff, they keep going buying a cup of coffee and said: what's the easier thing to do?. Do you know what I mean? (Paul)

6.6 Discussion

In their role as consumers, individuals are beginning to recognise the opportunity to use their consumption in order to communicate grievances and pursue change in the economic, political, cultural and civil sphere of society. This awareness is closely related with the ability of individuals to reflect upon their consumption as well as with recognizing the social context in which products and services are embedded (Micheletti, 2003). Interviews with self-identified 'ethical' consumers indicated that becoming aware

of the opportunity to use choices in the marketplace as communicative tools is initiated through a plethora of personal experiences; such process is experienced as dynamic in the sense that reflexivity continues even after engagement with practices of ethical and political consumerism.

Awareness seems to be the first step for individuals but their actual engagement with practices of boycotting and buycotting will depend on many factors. Supportive of other findings in previous works as illustrated through the chapter, findings from this qualitative research identified four main issues that enable and constrain an individual in their practising of boycotting and buycotting and discussed their complex dimensions: the financial capital of the individual, the access and use of a variety of information, time to support and sustain choices, as well as availability of the products and services that will allow communication to be achieved. As was illustrated in the analysis of the data, these four factors have several dimensions and are often interrelated with each other. The interaction of these practical constraints with emotions and trade-off decisions, provide a picture of how ethical consumption is experienced as a – what was termed here as – ‘mix’n’matching’ of battles.

These battles were mostly concerning decisions over boycotting and buycotting, thus matching the insights generated through both the interviews with grocery retailers and the street survey. The further insight these interviews provided, however was that buycotting and boycotting may not necessarily refer to the ‘usual’ issues of choosing ‘ethical’ such as organic or fair-trade alternatives over ‘less ethical’ substitutes (Research Objective 2). The case of John (the clergyperson) here is illustrative of how ‘ethics’ may be translated in everyday consumption practices, and moreover how these ethics may exceed the sphere of consumption to include all aspects of life; ethics, in this sense, is a way of life. Thus, in treating his family members with respect, accommodating their needs via shopping decisions did include ‘ethics’ but not in the ways ‘ethical consumption’ is often portrayed. In a similar manner, Hannah’s assertion of being more ethical than an ethical consumer was possible once she was able to transcend the idea of being just a consumer, to include other aspects of life, such as for whom to work for. Hall (2011) illustrated how consumers recognise consumption as an ethically-embedded process and are not necessarily subscribing to a given set of ethics in consumption. Insight from the in-depth interviews with self-identified ethical consumers confirmed

this, and provided evidence of how these everyday ethics in consumption may be part of a larger 'ethical' project of an individual, thus connecting the role of consumer with other social roles and identities. This way, 'ethical consumption' may mean for individuals more than the buying of organic and fair-trade labelled goods, for example, to include reduced consumption because of unwillingness to work at a non-ethical business and continue being on the dole (as in the case of Hannah) at some point in life, or choosing to "*shun things and just forget about them*" as in the case of Ronald.

This chapter also discussed the 'voting' metaphor and provided some empirical insights which urge some attention (feeding to Research Objective 3). Shopping decisions as substantially connected to disposable income raise doubts on the extent of which this tool can be used by all individuals. Participants themselves commented on the fact that ethical and political consumerism as a tool raises issues of inequality. This is not only a serious constraint for the phenomenon itself, but also a reason to force us to re-think the way this phenomenon has been portrayed to date - at least from the side of academia. Provided that electoral participation in western societies has a positive connotation of agency within a democratic system, the use of the voting metaphor to describe political consumerism conceals this serious aspect of inequality embedded in this phenomenon.

As an alternative and in order to overcome this serious limitation, this thesis views ethical and political consumerism as having a 'protesting' quality. Ethical and political consumerism as a tool for protest, rather as a metaphor of electoral participation, is argued to facilitate a better understanding of these social phenomena. In this respect, the concept of consumer relates closer to that of 'activist' than that of 'voter'.

Viewed as such, boycotting and buycotting could be argued to represent a type of direct action, of course of a non-violent, non-confrontational and rather legal in nature. In this respect, political consumerism as a type of direct action is close to other types of action such as peaceful rallies and marches. Compared to those types, participants perceived boycotting and buycotting as easier to engage with, since shopping is an act they are required to perform in everyday life.

Nonetheless, this uncovers another limitation dealing with conformity and the nature of change it can achieve. The implications of this are that – to paraphrase and apply Muller's (1972) argument to this study's context - political consumerism (as defined

mainly by boycotting and buycotting practices), though unconventional, appears to involve a “*within system*” behaviour which doesn’t challenge the authority of markets (or states). Thus, it is not surprising that the market structure is reflected in the offering of products and services; and for individuals who are interested in changing these and other structures, shopping isn’t always perceived as an adequate tool to use. Insight from this research gave further evidence for this, when participants raised their doubts about whether consumption alone as a tool is sufficient to achieve any significant change in society.

6.7 Reflections

There seems to be a constant struggle over the appropriation of the meaning of ‘ethics’ in daily consumption practices and associated consumer identity. On the one hand, we see business – through marketing – increasingly commodifying ‘ethics’, creating new codes of applied consumer ethics for individuals, constructing new identities and identifications while celebrating the multifaceted western contemporary individual. And on the other hand, we see the individual struggling to adopt, reflecting, criticising, creating, advancing and/or abandoning this battle. The interviews with self-identified ethical consumers supported Willis and Schor’ (2012) assertion that the “*polysemy of consumption undermines arguments that attempt to identify single or dominant meanings*” (p. 180). This however, doesn’t seem a valid enough reason to prevent (at least academics) from reproducing the idea of an ‘ethical consumer’.

The vagueness of this consumer identity (Research Objective 1) appears rather wise; it can include everything as long as a fraction of something can hold some moral grounds. The data acquired through the street survey (and presented in chapter 5) provided some evidence of people willing to identify themselves as ethical consumers. Nonetheless, findings from the in-depth interviews with individuals (who were recruited as ‘ethical consumers’ and who do feel they incorporate ‘ethics’ in their consumption) suggest that this frame of an ‘ethical consumer’ is not always something desirable. Created or not within a marketing lab, for some the ‘ethical’ consumer exists somewhere out there confusing them (Mairy), creating stereotypes who some view could fit into (David)

while others don't (Lucy), inspiring them to exceed in ethics (like Hannah) or abandon the idea of ethics in consumption as a whole and focus their efforts in a different level of struggle (Paul). But who is this ethical consumer? The chapter to follow draws an analytical distinction between an 'ethical Shopper' and an 'ethical Consumer', in an attempt to provide some explanation to this paradox.

Chapter 7: Discussion (or my thesis)

The last three chapters, Chapter 4, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, presented findings from the primary research with **Retailers**, the **Public** and **Ethical Consumers** respectively. Insights provided evidence of the heterogeneity found in the ethical consumer framing in terms of the meanings related to this identity (Research Objective 1) and the associated practices (Research Objective 2) and which in turn, was reflected in perceptions of efficacy of certain practices associated with ‘ethical’ consumerism (Research Objective 3). This chapter attempts to explain this heterogeneity by examining the role of ‘purchasing’ in conceptualising ethical consumption (aim of the thesis).

In particular, in this chapter, the concept of the ‘ethical consumer’ is revisited, interrogated and, finally, contested. First, it is proposed that by making a distinction between the ‘ethical Shopper’ and the ‘ethical Consumer’, it is possible to explore a qualitative aspect of ethical discourses in relation to consumer practices which is otherwise difficult to capture. In a nutshell, the concept of an ‘ethical Shopper’ is argued to represent the side of ‘ethical consumption’ which is hegemonically market-driven and which seeks to commodify ethics through branding and related marketing mechanisms. On the other side is what we (re)termed the ‘ethical Consumer’, which represents the creative, pro-active, agency-driven counterpart. This side of ethical consumption is argued to be closer to the concept of political consumption; a term I argue as a more appropriate to use due to its less value-laden nature.

7.1 Introduction

It is reminded that the **aim of this thesis** (as already set in the introductory Chapter 1) is *(a) to explore, through primary research, the framing and meaning of the so-called 'ethical consumer' and associated notion of 'ethical consumption', in order (b) to understand what constitutes an 'ethical consumer' and how the prerequisite of 'purchase' affects this framing, particularly with respect to realising the potential change (both in terms of degree and type) that the so-called ethical consumption promises to deliver.*

Up until now, the discussion has served to fulfil the first part (a) of the aim of this thesis i.e. to explore, through primary research, the framing and meaning of the so-called 'ethical consumer' and associated notion of 'ethical consumption'. Detailed findings of this research were presented in the previous three chapters (Chapter 4, 5 and 6). Each of these chapters corresponded to one of the three separate sources of primary data; that is, findings from interviews with retailers, findings from a street survey and findings based on interviews with self-identified ethical consumers. This ordering of presenting the data was not coincidental; it was purposive so as to illustrate the journey from understandings of 'ethical' consumption as utterly tied up to the idea of 'ethical purchasing' (the side of business and particularity the grocery retail sector) to understandings that accommodate a broader definition of 'consumption' that goes beyond the commodifying 'Midas' touch' of economics (as ultimately illustrated in the in-depth interviews consumers).

This chapter, by feeding back the findings of the primary research to the theoretical conceptualising of ethical and political consumption, addresses the second part (b) of the aim of this thesis i.e. to understand what constitutes an 'ethical consumer' and how the prerequisite of 'purchase' affects this framing. In order to achieve this, I draw a conceptual distinction between an 'ethical Consumer' and an 'ethical Shopper'. I make this distinction so as to highlight qualitative differences between these two proposed perspectives on ethical consumption which are not yet captured and acknowledged within the literature. Through this proposed distinction the strengths and limitations of the phenomenon of ethical consumerism are then revisited and the potentiality of both

ethical and political consumption in bringing about change of economic, political, and societal nature is discussed. Feeding back to the theoretical understanding of ethical and political consumption, this chapter goes on to expand these concepts by suggesting the inclusion of types of consumer action (or action in the market-place) which have been – until now – kept in silence. The chapter ends with a critique on the use of the adjective ‘ethical’ when referring to consumption and highlights the problems and consequences of doing so.

7.2 The ‘ethical Shopper’ and the ‘ethical Consumer’

Examining the ‘ethical consumer’ identity through the specific research design generated evidence which suggests a continuous struggle in terms of the meaning construction of such an identity. At least two forces in this struggle became apparent: meanings shaped by the environment (including business, civil society institutions and academia) and meanings created by the individual reflecting some degree of agency.

It was already mentioned before in the literature review that the ‘ethical consumer’ is a constructed identity which appears to have been initially developed by marketing research as a means of classification for certain consumers. The birth of the ‘ethical consumer’ through this process meant that certain characteristics in terms of behaviour (consumer behaviour) and reasoning (motives, goals etc) were defined. The ethical consumer was created as a term to categorise consumers who claimed to involve morality in their reasoning behind their choices as consumers. In this sense, one may argue that the creation of the ethical consumer was an attempt to reflect certain aspects of reality which were already happening and which marketing – up to that point – was not adequately equipped to make visible. Once this category (or identity) was born, however, different actors came into play with respect to the meaning making of such an identity. In other words, the creation of such an identity opened up a space within which different actors now strive to create and control its meaning.

This space has two distinctive elements: an aspect which deals with morality (ethics) and an aspect which deals with pursuing social change (politics). In terms of ethics, this is a

space where judgments on ‘good’ and ‘bad’ consumer behaviour are constructed. It’s also a space where ‘good’ and ‘bad’ products and business practices are defined. In terms of politics, this is a space where the ‘struggles’ for social change, as well as the means (tools) for pursuing and achieving it, are developed and defined.

From their part, businesses seem to embrace the concept of the ethical consumer, and ethical consumption, and several business strategies have since evolved around these concepts. Civil society institutions and initiatives, including charities, churches, local government organizations, universities, etc in the UK have also contributed actively in the construction of the ‘ethical consumer’, often in synergy with business. An example is the advocating, supporting and advertising of the Fair Trade idea, not only in terms of promoting fair-trade labelled products but also in applying such a label to whole cities, universities (The University of Edinburgh is one out of over 160 Fair-Trade Universities and Colleges in the UK¹), schools, places of worship and even countries (Wales and Scotland are the first two countries to have achieved a Fair Trade Nation status²), though what either of these labels means is not entirely clear. Fair Trade’s emphasis on *‘just’ consumption* [or better on ‘just purchase’] as Adams and Raisborough (2008) noted, however, allows some scope for problematisation. Particularly since such emphasis automatically confines action to an individual’s financial resources, ultimately turning Fair Trade consumption into a form of middle and upper social class distinction (Andorfer, 2013). This need for distinction seems, in turn, to be catered by the business world; the case of Cafédirect as found through an analysis of newspaper advertising appealing to such need is illustrative here (Wright, 2004). So, what would our understanding of ethical consumption be if it wasn’t just related to purchasing?

The table below reflects an attempt to deconstruct what has been termed an ‘ethical consumer’ and re-synthesise it in order to reflect this conceptual difference. Its role is to illustrate the qualitative differences between what are here termed an ‘ethical Shopper’ and an ‘ethical Consumer’. The dichotomy proposed here is not intended to work as a

¹http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved/campaigns/fairtrade_universities/about_fairtrade_universities.aspx

²http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/february_2013/scotland_achieves_landmark_status.aspx

typology of individual identity in which people can be squeezed. Moreover, it doesn't suggest a true antithetical dichotomy. On the contrary, the relationship between these two concepts is complementary. In other words, it is suggested that the unit is the person, in his/her role as consumer. And within this, it is suggested that there are at least these two facets or perspectives which, through antithetical traits, can be conceptualized.

Table 7-1
Towards understanding the ethical...

Shopper	Consumer
Follower	Creator
Reactive	Pro-active
Ethics as a brand	Ethics as a guide
Focus on shopping	Focus on re-defining needs
Economic sphere	All social spheres
Reform	Radical change
Middle class/affluent	Any class

Table 7-1: Towards understanding the ethical...

The next sections elaborate further on each of the features of these two perspectives.

7.2.1 Shopper and Consumer

At a first glance, making a distinction between a shopper and a consumer might look rather futile. However, there are certain assumptions connected with each term, which are dissimilar and thus call for such a distinction.

Marketing as a discipline is primarily preoccupied with aspects of – often contemporary – consumption that are within the economic system of capitalism. In other words, it

holds several assumptions which fit the current economic system of capitalism. One example is the ‘monetary exchange’ mechanism which is widely assumed as the only way to organise the distribution of goods and services within capitalistic societies. Someone is usually a worker, who would get money as a reward for their production and who is then free to spend this money in products of his/her choice. Marketing as a discipline was founded upon assumptions like this one.

As illustrated in the literature review, section 2.2, the words consumption, consumer and consume go beyond assumptions of certain economic structures of organising societies (as for example the simple assumption of ‘monetary exchange’ illustrated previously). In this sense, to consume mainly indicates the ‘using up’ of something, hence the consumer is someone who first and foremost is the ‘user’ of a good. On the contrary, shopping, shopper and shop are more indicative, or seem closer, to the idea of purchasing; a mechanism which is already in place in most of the capitalist economies today. For this reason, it is argued here that those usually referred to as ‘ethical consumers’ and actions described as ‘ethical consumption’ both within and outside academia, are closer to the idea of shopping, the idea of a shopper, a person who in his/her role as a consumer has to a great extent internalised such assumptions. Moreover, marketing as a discipline is only capable of capturing one side of an ethical consumer, that which is termed here the ‘ethical Shopper’.

Thus, in an attempt to **re-appropriate the meaning of ‘consumer’**, it is here argued that the whole idea of ‘ethical consumption’ as it has evolved today within most academic literature on ethical and political consumption be better considered as ‘ethical shopping’. In this way, the idea of an ‘ethical consumer’ is granted fewer ideological assumptions and, thus, more freedom of agency.

7.2.2 Follower and Creator

One of the main traits of the proposed concept of an ethical Shopper is the rather passive role he/she takes within the given economic structure of capitalism. As a follower, the ethical shopper is connected with Horkheimer and Adorno’s (1996) idea of

the culture industry, in the sense of being manipulated by mass production and unable to determine his/her true needs. Products become experiences infused with meaning that extend beyond the directly related needs, for example hunger or thirst. These meanings are not created by the individual alone, but are co-created in relation to the environment. Marketing's, and particularly advertising's, role is just that: to interact with an individual's meaning creation with the ultimate goal of stimulating demand for a product, service and/or idea. Attempts by business to establish new moral codes for both enterprise and consumption (such as for example, the promotion of business and consumer ethics) are attempts which do not violate the assumptions of the current economic system of capitalism. Thus, the purchasing of organic, fair-trade and environmental friendly framed products are practices closely connected with this 'ethical' shopper. Marketing research often captures only this facet, since it's primarily the shopping behaviour which is being explored through such types of research.

This however is only one side of the story. The other side is the ethical Consumer; an individual with a degree of agency, of free spiritedness, of free will and choice. Miller (1998, p. 148) observes that the primary "*purpose behind shopping is not so much to buy the things that people want, but to strive to be in a relationship with subjects that want these things*". The active role of shopping is not so much in the act of purchase as is in the meaning that people create with such act. In this sense, this 'love' for the other that Miller's theory of shopping is referring to, is not because the person 'purchased' an object; it would have been the same if the person has acquired such object through any alternative means, such as exchange. Thus, even though this project clings to a social constructionist ontology, at the same time it also embraces the capability of all humans to imagination and creativity; an imagination close to Castoriadis (2005) sense of 'creative imaginary' as "*social and political awakening, a resurgence of the project of individual and collective autonomy, that is to say, of the will to freedom*" (p. 146) rather than a 'capitalist imaginary' "*of unlimited expansion of "rational mastery," pseudorational pseudomastery, of an unlimited expansion of consumption for the sake of consumption*" (p. 146).

7.2.3 Reactive and Pro-active

The concept of ‘reaction’ is central to the idea of the ethical Shopper; as a ‘follower’, the ethical Shopper is receptive to the solutions that the market of ethical consumption offers. In this sense, the ethical Shopper reacts to stimulus that has been developed from within the structure of the market. Practices that are typical of the ethical Shopper such as that of buying organic and fair-trade can also be perceived as more reactive, in the sense of being ‘corrective’ of the way business is done. This is close to the idea of reforming the market, as it is argued later on.

In comparison, the idea of the ‘ethical Consumer’ allows for the inclusion of praxis which is not as easily commodified; the reducing of consumption and the re-defining of needs are addressing for example environmental issues in a pro-active manner. Here findings from the street survey provide a useful insight; it was ‘green consumers’ and not ‘ethical consumers’ that were associated with practices of recycling, avoiding air-travel etc. [This is further explored in section 7.2.5]. Of course one may argue that growing vegetables in the back yard has its own market (e.g. buying soil and seeds), as do other DIY practices. But as a ‘creator’, the ethical Consumer represents an individual with agency who, in a pro-active manner, uses ‘ethics’ as a guide in order to shape his/her own ethical meaning and praxis in consumption, as discussed next.

7.2.4 Ethics as Brand and ethics as Guide

Throughout the analysis of the in-depth interviews a distinction between ‘ethics as a brand’ and ‘ethics as a guide’ was apparent. The branding of ‘ethics’ was something that participants were sceptical about, although this did not always lead to them disengaging from certain associated practices. Lucy’s story is perhaps the most illustrative on this aspect of ethics as a brand. She proclaimed: “*I don’t want to be labelled as an ethical consumer*”, and went on narrating her story when she bought a t-shirt and asked for scissors in order to cut off the fair-trade label that was placed in the outside. “*I don’t want to wear anything that screams: I think I’m an ethical consumer...it’s exactly the same as wandering*

around with Prada emblazoned on your chest’, she explained. This ‘brand’, as discussed in the previous chapter, can also have its own aesthetics. For some, like Hannah, such aesthetics seem to be close to her tastes; for others, like Lucy, do not.

Overall, perceptions on the branding of ‘ethics’ is somewhat controversial; there were participants who would be quite happy to communicate their support of ‘ethically’ marketed products; whereas others, like Lucy would be completely repelled by the idea. The ‘branding’ of products and services as a means of promoting their sign value may have at least two aims: to get consumers to buy the product, and at the same time to raise awareness and publicise the issue, grievance or concern they attempt to address. Ethical consumers, however, appear sceptical on the extent to which these branded ethics are not just another way of opening new markets and securing increased sales.

The stereotype of an ethical consumer, as a branded / labelled consumer, came up also in the interviews with retailers, and particularly that with Asif. In his story, the ‘green people’ as he calls them are only a ‘show-off’ (as discussed in section 4.2.3). To be perceived as an ‘ethical’ person in general and as a ‘Consumer’ in particular appeared desirable; to be perceived as an ‘ethical Shopper’ was definitely not for some participants in this study.

7.2.5 Focus in Shopping and focus in Re-defining needs

Findings from the street survey indicated that the ethical consumer is only related with the buying of organic and fair-trade, as well as the avoiding of over-packaged goods. In comparison, the green consumer is also involved in recycling, shopping from charity shops, avoiding wasting food, adopting a vegetarian diet and making and mending clothes. These were findings that represent the public opinion, and are important since they were able to capture the surface of the framing of ethical consumption – in other words, the appearance of this phenomenon. Here, it is interesting to note that boycotting was not associated with ethical consumption.

Findings from the in-depth interviews with consumers, however, draw another picture. The practicing of ethical consumption extended beyond the mere buying of fair-trade

and organic, to include a variety of other praxis which through self-reflexivity urged for the re-defining of needs and the self-questioning of motives for choosing to buy some particular things. Apart from Paul, who decided to disengage from pursuing any sort of change through his consumption, all other interviewees expressed their concerns about over-consumption in general and explained their attempts to address this by reflecting on their own consumption patterns. Here, aspects of anti-consumption in ethical understandings of consumerism, as discusses in the literature review, become relevant.

Thus, we can draw a distinction between the ‘ethical Shopper and the ‘ethical Consumer’ in the sense that the Shopper is mostly about boycotting practices [which is reflected in quantitative studies of political consumerism such as Koos (2012) but can be explained by the very defining political consumption as relevant only to eco, organic and fair-trade purchasing], whereas a Consumer represents an individual who through self-reflection, agency and creativity, is capable to question the very notion of need.

7.2.6 *Economic sphere and All social spheres*

Directly related to the point raised in the section above, is the distinction made here between perceiving ethical consumerism as relevant only to the economic sphere or as relevant to all social spheres.

Findings from the in-depth interviews illustrated that individuals are aware of the interconnection between production and consumption; coupled with a willingness to pursue social change through agency, their meanings and rationales were not only translated in their choices of what to consume, but also where to consume, or how to consume. Moreover, participants in these interviews commented on the complexity of keeping a balance between their consumption choices and other aspects of their lives, which they perceived as interconnected. Choices on what job to do, for how many hours, under which employers, where to go for holidays and how, were some of the examples that participants put as relevant with their personal approach on ethical consumption. Dilemmas on whether one should follow his/her group of friends that

decided to go for a coffee at Starbucks for example, while he/she is boycotting that coffee-chain, is another example.

Thus, viewing an individual only in economic terms as an ‘ethical Shopper’ means here to neglect other aspects which are also important in an individual’s life. Here, an ‘ethical Consumer’ is perceived as someone who is also a ‘parent’, ‘a friend’, ‘a worker’, a ‘producer’, ‘an artist’, etc.

7.2.7 *Affluent/middle class and Any class*

Resources - and in particular time, information and money – were repeatedly mentioned in the face-to-face interviews with consumers as necessary in order to achieve an ‘ethical’ consumer lifestyle and sustain its related consumer behaviour. For it is not only the premium price of ‘ethically’ marketed products and services that requires consumers to be able to afford; it is also the time required so as to be able to make informed choices (for example time spent to investigate business practices related with a product or service), or even time in order to support an ‘ethical’ choice (for example when a consumer wants to avoid buying from supermarkets).

For their part the business world appears to be willing to help with overcoming such difficulties with resources: for example, some companies are striving to support ideas and initiatives which one might say that extend beyond the interests of traditional commerce (such as the Reduce-Reuse-Recycle triad). Nonetheless, business is still business, and will operate under the same principles of enterprise within a capitalist system, i.e. will strive to make profits, no matter how these profits are going to be used. New companies focusing on this triad have already been established. Recycling has become business. In the same sense, even ‘alternative’ business models continue to be nested upon somewhat contradictory principles. One example is The Co-Op Group in the UK; it claims to be ‘ethical’ in its business policies and practice, and is proud of continuing the old UK co-operative movement ideas. Nonetheless they are still a large scale organisation operating in diverse sectors, offering products from groceries to funeral services and bank accounts, as well as being involved with parliamentary politics

through their affiliation with the Co-operative Party and its sister party, the Labour Party. Here, the 'reduce' idea, for example, could jeopardize the very existence of such business that needs sales in order to operate.

Moreover, it is very much the case that each business is the gatekeeper of the information that is important to people if they want to make their own informed choices in the marketplace. With the exceptions of scandals brought into light usually by the media, as with the accusations of sweatshop labour conditions for Primark, information on exact business practices is often withheld from the public. In the rare cases where information is in the public domain, the business world also has come up with an extra tool for consumers in order to help them organize such bulk of data; 'ethicscores' and other initiatives which manage information and facilitate consumers in their decision making have been already established.

But getting back to the issue of resources, data from all three research methods used in this project (interviews with consumers, retailers and the survey) indicated that in order to follow the rules of being 'ethical' as a consumer, a person needs to have both the awareness of the social context of products and services and the necessary resources to develop and sustain consumer choices. Let aside that the former issue of awareness most probably would positively increase the higher the educational level of an individual (Tobiasen, 2005; Micheletti and Stolle, 2005), the latter issue, that of resources, and in particular money, is enough to create a distinction between consumers that can afford to buy 'ethically' marketed products, and those that cannot.

What is left is something like a stereotype of an 'ethical Shopper' who is usually affluent (in order to afford ethical products) and who most probably will be somewhere in the middle class of the western social stratification system. It is in this sense a rather privileged individual since to a good extent he/she possesses the necessary resources (and primarily money) which can buy off an 'ethical' adjective to be placed before his/her consumer behaviour. Furthermore, showing off this privilege, by wearing a Fair-trade labelled T-Shirt for example, seems somewhat connected with this stereotype. Interviewing self-identified ethical consumers revealed this tendency, to the extent that for some interviewees this affectation of affluence was a valid reason for refraining from being labelled as an 'ethical consumer'.

In the exact opposite side of this ‘ethical Shopper’ stands the ‘ethical Consumer’, an individual who through creativity and critical thinking is capable to perform his/her ethics in ways that do not necessarily require a middle class income. People of low or no income involved in allotment initiatives are a good example which illustrates this. As successfully put by a guest speaker from WestGAP (West Glasgow Against Poverty) in the public event held in order to disseminate the findings of this project to the public, “*poor people are more ethical [than affluent ones], they don’t have the money to consume as much*”.

7.3 The potentiality of ethical/political consumerism in pursuing change

Where ethical and political consumerism literature definitely meets is in the shared assumption that certain consumer behaviours involve conscious goal-oriented actions aiming towards some sort of social change. This is evident, for example, if we look at the very definition of political consumerism as “*the consumer choice of producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices*” (Micheletti et al., 2004, p. xiv). This study did not provide (nor was designed for providing) sufficient evidence to make definitive claims on whether ethical and political consumerism is – or isn’t – a ‘movement’. It did, however, provided some indications on this respect. Ethical or political consumerism does not represent a ‘traditional’ type of social movement in the sense of being a coherent, homogenous movement of members-consumers. On the contrary, there are complex dynamics of the various actors involved not only in the birth of the ‘ethical’ consumer, but also in the way ethical consumption is perceived and experienced.

By focusing the examination on the aspect of identity, this study illustrated how the discourses on ‘ethical consumption’ can vary greatly amongst individuals. The collective aspect was introduced by interviewees mostly when considering practices that require ‘others’ in order to create meaning. One such practice is boycotting; the sign value of the products as a tool for change depends greatly on the existence of a collective effort.

Here, Holzer's (2006) assertion that SMOs collectivise and communicate grievances is relevant; Kirsty's boycotting of products made in Italy because of the Italian government's policies towards Roma travellers, is an example of the difficulty individuals experience when the practice they decide to engage with is not part of a 'collective' frame and effort. Nevertheless, any strong ties and/or feelings of belonging to "*a wider, largely imagined community of like-minded consumers*" as Shaw's (2007) study suggests, was not that much supported by the evidence of this study. [This might be the result of different methodological approaches; in Shaw's study, the interviewees were recruited at a shopping event staged by 'ethical businesses' in the UK, thus perhaps participants in that study might share more similar ideas on the discourse of 'ethical' consumption.]

Having said that, the study instead provided evidence of a constructed stereotype of an ethical consumer, which is close to what I have termed here an ethical Shopper. This was supported from data extracted from both the retailers' side and the consumers' side. So, instead of a feeling of belonging, it was more a feeling of not belonging to the stereotype that interviews with consumers revealed. Moreover, it was also through other roles and not as consumers that participants rationalised their 'ethical' consumption – for example, as a member of the Animal Liberation Front (Thomas); as a member of Friends of the Earth (Linda); as a clergyman (John).

A considerable part of the interviews with self-identified ethical consumers was dedicated to the examination of this idea of change; the research was designed so as to capture their perceptions on the extent to which ethical and political consumption are capable of bringing any sort of social change. Findings illustrating the contradictory views of consumers have already been discussed in detail in the previous chapter (section 6.5). Here, the concept of change is revisited and research insights are utilised in order to advance the theoretical understanding of this aspect of ethical and political consumerism.

7.3.1 Layers of change

It has long been asserted that acts of consumption are engaged in as either ends in themselves, or means to an end (Bagozzi and Warshaw, 1990). The phenomenon of ethical/political consumerism corresponds to this later case; acts of consumption represent the means to exercise politics with a small p – or in other words, to take part in the organisation of society. In this respect, ethical consumption has been conceived as a form of sub-politics (Beck, 1996) or lifestyle politics (Giddens, 1994). It comes then as no surprise that ethical and political consumerism involves actions that are primarily enacted within the market environment, nonetheless the goals behind such behaviour can refer to all economic, political and cultural streams of society.

In the economic stream, goals may vary extensively but all refer to changes within the market structure. In terms of related practices, buying fair-trade and organic produce, and boycotting Nestle and Tesco, were amongst the examples given by participants in this study. As a ‘worker’, avoiding employers with an ‘unethical’ track of business policies was another example of showing disapproval and exercising pressure in the economic realm. In the political sphere, goals again may vary greatly, and can include criticism from single policies to whole nation policies. Practices mentioned in this study included the boycotting of all Italian produce as a criticism to the Italian government policies towards Roma travellers. Boycotts of Israeli produce have also come up in the interviews with both consumers and retailers. In the cultural sphere, changes may include consumer culture itself. Practices of DIY, vegetarianism, recycling and downshifting were amongst the examples that were given from participants in this study. Here it is important to highlight that the separation between these three streams of society was made only for illustrative purposes, and that it is actually difficult to distinguish between them as they are interconnected. In fact, the awareness and reflexivity of the participants in this study highlights this exact issue; it is this awareness that the economic, political and cultural streams as interwoven that enables them to perceive their consumption as a tool for pursuing change.

Finally, variations exist also with respect to the geography of the change; that is, it can be goals that refer to a local issue, or more global issues such as that of capitalism,

justice, animal welfare etc. In addition, goals might be short-term oriented, such as a call for boycotting a certain brand as a reaction to an objectionable business practice (e.g. Primark), or long-term oriented, such as a boycott of a multinational brand (e.g. Starbucks).

7.3.2 Reform and/or Radical change?

The ability of ethical and political consumption to bring about ‘change’ is heavily debated; discussions usually focus not only on the means (i.e. the how) but also on the nature of change (i.e. the what). These two of course are interconnected. Ethical and political consumption as the means to pursue ‘reformation’ and ‘correcting’ of existing market structures has had some success already, e.g. producers of fair-trade coffee might be getting better wages. Nonetheless, the extent to which these tactics are capable of eliminating social inequalities and environmental hazards that the capitalistic system is accused of creating and/or sustaining, and/or re-enforces is also debated. Zwick (2013) commenting on the inability of eliminating inequalities through an ‘ethical’ framed economy writes: *“nothing is more utopian than to expect the reputation economy of communicative capitalism to offer anything other than the continuation of growing economic inequality and the intensification of social injustice characteristic of extreme neoliberalism”* (p. 404).

The change that the ethical Shopper as conceptualised earlier is contributing to (consciously or not) may only be about re-forming the existing market structures and mechanisms. The praxis of shopping is deeply rooted in economic norms and structures of the current economic system, i.e. a capitalist system. Consumers who were interviewed and who claimed to see beyond the veil of capitalism, raised concerns on the extent to which ethical consumption, as a concept primarily related to shopping, is capable of bringing about any ‘real’ and radical social change. Encapsulating this in relation to environmentalism, Scott (2010) argued that *“the moral ambiguities associated with green consumerism suggest little more than a 21st century twist: “Keeping up with the Greens.” It is doubtful, I think, to suggest that most green consumerism we see is seriously redefining material consumption and the relationship to the environment”* (p. 20).

Instead, attempts to disengage from the market were considered for some a more promising route. A rather different solution to this was illustrated in Paul's story, who decided to abandon completely the 'ethical' consumption route, and instead decided to focus his effort through other means and particularly through his involvement with a pressure group concerned with issues of social justice here in the UK.

Paul's decision to not care anymore about the politics behind his consumption reflect his belief that, as consumers, it is impossible to escape the market. This is close to what Bauman (2005) also supports when he writes that: "*whatever the market touches it turns into a consumer commodity; including the things that try to escape its grip, and even the ways and means deployed in their escape attempts*" (p. 89). The study of the Burning Man festival by Kozinets (2002) however, tells a slightly different story. Through an ethnographic approach, Kozinets illustrates the way people in this festival attempt to disengage from the market. Although he does leave open the issue of whether and under which conditions people can permanently escape the market, this case is illustrative of the existence of such attempts (although characterised by temporality and locality).

The case of the Burning Man is perhaps an attempt to disengage from the market, but actually to be part of that festival, you need to pay and get a ticket. That is, you need to be a Shopper in the first place. Here, however, it is argued that there have been other attempts which may be characterised as more radical in their approach and which exactly due to their critical perspective of consumer society are denied. Fontenelle (2013) identifies some of these attempts within the environmental movement in the UK, where the most radical activists have been classified as 'domestic terrorists'. She explains that "*by radicalising their criticism of consumption and vandalising the icons of consumer society, these eco-terrorists, who in Lacanian terms could be considered the excess of the consumer society, challenge the ideology [...] and the ontological security of this model*", to conclude that "*Our consumption patterns can only be questioned with the permission of and regulation by the consumer society itself with the purpose of defending it*" (p. 362).

To sum up, the interviews with 'ethical consumers' provided some empirical evidence on the hugely debated issue of the ability and potential of ethical and political consumerism to bring about change. The reforming capacity of ethical Shopping is not always considered as adequate to deliver changes in the way some individuals may

envison. Some, like Paul, may abandon the idea of pursuing change through the marketplace completely; some others may continue shopping ‘ethically’ marketed products while also making attempts to disengage to some extent from the market. The ability to disengage from the market is a contested issue; nonetheless attempts that seem to criticise the status quo in economic structures and consumer culture do exist but are not ‘framed’ as such. Ultimately, it is for this reason that this thesis urges for an expansion of the concept of political consumerism (as discussed later on in section 7.4), so as to include practices that reflect both attempts for reforming, as well as radical approaches to change.

7.3.3 *Organising and achieving change*

Kirsty’s case (of boycotting of all Italian produce due to the Italian government’s policies towards Roma travellers), supports previous accounts of the limited power and voice of individuals exercising political consumerism, and thus the role of SMOs in collectivising and communicating the grievances to the targeted actor (Holzer, 2006).

Other insight gained from the in-depth interviews dealt with the issue of evaluating change. Participants often admitted to keep buying ethically marketed products without really knowing much of the effect of such a decision. Staying loyal to a certain decision of buying, for example, only organic, was mostly due to some sort of faith that their consumption practices will eventually, at some point achieve some change in the way. But they also seemed very pragmatic about it. There was an acknowledgement that shopping decisions may not have any particularly great immediate effect; change was mostly seen as something that happens gradually. Having said that, the case of David was an interesting one; it illustrated how the practising of ethical consumerism may be normalised to the extent that an individual keeps following the same consumption patterns even if he/she has lost faith in the very concept of ethical consumption (as a tool to pursue change).

Perhaps the most interesting insight from this research with regards to organising and achieving change refers to the limitations of political consumerism, and particularly the importance of opportunity structures. The case of STOP is an example of how different

actors for sometimes completely different reasons came together to oppose the development of a large-scale supermarket and student accommodation complex in the area of Partick. It is also a great example which illustrates the limitations of using consumer power in order to communicate grievances, exercise pressure or more generally take part in the process of shaping the immediate surroundings. The paradox here is that the target was a supermarket chain, and boycotting as a means of pressure was not possible.

7.4 Expanding the concept of political consumption

Politics and consumption have long been subsisting side by side. In ancient Greek city-states, where the idea of ‘democracy’ was born, the agora was a common space where both politics and commerce were performed. Of course, not all aspects of what we consider today as ‘democratic’ were the same; for example, women did not have (formal) voice in debates around politics, and their presence was not in the agora, but in the household. The way that agora was functioning, however, provides a good illustration that the economic activity and political discourse are not separate from each other. Today, the marketplace and the parliament are two distinct geographical spaces; nonetheless, politics with a small ‘p’ are still exercised by individuals in commercial environments, as in shops, supermarkets, etc.

What was in the Greek agora an inherently public role - going to market to debate - has now become a distinctively private matter - going to market to consume (Bradshaw et al., 2013). Under such theorisation, consumption has often been accredited a self-interested economic motivation; something which ethical and political consumerism to some extent seeks to ‘correct’ by focusing on the altruistic and non-economic motivated facet of consumerism, drawing in this respect the line between ‘ordinary’ and ‘ethical/political’ consumption. Under these assumptions, one is left to wonder when ‘the personal is political’ ceased to exist; whether politics is only about ‘others’, and not about the organising of a society, about connecting the ‘individual’ with the ‘social’? This understanding, as explained in the literature review, raises questions on the extent

to which ethical and political consumption (as perceived today) is biased towards the inclusion of only certain types of practices, while excluding other practices which do take place in the market, and which are political.

Findings from this study supported previous accounts for the inclusion of the self-interest nature of consumption as explained in the literature review; the change individuals strive to achieve through their engagement with ethical and political consumerism can derive from both personal and public issues. Moreover, the aspect of oikiosis was seen not only in participants' rationalisation for supporting, for example, fair-trade produce as a solidarity act to underprivileged workers. It was also apparent when critiquing such 'ethical' consumption practices, for example, in perceptions that it is a 'luxury' that they can afford while others cannot. This aspect of oikiosis appears to be part of the reflective process that contributes towards the creation of the stereotype of the 'ethical consumer' – or 'the ethical Shopper', and which might also hence explain their aversion towards it.

Perhaps it is important to remember that the concepts of ethical and political consumerism were developed in countries that have a relatively stable and healthy economic climate. While conducting this research, recession and crisis hit the global economy. In Europe, Greece has until now (2013) not overcome this economic turbulence which led to the adaptation of extreme austerity measures with obvious consequences to both the people and the economic structures of the country. What I have been observing since then is an interesting and inspiring change in both traditional trade and consumerism; there was a significant blooming of a barter economy (with clothes exchange events and schemes) as well as initiatives to strengthen the connections between producers and consumers (e.g. an application for mobile phones called "To the Shelf" launched in June 2013 (<http://www.totheshelf.com/about.html>), or to cut out the middlemen (such as the Potato movement (Pautz and Kominou, 2013) or to create new civil society institutions relevant to consumerism (such as 'social supermarkets' and soup kitchens).

Similar consumer initiatives and actions appear to have mushroomed in other European countries. The extreme cases of collective shoplifting and refusing to pay tolls/fares in public transport that have been observed in Greece and Spain in recent years (Pautz and

Kominou 2013 – for a detailed description of ‘collective shoplifting’ I have included a copy of this paper in Appendix 17, p. 361) are difficult to reject as practices not dealing with consumption and politics. In a similar sense, the 1970’s Autoreduction movement in Italy (Cherki and Wieviorka, 2007) is difficult to be overlooked and discarded as not representing ‘political consumerism’ just because the main aims were about lowering the prices of e.g. electricity, transportation fares and housing.

But even if we look within the UK, we can also find extreme cases that perhaps ought to be understood under the light of political consumerism. For example, as a side project during my research I have also been involved with what is termed ‘dumpster-diving’ i.e. visiting the commercial waste bins (usually during the night) and re-appropriating products that are in those bins usually because they have expired. There are very interesting insights to be drawn from such actions; the way the ‘supermarketisation’ of food retailing has forced the establishment of expiring dates of products and the consequences of doing so; the conflict of interests between supermarkets and private companies hired to take care of their waste (these companies actually seem to benefit from dumpster-diving because they pay less for disposing that waste to the landfill) etc. Additionally, as explained in the literature review, the London 2011 riots for which Žižek (2011) produced a commentary titled “Shoplifters of the World, Unite!” – after the song from The Smiths, and perhaps in reference to the political motto ‘Workers of the World, Unite’ – are also of relevance here.

Finally, another unrepresented form in accounts of political consumerism, to date, is that of the global ‘pirate movement’ that focuses on file sharing and which even entered the formal sphere of politics with the establishment of Pirate Parties across Europe. The pirate movement appeared in the beginning of 2000, emphasising the three following issues: (a) personal integrity on the Internet (which here primarily refers to critique against unwarranted wiretapping of Internet traffic); (b) file sharing and anti-commercial downloading; and (c) immaterial rights and copyright restrictions (Erlingsson and Persson, 2011, p. 122). In 2006, the Swedish Pirate Party was founded and achieved a 0.68 percent of the total votes in the elections for the Swedish parliament. Further support for this movement was gained after a new copyright law was founded by former Swedish Social-Democratic government. Under this law, police raided the headquarters

of one downloading site (The Pirate Bay) and virtually turned “*a whole generation of young people into criminals over night*” (Miegel and Olsson, 2008, p. 212). The 2009 Swedish European Parliament elections, the Swedish Pirate Party achieved a 7.1 percent of total votes (Erlingsson and Persson, 2011). A high score was also observed for the German Pirate Party that got 8.9 percent in the regional election in Berlin November 2011, followed by similar results in other regional elections in the spring of 2012 (Bengtsson, in Fredriksson, 2013).

The interesting point here is that through empirical evidence, Erlingsson and Persson (2011) argued that the most important reason why individuals voted for the Swedish Pirate Party was the importance they ascribed to the party's main political issues, and not some vague dissatisfaction with established parties as nested in popular belief. It is thus perhaps surprising that political consumption hasn't yet included in its conceptualization and measurement any aspects of file-sharing. Particularly when the typical pirate party supporter seems to be the ethical consumer's counterpart: he is usually a young male, highly educated of low-income and on rent (Erlingsson and Persson, 2011, p. 127).

Drawing a distinction between a ‘Shopper’ and a ‘Consumer’ allows for radical consumer actions, both individual and collective, which have been ostracised until now, to be included in the concept of political consumerism. To be able to perceive political consumerism as more than “*an extension to the conventional, or ‘old,’ participation repertoire*” (Strømsnes. 2009, p. 303), actions such as individual and collective shoplifting, downshifting, ‘open source’ and ‘copy left’ initiatives, dumpster-diving, autoreduction, and other actions which may fall under the market anomie (in the sense of breaking the norm) concept need to be recognised as political, despite any tendencies of criminalising deviant consumer behaviour.

7.5 Is there a need to use the adjective ‘ethical’ then?

Ethics, as the philosophical study of morality, is concerned primarily with issues of right and wrong, good and bad. Etymologically, it derives from the Latin word ‘ethica’, which comes from the Greek *ᠠᠠᠠᠠᠠᠠ* (that refers to the philosophy or the study of ethics), and which in turn derives from the adjective *ᠠᠠᠠᠠ* that means habit or custom. (The antonym of ethical is amoral, whereas the antonym of moral is immoral.)

Wittgenstein (1965) in his lecture on ethics illustrated through an analysis of world-thought-language how morality as an absolute judgment of value is ‘nonsensical’, and that along with aesthetics and metaphysics, propositions of ethics are impossible to examine through the scientific way of looking at facts. He concludes that “*Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense*” (p. 12). So, what’s the need to use the adjective ‘ethical’ then?

By viewing ‘ethics’ as something indicative of habits and constructed through historical processes, this research embraces a relativistic approach to morality; or in the words of Friedrich Nietzsche (2003, p. 96) it assumes that “*there are no moral phenomena at all, only a moral interpretation of phenomena*”. With a fragmentation of ‘universal’ moral codes that were developed and imposed mainly through religion in the western civilization at least in the last two hundred years, and the complexity that characterise social structures today, the world of business appears to be struggling to develop and lead the development of applied ethics in the context of consumption. Ethical codes existed before ethics became a brand. Moreover, Muncy and Vitell’s (1992) Consumer Ethics Scale (CES) reminds us of other aspects, or layers, of ethical conduct in contemporary consumption and consumerism (e.g. shoplifting, copyright piracy etc).

Utilisation of the ‘ethical’ and ‘political’ frames in academic thought has been acknowledged (e.g. Clarke et al., 2007; Barnett et al., 2011) as relevant to political geography; the ‘ethical’ frame as the UK counterpart of the ‘political’ frame in consumerism. Through the interviews with retailers and consumers, it became evident that the terms ‘ethical consumer’ and ‘ethical consumption’ are not as popular as one

might have expected. Nonetheless, the findings also indicated that there appears to be a positive connection between familiarity with those terms and exposure/internalisation of some characteristics tied up with the 'British context'. Retailers representing Supermarkets were all aware of this 'ethical consumption' discourse, something that did not hold true for those representing convenience shops. Those unaware of the terms and concept of ethical consumption in this study were of non-British ethnicity and not formally trained in Business Science. Of course data from this study are inadequate to support definitive claims; they are however indications that formulate and call for further enquiry. For example, one may wonder the extent to which 'ethical' consumption is primarily a British phenomenon?

'Sociological knowledge spirals in and out of the universe of social life, reconstructing both itself and that universe as an integral part of that process', Giddens once professed (1991, p. 15-16, italics in original). Academics through the reproduction of the 'ethical' frame in consumption are contributing (consciously or unconsciously) to the development of a westernised capitalistic understanding of consumption 'ethics'. Reflecting on the 'expertise power' (French and Raven, 1959) that academics hold in terms of knowledge construction and dissemination of ideas, it is very crucial to realise that our current use of the 'ethical' frame is, to some respect, contributing to the development of a code for applied consumer ethics that denotes universality. This is even more crucial if we consider that consumer action can also work as a source of ethics, and not as mere reflections of ethical perspectives that have emerged elsewhere (Arvidsson, 2013, p. 383)

It is for this reason that this thesis calls – if not for the complete abandonment, at least – for the acknowledgement that the notion of 'ethics' in which that ethical and political consumption is embedded in, bears with it certain assumptions and moral codes that are relevant to the context (culture) within which the particular frame has developed. Given the contextual nature of 'ethics', perhaps an amoral (and not immoral) view on political consumption might prove to be a more adequate conceptual framework for the study of such phenomena.

7.6 Concluding remarks

Boström and Klintman (2009) highlight that quantitative studies investigating what types of people are most likely to use the market arena for expressing political and ethical concerns, usually conclude that the typical concerned consumer belongs to the middle or upper-middle class, has a good income, is white, often a woman in her lower middle age or middle age, has children, and lives in Northern Europe or North America (paragraph 5). Such studies assume the practice of boycotting and buycotting as the main indication of ethical and political consumption; the profiling of this ‘typical’ concerned consumer is a direct outcome of the ability of an individual to engage with such practices.

Qualitative data in this thesis captured part of this tension between this ‘typical’ and a non ‘typical’ concerned consumer; the conceptual distinction between **the ‘ethical Shopper’ and the ‘ethical Consumer’** was proposed as a means to overcome the **focus on boycotting and buycotting** as the main tools of practicing ethical and political consumption, and which leads into a sort of stereotyping. Evidence from this study suggest that individuals who perceive their consumer patterns as political and/or ethical praxis acknowledge this shortfall of placing boycotting and buycotting in the centre of attention. *“I am more ethical than the ethical consumer”*, Hannah asserts.

This thesis, hence, calls for the re-consideration of the ‘ethical’ adjective as a suitable frame to analytically investigate and understand the realm of consumption as an arena for political discourse. Moreover, it calls for the recognition and inclusion of other practices which allows an understanding of the consumer as an ‘activist’, along with that of a ‘citizen’, ‘purchaser’ and/or a ‘shopper’. This fits well with previous empirical work indicating political consumerism as a supplement to an individual’s engagement in politics through other traditional political arenas (e.g. Tobiasen, 2005; Micheletti and Stolle, 2005). And politics is not only about voting, is it?

Chapter 8: Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations for future research

This is the final chapter of this thesis and as such, it aims to wrap-up major research findings and draw an overall conclusion

The chapter begins with a restatement of the aims and objectives of this project and summarises the main findings which correspond to the aforementioned research aims. The concept of ethical consumption is revisited and explained through the insight gained by the empirical investigation. The limitations of this study are then presented and discussed. The chapter continues with some recommendations and directions for those interested in conducting further research, and concludes with a section on self-reflection notes.

8.1 So, what is ethical consumption after all?

Moving towards the end of this report, and after having offered a detailed account of the theoretical framework, methodology and main research findings, it is now time to revisit the question of what *is* ethical consumption, as discussed in the introductory chapter (see Chapter 1, p. 2) and enunciate in this way this project's contribution to knowledge.

The present study aimed to offer an understanding of the phenomenon of ethical consumption based on insights gained through empirical investigation. The project focused specifically on exploring the identity, practices and efficiency of ethical consumerism. Consistent with these objectives, the sections below offer an account of ethical consumerism themed around the particular three (interconnected) aspects.

8.1.1 Reflections on the 'ethical consumer' identity

Even though the 'ethical consumer' is increasingly featuring in various institutional discourses (e.g. commercial, academic, civil society and governmental), findings from this study indicated that the use of the specific term by individuals is not very common in their everyday life, as may happen with other social identities. Findings also captured something which appears to have been overlooked in previous research: a considerable proportion of people stated that they were unfamiliar with the particular term (18.8%). Whilst this might reflect my sample, it is significant that a dramatically lower percentage was observed when people were asked about the 'green consumer' identity, where only 4.5% of the respondents expressed their non-familiarity with that term. There may be several reasons explaining this. For example, it could be argued that the concept of a 'green' consumer is perhaps more popular, and/or has been around for longer. It is also more straightforward because it is an identity which corresponds to a specific issue, that of the environment. All the above do provide some indications that help to understand the ethical consumer identity. However, what is perhaps more important is the question

it raises with regards to the extent that we force, at least as researchers, the particular concept into existence, either as an identity, a consumer category, a phenomenon etc.

The same question is further reinforced by another finding of this study. Again using data generated by the street survey, more than half of the respondents claimed to perceive themselves to be 'ethical consumers' at least to some extent (54.5%). But when confronted with a multiplicity of other adjectives to describe consumers, the 'ethical' consumer did not score as high (23.4%) as other descriptors such as a 'practical' (56.8%), 'lazy', 'thrifty' or 'well-informed' one. Such findings might be associated with the way survey questions are designed. For example, when confronted with a question on the degree of being ethical, socially desirability bias would probably do the trick, and individuals would opt for an 'ethical' perception of themselves. But when consumers are given a choice of adjectives to describe themselves as consumers, other issues such as information (well-informed), money (thrifty) and time or energy put into their consumer behaviour (lazy) seem to appeal more than morals ('ethical' and 'moral'). Such a finding, of course, doesn't suggest that consumers don't perceive themselves as ethical, but that other issues or factors might be perceived by them as more adequate self-descriptions.

This study also examined the relationship between four specific identities which appear allied in the literature: the socially responsible, the green, the ethical and the political consumer. Data from the street survey confirmed that individuals who identify themselves with one of these identities are more likely to identify also with the rest of those identities. So at least to this respect, the perceptions of consumers appear to be harmonious with those of researchers.

As with consumers, not all retailers that were interviewed were familiar with the term 'ethical consumer'. The probability of familiarity with this concept of ethical consumption appeared higher when the retailer was socialised into British consumer culture and formally educated with a business background. From the supply side, retailers' views on ethical consumers were mixed: for some they were their best customers, for others they were just a 'show-off', and for others they were non-existing. In the area where this research was conducted, ethical consumption was far from being regarded as mainstream; and an indication of this could be that convenience stores do not stock 'ethically' marketed products.

Lastly, data from the survey also pointed out a strong connection between identity salience and the purchasing of organic and fair-trade labelled goods, as well as the avoidance of over-packaged goods. It is logical to expect that ethical consumer identity is experienced and reinforced through practice. The picture however becomes more complex when we consider which types of practices are perceived – and by whom and why – to belong to ‘ethical consumerism’. And this is not as straightforward as the findings of the survey suggest.

8.1.2 Reflections on practicing ethical consumption

In terms of practices associated with ethical consumption, this study provided empirical evidence that emphasised once more the attention that researchers need to pay when interpreting consumer behaviour. In particular, quantitative data illustrated that boycotting and buycotting were indeed the prevailing practices associated with perceiving oneself to be an ethical consumer [this was also supported by qualitative data, as explained later on]. The hypothesis, however, that all people perceiving themselves to be ‘ethical’ consumers necessarily purchase organic or fair-trade goods, did not hold true. One may buy fair-trade bananas, for example, just because they are the only available type of bananas in the supermarket, as is the case with Sainsbury’s in the UK. Ethical purchasing as a normalised behaviour, as the case of David illustrated is another example of this. Merely using the purchasing of ‘ethically’ marketed products as the only criterion for framing consumers as ‘ethical’ might, thus, be misleading if the consciousness of such choice is not established.

The prerequisite of consciousness in order to characterise a purchase, let’s say, of fair-trade bananas, as ‘ethical’ was supported further by another finding from the survey. When asked about the rationale behind perceiving themselves as ethical consumers, participants in the street survey also mentioned their *awareness* of ‘ethical’ issues in the realms of production and consumption. Even if it doesn’t automatically translate into engaging with particular consumption patterns (for example buying organic or fair-trade goods), ‘awareness’ of several issues that may generate moral concerns and which in

some way relate to consumption, could be for an individual a good enough reason to ascribe to an ethical consumer identity.

The in-depth interviews with consumers offered a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences of self-identified ethical consumers. Their stories illustrated how the practicing of ethical consumption is experienced as a *work in progress*. It starts from the realisation that we live in a consumerist world, and is further affirmed through the understanding of the dynamics of the market structure (centred on the negotiations between supply and demand) and belief in agency as consumers. But this process is not static; once consciousness and awareness is established, through self-reflection consumers work and rework their understandings of what it means to be an ethical consumer. As they engage more in practicing ethical consumption, their perceptions and behaviour as consumers also evolves.

It is often the case that individuals first start with a single issue or practice in mind, for example, becoming a vegetarian, and through time they add more issues or practices in their agenda, depending on the results of their self-reflection. Since engaging with ethical consumption practices requires certain resources (information, time, money) as well as opportunity structures (such as availability), individuals at some point experience constraints and, so the need to regulate and adapt their consumer choices becomes apparent. Eventually there comes a point where consumers, due to constraints mentioned earlier, have to – what has been portrayed here as – ‘mix’n’match’ their battles.

Aside from the scarcity of resources and opportunity structures, another common problem identified through this empirical investigation are the trade-offs consumers face in their attempt to practice ethical consumerism. Andrew’s dilemma of buying organic mushrooms from the Netherlands or non organic mushrooms from a local farm is one prime example illustrating this complexity. Such trade-offs in consumer decision making usually stem from conflicting issues that consumers wish to address. It is thus, not uncommon for consumers having to choose between two or more ‘ethical’ goods (for example foreign and organic *or* local and non-organic), and struggling to make a decision.

Considering all the above, it is not unreasonable to expect that the practicing of ethical consumption involves a variety of emotions experienced by individuals. In fact this

study's empirical investigation illustrated that consumers may experience relatively strong emotions (e.g. empowerment, hope, confidence, confusion, guilt, shame, fear or disappointment) all at once even if they are in conflict with each other. This ambivalence was observed through the in-depth interviews where peoples' emotions appeared to fluctuate from empowerment and hope, to disappointment and guilt, and back, within the limited time of an interview.

Finally, with respect to the types of practices, findings from the qualitative part of this study also suggested that boycotting and buycotting are considered by the majority of self-identified ethical consumers as the two main ways of practicing ethical consumption. Nonetheless, lifestyle choices such as where to reside and/or work were also mentioned as relevant in the discourse of practicing ethical consumption. This was particularly evident in interviews with consumers who have been actively engaged in ethical consumerism for some time and who have grown to question the extent to which boycotting and buycotting can actually deliver the promises of change. Contrary to the sometimes simplistic accounts of ethical consumption seen in the literature, individuals recognise that being a consumer is only one of the roles they have in society. And for this reason, it makes sense to try and be *consistent* with their moral values and/or their willingness to pursue change not only through their purchasing choices but also through other choices in life (whether that is in the realm of work, citizenship, aesthetics, politics etc.).

Boström and Klintman (2009) raised the need for more empirical investigation into the way political consumers reflect on their roles and identities. This study provided some empirical insight not only on *the ground* upon which consumers identify themselves and act as political and ethical consumers, but also on the *degree* and *nature* of such identification.

8.1.3 Reflections on the potential of ethical consumption to bring about change

Data from this research pointed towards the existence of a particular stereotype of an 'ethical consumer': an individual who in his/her role as a consumer makes certain

choices based on market ‘ethics’ which appear to be shaped and promoted by the market itself. It is the supporting of products, services and companies which market themselves as ‘ethical’ that mostly appeal to such stereotype. Here, the purchasing of organic and fair-trade products is the most common practice associated with this stereotype. And – at least for the time being – that ‘ethical’ branding requires consumers to pay premium prices. Hence, in order to support and sustain such the ‘ethical consumer’ stereotype, people have to be able to afford it.

It probably comes as a surprise that this type of ‘ethical consumer’ is at the receiving end of critiques by some consumers and retailers who are to a considerable extent involved in ethical consumerism. Asif’s story (see section 4.2.3, p. 146) is a good example of a retailer who, while operating in the sector of organic produce, is very critical of consumers who purchase organic. Hannah’s (see section 6.3.7, p. 219) assertion of being *‘more ethical than an ethical consumer’* is another good example illustrating the disapproval the particular stereotype receives from individuals who do perceive themselves as being ‘ethical’ in their role as consumers even though they do not tick the relevant boxes in marketing surveys.

Most of the criticism of that stereotypical ‘ethical consumer’ has its roots in two separate issues: distrust in the reasoning behind an ‘ethical’ consumer choice and uncertainty of the outcome. Consumers assigned to that particular stereotype are thought to be driven by a need for distinction (for example to show-off), so their ‘ethical’ intentions are contested. This is further reinforced when people start to question the degree to which the purchasing of ‘ethically’ marketed products is (alone) capable of achieving any positive change.

With regards to potential, this study was able to identify several factors that pose limitations and which in turn affect the degree and type of change that practices of ethical consumption can achieve. Firstly, the context-specific nature of ethical consumption requires the existence of opportunity structures for people to be able to use their consumption as a tool for pursuing change. As illustrated in this study, the case of Stop Tesco Owning Partick is an example of a conflict which was not possible to be fought through boycotting. Secondly, for an individual act of boycotting and buycotting to have any result, it needs to be also part of some sort of collective effort. There is a need for both aggregated numbers of consumers and SMOs capable of collectivising

individual voices (Holzer, 2006) in order to communicate any grievances that are reflected in consumer choice. Finally, as discussed in section 7.3.2 (p. 258), practices of ethical consumption and particularly that of boycotting are solutions which are embedded in the system of logic that seems to have created the problems in the first place. It is thus not surprising that ethical consumerism as portrayed and promoted in society today is perhaps only capable of achieving incremental reforming changes rather than radical ones.

8.1.3.1 From ethical to political consumption

Taking into account all the above, this study suggested an analytical divide between an ‘ethical Shopper’ and an ‘ethical Consumer’. The former represents an understanding of an individual as a shopper, follower and reactive and who has an affluent/middle class background. Here ethics are mostly a brand. The latter views the individual as a creative, pro-active actor whose focus is in re-defining needs (through self-reflexivity). It represents an individual who has agency in all social spheres (and not just the market) and who uses ethics as a guide. In other words, the ‘ethical Shopper’ is close to the stereotype of the ethical consumer analysed above, whereas the ‘ethical Consumer’ is closer to the political consumer.

This study supports previous calls for a shift in our perspective from ethical to political consumerism. Human geographer Nick Clarke –one of the advocates for such a need to change perspectives – convincingly argued that:

A focus in political consumption changes the question. It recognises that political consumption works not only directly through the market, but also indirectly through local, national and international regulatory bodies. It changes the question from how many ethical products must be sold before, say, development is achieved, to how many ethical products must be sold before legislators are persuaded to act in such areas as trade or labour conditions. (2008, p. 1878)

In a similar manner, a view of individuals as Consumers and not Shoppers (as ‘political consumers’ and not stereotypical ‘ethical consumers’) is argued here to provide a better framework within which consumption as a tool for achieving change can be studied and understood.

8.1.3.2 But what kind of political consumption?

This study urges for an understanding of politics with a small ‘p’ – i.e. not parliamentary politics only. That should include both formal and informal systems; in this sense it urges for an even wider understanding of politics than suggested in the quote above which embraces formal roots of governance (legislation). Moreover, this study argued for a perspective of political consumption as a form (or tool) of ‘protest’ rather than ‘voting’. It also urged an inclusion of practices and behaviours that go beyond our conventional definition of ethical and political consumption (this was explained in more detail in section 7.4, p. 261).

To extend the horizons, from ‘ethical’ to political’ is not only so as to overcome the moralising of consumption. This study also argues that it is of great importance to re-evaluate what we include in such an approach in order to recognise other practices too, even if they don’t fit the ‘politically correct’ understanding of consumerism which takes for granted certain market mechanisms such as purchasing.

8.2 Assumptions and limitations of this study

As with every piece of research, this study is bound to a particular a theoretical framework and that, in itself, poses certain limitations – mainly due to its underlying assumptions. A theoretical framework is important because it sets the boundaries for a research project so as to be a manageable task, which at least in theory, with a well designed methodology can deliver empirical insights which in return may inform theoretical accounts on the topic under investigation. It’s not suggested here that an

alternative framework could have worked better, but that the particular framework, or perspective, has its own limitations which should be taken into account when considering the claims and arguments presented in this report.

One assumption which has been both encouraged (e.g. Michelletti, 2003; Follesdal, 2004) and disputed (e.g. Sassatelli, 2007; Jacobsen and Dulsrud, 2007) by scientists studying ethical and political consumerism is that consumers – viewed as rational actors – are able to make deliberate choices. Clarke (2008) identifies two assumptions which have been enduring in ethical and political consumerism literature, namely: that people act autonomously (hence people can know the consequences of their actions and they can and will adjust their actions in light of some acquired knowledge), and that people are happy to accept personal responsibility for the so called “global problems”, such as child labour. Through the in-depth interviews with consumers, this study was able to capture some of the ‘irrationality’, or better, some of the *inconsistency* of consumers in their practicing of ethical consumption. Here, it is argued that it is not a question of whether consumers act as rational agents or not, but rather a question of the degree of their autonomy. The analytical distinction between an ‘ethical Shopper’ and an ‘ethical Consumer’ that this study suggested, recognises to some extent this variation in autonomy. While the ‘ethical Shopper’ represents a ‘follower’, the ‘ethical Consumer’ is being granted some more freedom in terms of how they choose to define both their grievances and the corresponding ways to express – and even alleviate – them. What this implies is that arguments (and particularly those referring to the potentiality of ethical and political consumption) made in this study are still rooted on assumptions of consumer rationality and autonomy, however they are levelled by the recognition that the ‘real’ (compared to a theoretical) world is far more complex and non-absolute.

Another assumption this study embraces is that ethics and ethical codes are strictly human inventions. As discussed in section 7.5 (p. 265), this study proposes the abandonment of the ‘ethical’ framing and instead calls for a ‘political’ framing as more suitable (because of its less value-laden bias) concept. In other words, this study objects to the existence of *absolute* and *universal* values upon which moral propositions can be established. Such perspective might intimidate individuals who are proponents of absolute truths (e.g. positivists, religious people etc). Nonetheless it allows for a critical examination of the phenomenon of ‘ethical consumption’ by viewing ‘ethics’ in

contemporary consumption as a complex constructed system incessantly shaped by various agents with different agendas and degrees of power.

At the same time, this study also holds the assumption that academics have an immense responsibility in shaping knowledge and concepts. It is of course necessary to try and explain phenomena such as ‘ethical consumption’ when they manifest themselves in contemporary societies, and in order to do this one has to use the relevant terms. At some point, however, it is also the responsibility of academics to abandon certain framings of consumption (such as that of ‘ethical consumption’) that are found inadequate and actively push for new framings (such as ‘political consumption’) as more appropriate. Clarke (2008) has already illustrated the shift from ethical to political consumption in academic thought, and the benefits as well as drawbacks that accompany it.

Finally, this research project is also limited by the methodological approach which has followed. The methodological limitations have already been presented in the chapter dealing with the research methodology. Hence, there’s no reason to repeat them here. It might be appropriate, however, to highlight once more that the empirical data generated and used in this study are historically and geographically situated. As such, insight produced through these data is also bounded in the locale (both in terms of time and space) of this research project.

8.3 Recommendations and directions for further research

As it is often the case, due to the organic nature of research, new questions and areas worth investigating are formed both during and at the end of the undertaking of a research project. This section offers some recommendations and directions for future research based on the experience gained through this particular study. These are themed under three – somewhat overlapping – topics: areas of investigation, research design and methods, and theoretical contributions; and are presented next.

8.3.1 Areas of investigation

This study illustrated, both through a review of the literature and the gathered empirical evidence, that the use of the 'ethical' adjective in framing consumption is to a considerable extent a British phenomenon. Clarke (2008) suggested the following three reasons for this: firstly, the failure up to now to recognise the political character of such consumption, secondly, the synergy which is created as it forces us to see consumers as rational and relatively autonomous individuals, and lastly, the preference over the 'political' frame which in Britain might carry more 'baggage' than in other countries. This study provided some insight into the perceptions of consumers with respect to the 'ethical' versus the 'political' framing of consumerism. There is, though, a lot more room for further empirical investigation. A study which would aim in a systematic examination of this suspected preference of the 'ethical' over the 'political' framing in UK would provide valuable insight to understanding this aspect of contemporary consumption in Britain.

The links between consumption practices and activism are another area worth examining further within ethical and political consumerism. The need here is not as much in terms of theory, but in generating insights through empirical work. It might seem appropriate, and fit when a theorist baptises certain consumer practices within ethical consumerism as a form of activism. Nonetheless, examining the perceptions of actors themselves - the way they are framing, and reasoning their behaviour - could potentially reveal important aspects in ethical and political consumption which would be otherwise overridden if this association between consumption practices and activism was assumed *a priori*. This study offered some empirical evidence suggesting that the degree to which 'ethical' consumers perceive their behaviour as activism varies. Further research could investigate the reasons behind such variations. One way to do this would be, for example, to compare individuals who perceive themselves as 'ethical consumers' with other individuals who would adhere more to an 'activist' identity. An examination of the views of 'activists' on ethical and political consumerism could potentially also spread some light into the reasons of (not) engaging with such practices – revealing this way both the potential and limitations of such phenomena.

Finally, the research findings of this study provided some evidence on the role of emotions (and in particular that of guilt) in the reasoning of consumers who engage in ‘ethical consumption’. This study was not designed so as to focus on the aspect of emotions in ethical consumerism, making the insight provided by this study on this issue rather limited. Future research might wish to investigate further the type and functioning mechanism of emotions, not only from the side of consumers but also from the side of producers, retailers and other advocates (as well as opponents) of ethical consumption. Understanding emotions related to ethical (and political) consumption, such as guilt, empowerment, disempowerment, fairness and fear could potentially provide some more insight valuable to understand such phenomena.

8.3.2 Research design and methods

It is often the case in ethical and political consumerism research (both academic and commercial) that scholars limit their empirical investigations within national borders – as with the current study. On the one hand this might facilitate (considering the scarcity of resources for undertaking research) an in-depth investigation and understanding. On the other hand, however, it results in understandings which are context specific to the particular nation that the research was focused upon. This can potentially inflict dangers when findings of nationally bound research are used to inform theory which intends to make universal claims (as with ethical and political consumerism).

Jacobsen and Dulsrud (2007) identify in the arguments on ethical and political consumerism what they call a “*generic active consumer model*”. Rooted on this model is a belief that the active consumer is a “*universal entity, available across nations and time*” (p. 469). Drawing on findings from previous research, Jacobsen and Dulsrud (2007) convincingly illustrated that individuals assess their responsibilities and their powers as consumers differently across both nations and historical periods. It is therefore of great importance that future research considers engaging with a cross-national research design.

Insights from the research project presented in this thesis could benefit from further investigation into the identity of the ‘ethical consumer’ across two or more countries.

Findings from such studies could provide further evidence in order to advance our understanding on the 'ethical' framing and perhaps even provide some explanations as to why the 'ethical' adjective appears to be favoured in Britain.

In terms of methods, this study made particular use of two popular methods: interviewing and surveying. As explained in the methodology chapter, these methods were selected amongst others because – more than anything else – they served best the research needs (which were mostly descriptive). Further research however, might want to consider two less popular (in the literature of ethical and political consumption) research methods; that of focus groups and long term observation. Each method is capable of eliciting different types of data, which best serve different types of questions. This study has already provided some evidence on particular aspects of ethical consumption based on individuals' perceptions. It has for example illustrated how the meaning of ethical consumption varies across individuals who nonetheless adhere to the same 'ethical consumer' identity. Conducting focus groups could explore further these tensions between consumer perceptions. Focus groups may also be an appealing research method for examining further the analytical distinction between the 'ethical Shopper' and the 'ethical Consumer' that was proposed in this study. In addition, longer term ethnographic work could prove valuable in generating some insight on the actual practicing of ethical consumption – knowledge which until now is rather limited in this respect but much needed if we are to understand in more depth differences between discourse and practices of ethical and political consumption.

8.3.3 Theoretical contribution

Much theoretical work is still needed to enhance understanding of the political aspect of consumption. To date, there have been several attempts to analytically bridge ethical and political consumption as concepts originating from separate disciplines. Most work, however, has been carried out at – what Stember (1991) identifies as – a multidisciplinary (that is several disciplines providing a different perspective) and an inter-disciplinary (that is integration of the contributions of several disciplines to a problem or issue, bringing parts of independent knowledge into harmonious

relationships through strategies such as relating part with the whole or the particular and the general) level. What is yet missing, is argued here, is a transdisciplinary approach, in the sense of work aiming in unifying intellectual frameworks beyond disciplinary perspectives (Stember, 1991, p. 4).

Finally, current theoretical perspectives on ethical and political consumption appear to be not only influenced by disciplinary paradigms but also by geographical location (as explained earlier). Therefore, approaches on ethical and political consumerism need to take into account the different ways that “*consumers and consumer roles are framed in interactive processes in markets, governance structures, and everyday life*” (Jacobsen and Dulsrud, p. 469). There is still much work needed with respect to the theoretical understanding of such phenomena – i.e. developing and/or adjusting of theories in order to recognise and cater for this context-specific nature of the respective phenomena.

8.4 Self-reflection and final remarks

This chapter revisited the concept of ethical consumption and provided a perspective on this phenomenon enhanced by the research findings. It also touched upon the assumptions and limitations of this particular research project. Some comments and directions aimed at researchers interested in carrying out studies on ethical and political consumption were then presented. Before closing this report, I would like to add a few notes based on my self-reflection as the researcher of this project.

Back in 2005, when I first got introduced to the concepts of ethical and political consumption as a prospective PhD student, the available literature was rather limited. It was a relatively new concept and area of study. This meant that the particular area of study was not saturated - there was plenty of space for undertaking interesting research. At the same time, however, exactly due to such “newness”, it was perhaps more demanding, making it an even more complex task for a lone ‘novice’ researcher.

For those considering embarking on a PhD and choosing this area of interest, I would emphasise that there is plenty of room for interesting and exciting research. Having said

that, it is important to consider also the backdrops related with choosing a relatively ‘new’ field to make the first steps towards becoming an independent researcher.

As a final point, I would like to highlight the difficulty that I experienced in my attempt to remain personally detached from this project. This was probably amplified by my own interest in the topic as well as my personality traits, but researching in an area that you actually live and experience in your everyday life can be challenging. The reason I raise this point is not so as to discourage researchers from taking interest in such areas of study, but rather to caution them of this potential risk and prompt careful planning beforehand so as to minimise any such risk. Even just the awareness before hand of such a risk, and thus the opportunity to start with the ‘right’ mindset, I feel might be advantageous in most of the cases.

8.5 Some general questions to elicit inspiration

When Mairy, one of the interviewees (see Chapter 6.3.3), asked *me* to tell *her* whether she is an ethical consumer or not, I was struck. I felt like I was supposed to be a doctor and she was anxiously waiting for my diagnosis. Motivated by that incident, I decided to include here a few questions which are hoped to be useful not only for researchers but also for individuals and collectives interested in ethical consumerism:

- Why make (keep) the distinction between ‘ordinary’ and ‘ethical’ consumption?
- When and how does ethical consumption become a burden / a solution?
- What type of change do we envision?
- Can we really achieve this change (just) through our wallet?
- If not, which other tools can help us pursue change?

They are in the form of questions on purpose; the aim here is to inspire further development in thought rather than to suggest certain paths labelling them as ‘the most appropriate’. I am not a doctor (even if I do eventually get a Doctorate). Through the undertaking of this project I have gained some ‘expertise’ - and based on that I have expressed my conclusions and contribution to knowledge in this thesis. Ultimately, however, on questions such as the one posed by Mairy, I feel people should decide for themselves.

Appendices

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1. Public Event Overview



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH



Public Event – June 2010



Who is the ethical consumer?

Research findings – discussion – networking

2. Description

The free public event on Ethical Consumption was part of the West-End Festival in Glasgow. The event was held on Tuesday 22nd of June 2010 between 5pm and 7pm in Hillhead Library and had the following four aims:

- communicate findings of my academic research on ethical consumption
- generate a public debate on consumption and ethics
- promote local groups and initiatives
- provide a space for networking amongst individuals and groups interested in those issues

The evening was structured in four sections: a 20 minute power-point presentation of my academic research conducted in that area of Glasgow, a brief introduction and

comments from invited speakers of six local groups, a 30 minute public discussion/debate and a 30 minute informal networking over coffee/tea and biscuits.

3. Involved parties

The six invited speakers represented the following groups: West Glasgow Against Poverty (WestGAP); Partick Community Council; Friends of the Earth-Glasgow; West-End Transition; Drumchapel L.I.F.E. (Life is for everyone); and Woodlands Community Garden and Energy Awareness Hub.

Facilitation of the event/discussion was undertaken by Evelyn O'Donnell, Engagement Network Co-ordinator at the Community Planning Partnership (Glasgow).

4. Outcome

Forty people attended this event. The event succeeded in generating a debate by creating the space where different and conflicting views on ethics and consumption were shared and explored. According to feedback, the event also worked as a catalyst for further collaboration amongst some of the invited groups - an outcome which was not anticipated during the planning process of this project.

5. Evaluation

The event was evaluated in three stages: a) questionnaires at the end of the event completed by attendees, b) informal chats with representatives of invited groups after the event, and c) written evaluation/reflections from the organiser.

Sharing research findings and holding a public discussion/debate were the main two features of this project which attendees – according to feedback - enjoyed the most. The opportunity to meet other people/groups was also embraced positively. Some of the attendees' comments on the strengths of the event - illustrating the impact of this project - were the following:

“Good overall view on ethical consumption, good points from speakers/audience that were new to me”

“Great to hear research findings –thanks for the opportunity”

“The various view points – the outcome of research”

“Interactive discussion, relevant research/discussion allowed me to hear other points of view”

6. Surprises

Liaising with the West-End Festival and including this event in their brochures resulted in grabbing the attention of media; I was invited to attend a BBC Radio Scotland morning show where I had the opportunity to provide on air some results from my research.

7. Sponsorship

The event was generously funded by the Edinburgh Beltane – Beacons for Public Engagement and The University of Edinburgh Development Trust through a Small Project Grant [ID: 3913].

8. Awards

Due to the particular public event, I was awarded the Knowledge Exchange Prize 2010 for Early Career Researchers (School of Social and Political Science, The University of Edinburgh).

2. Slides with research findings

Below are the slides of the research findings that were used in the free public event I organised back in 2010. For an overview of the event itself please consult Appendix I, page 278

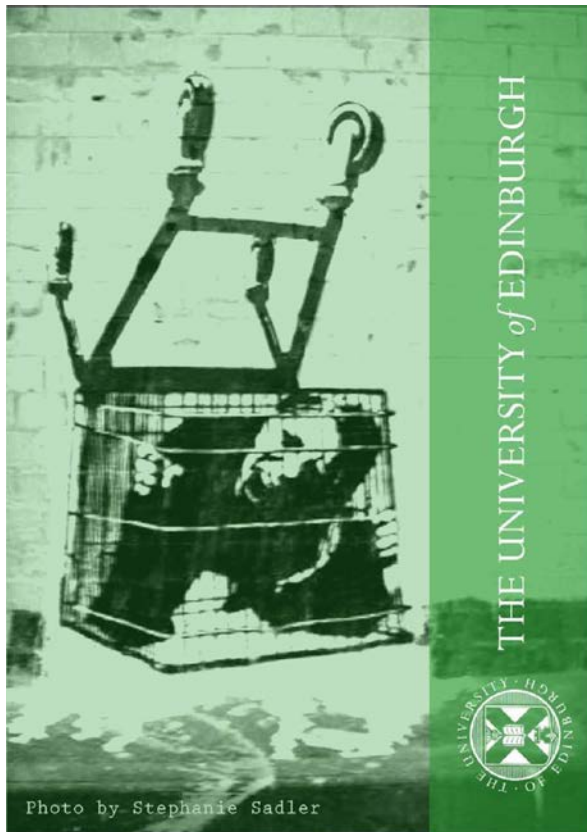
GLASGOW'S
WEST END
FESTIVAL

EDINBURGH BELTANE

open minds



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH



WHO IS THE **ETHICAL** CONSUMER?

**HILLHEAD LIBRARY
22ND JUNE 2010**

THREE QUESTIONS

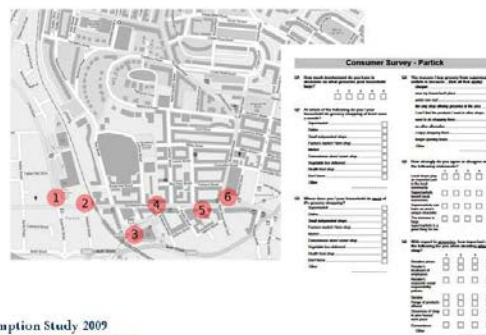
- What is 'ethical' consumption ?
 - How do we experience it ?
 - Is buying 'ethically' enough ?

THE RESEARCH

ETHICAL CONSUMERS



PUBLIC



Ethical Consumption Study 2009



RETAILERS

FINDINGS

VIEWS: RETAILERS

- Being ethical is buying fair-trade, organic and environmental friendly; some sensitivity on CSR policies too.
- Some retailers do not see why consumers would buy products marketed as fair-trade or organic / don't see a need to stock any

“...LIKE, UH **GREEN** PEOPLE...”



“they are showing off to each other. They say ‘stop wastage’. They come in, they put the product in a cloth hand-bag on their arm - style, you know...”

But you see, when you pass them in the street, they’ve got a can of coke and they throw it in the street. I see so many people like that.”

WHO ARE THEY?

“I suppose they are *richer*, more *educated* people...I’d say a lot of university types, a lot of media types are more ethical just because it’s more *fashionable* just now...”

“Normally the *elderly* people... the other age groups they just want the products.”

“I’d say our customers they’re not particularly [political]...they think it’s a good place to be seen, it’s more about their *self-image*.”

PRICE

*“a lot of people think that everything in this shop is organic or fair trade. And it’s not, because the **price** of organic, fair trade sourced products is so much greater than the bad stuff”*

*“when the **economic crisis** first happened, we decided to be **a bit less ethical** and just get the prices down so that people would continue coming in and it worked”*

VIEWS: PUBLIC



organic



fair-trade



local



practical



lazy



ethical

	AVAIL./ RANGE	PRICE	TRUST
Organic	9.8%	47.3%	26.8%
Fair-trade	31.2%	31.2%	12.5%
Local	33%	26.8%	0%

VIEWS: ETHICAL CONSUMERS

- Aware of **impact** of their consumption
- Use of consumer **power** to achieve change
- Strong **emotions**: guilt, responsibility-taking, confusion, cynicism, pessimism, empowerment
- Difficulties in getting the **message** across. Sometimes it is not enough, adequate or feasible (e.g. Tesco in Partick)

*“I am slightly boycotting Italy at the moment because of the way they are treating Roma, but I think **it wouldn't be obvious what I was doing and why** I was doing it...we are not big consumers of products from Italy anyway”*

- **Choices** on shopping; residency; occupation; leisure; partner and friends
- **Constrains** introduced by time; availability; information / knowledge; money

*“if it’s a week where I haven’t got much in the bank, I won’t buy the **expensive** one; I’ll just buy a **normal** brand of coffee”*

*“he looked on the computer, picked out six jobs and said: ‘what do you think of that one?’ And I felt pressured to say okay. It was working for Starbucks! I felt like they might refuse my benefits if they thought I was being **too particular**”*

THE TRAP (?)

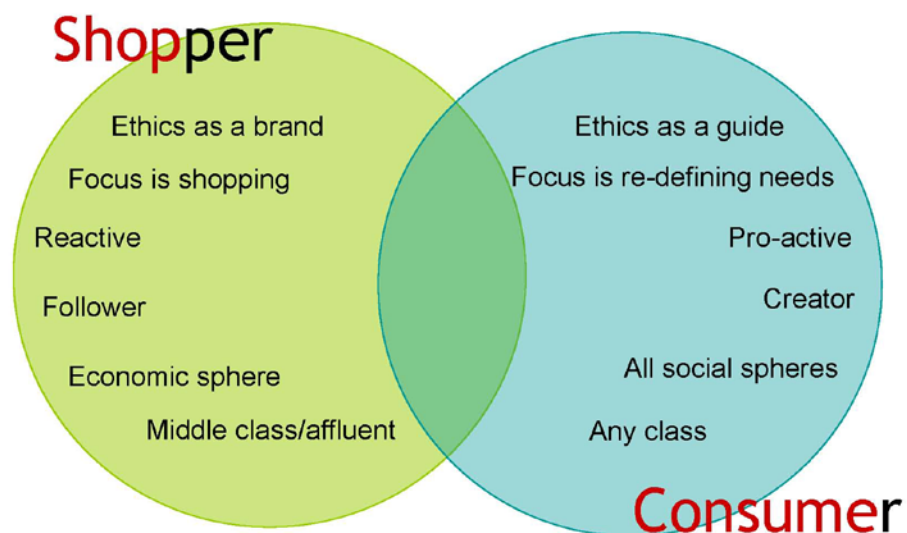
- **Easier** than direct action/civil participation
- **Danger** of seeing the tree and missing the forest and of **disengaging** from other forms of civic participation.

“it lets people off the hook. Instead of actually going out there and getting their hands dirty and do stuff, they keep going buying a cup of coffee”

“it’s almost worse than nothing because the fact that I do that tiny thing enables me to get away with sliding on the much bigger things”

REFLECTIONS

TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE **ETHICAL**



“It’s advertised on the television that you can be an ethical consumer if you buy from the Co-operative, if you buy fair-trade for example...and I’m thinking maybe they are jumping on band wagons; maybe it’s not just for to be ethical, that’s to actually sell more products. Because **it’s in people going ‘oh, that’s ethical so therefore I’ll buy it’.** ”

RE-DEFINING THE QUESTIONS

- Why make (keep) the distinction between ‘ordinary’ and ‘ethical’ consumption?
- When and how does ethical consumption become a burden / a solution?
- Can we really change society through our wallet?
- If not, which other tools can help us pursue the changes we envision?

3. Retailers' questionnaire cover page

Ethical Consumption Study 2009



Man with shopping basket of groceries low section, blurred motion © Getty Images

The study

This study is an integral part of my PhD thesis. It aims to gain insight into the 'ethical' aspect of consumption through a series of interviews and surveys with retailers - as well as consumers.

This questionnaire

This questionnaire has been designed in order to collect relevant views of retailers who operate in the West End area of Glasgow.

Why should I spend 5 minutes of my time to complete this questionnaire?

Your views are *invaluable* for this study!

You are not obliged to take part in this research. However, by completing this short questionnaire you will be helping me and the academic community to understand what ethical consumption is and how it works. In return, you will be granted access to the main findings once it is completed in September 2010.

Keeping in touch

For further details, updates on the study's progress, or to leave any comments / feedback please visit <http://ethicalconsumptionstudy.wordpress.com>

You can contact me (Ms Margarita Kominou) directly on 09875 678 765



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

If needed, you may contact my supervisors:

Prof. Janette Webb (jan.webb@ed.ac.uk) or Dr. Hugo Gorringe (h.gorringe@ed.ac.uk)

4. Retailers' informed consent page for the questionnaire

Data Handling

I will store any data collected from this questionnaire anonymously and in a secure place for a maximum of one year after the completion of this study (estimated time September 2011). The information you provide here will be used solely for the purpose of this research; no information will be distributed to any third parties.

Research findings will be mainly used to inform my doctoral thesis. Access to the main findings will be available to all participants in this research. Some of the main research findings will also be published in the study's internet blog. Where appropriate, analysed data might be used at a later time for academic article publications.

Informed Consent

To make use of the data you provide through this questionnaire, I am required by my university to demonstrate that you voluntarily take part in my research and that you are happy with the way data will be treated as explained above. Before proceeding with completing the questionnaire, please answer the following:

	<i>NO</i>	<i>YES</i>
Has the purpose of this research been explained to you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you aware of the uses to which data will be put?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would you like to be anonymised in the report?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would you like your organisation to be anonymised in the report?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would you like to receive a copy of the report?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Date: __/__/2009

Your signature: _____

5. The retailers' questionnaire

Ethical Consumption Study 2009

Questionnaire for Retailers - Please answer all questions

A2 How many people are currently employed within your organisation? (Please tick the appropriate box)

9 people or less.....

between 10 and 49 people.....

between 50 and 249.....

between 250 and 499.....

more than 500.....

A3 Do you currently stock any products marketed as:

	No	Yes
fair trade	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
environmental friendly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
against animal testing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
local produce	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A4 Within the last five years, has your organisation actively sought to stock products marketed as:

	No	Yes
fair trade	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
environmental friendly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
against animal testing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
local produce	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A5 Based on your experience, within the last five years consumer demand of _____ products has:

	increased	decreased	stayed the same	don't know N/A
fair trade	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
environmental friendly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
against animal testing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
local produce	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A6 On a scale from 1 to 5, how important are the following for your organisation and its image? (1=very important, 5=not important at all)

	1	2	3	4	5
low prices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
quality of products	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
convenience of location	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
specialisation (offering goods not available elsewhere)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ethical business policies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
other: please specify.....					

A7 What proportion of your customers would you say incorporate ethical or political issues in their decisions when shopping?

less than 10%.....

11-30%.....

30-50%.....

51-70%.....

more than 70%.....

don't know/ don't wish to answer.....

A8 Within the last five years, my organisation has at least once ... (please tick all that apply)

collected money for a local charity.....

collected money for natural disasters.....

supported the local community by sponsoring volunteer projects.....

considered the overall social impact of its business decisions.....

partnered with minority owned suppliers/companies.....

partnered with environmentally friendly suppliers/companies.....

aligned its marketing strategies with a particular social cause.....

monitored global fair labour standards/practices (e.g. child labour regulations, working conditions, etc.).....

tracked sources of global raw material and/or suppliers.....

monitored the impact of its business on environment.....

other: please specify.....

A9 On a scale from 1 to 5, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree)

	1	2	3	4	5
Our customers determine what we stock.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feedback from our customers does not influence how we run our business.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consumer activism constitutes a serious danger to our business.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A10 Thinking about consumer attitudes in general, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree)

	1	2	3	4	5
Consumers ultimately care only about price.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consumer boycotts have never been successful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consumers care about ethical issues when shopping.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A11 Has your organisation ever responded to consumer boycotts?

No
Yes

If yes, how?.....

A12 Are you aware of Tesco plans to build a large-scale supermarket in the area of Partick?

No
Yes

A13 On a scale from 1 to 5, to what extent do you feel that Tesco's new supermarket development at Partick may impact (1=to a great extent, 5=not at all)

	1	2	3	4	5
your organisation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
local business?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the local community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A14 Did you know that a group called Stop Tesco Owning Partick (STOP) was formed in order to oppose Tesco's plans?

No
Yes

A15 Is there something that you would like to add to any of the issues covered above?

Follow up interviews

B1 To gain further understanding on some of the issues covered above, I am aiming to do a series of short (30 min) interviews.

Yes
No

Would you be interested in taking part?

B2 If your answer to the above question was *Yes*, please provide me with some days/times that you are available to meet.

Your details

C1 For how long have you been working within this organisation? (please tick the appropriate box)

less than a year.....

between 1 and 5 years.....

for more than five years.....

C2 Please provide your name and position within your organisation.

Thank you for taking the time to help me with my research!

6. A descriptive account of the retailers’ questionnaire

Question A2: This question was designed to give an indication of the size of the organisation by providing the number of people currently employed within their organisation. Participants could choose amongst the following options: “9 people or less”; “between 10 and 49 people”; “between 50 and 249 people”; “between 250 and 499 people”; “more than 500 people”. The breakdown was based on the European Commission’s (2005) recommendations for defining Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME)¹.

Question A3: This question aimed to get a description of the “ethically” marketed products that were in stock within each shop. The question was a multiple-choice one and stated “Do you currently stock any products marketed as: fair trade; organic; environmental friendly; against animal testing; local produce”. The question was framed to capture answers based on the marketing of products and not on the perceptions of the participants. Moreover, there is a plethora of existing labelling schemes and certifications that could be included under the “ethically marketed” term. For this reason, it was decided to provide five categories that seem to be most relevant with the grocery industry. In retrospect, the option to include “other” as an additional answer to this question might have been beneficial. It could have provided some more insight on what products are in stock and an indication on whether other categories (along with the five identified ones) might be relevant.

¹ According to the European Commission (2005), an enterprise is “any entity engaged in an economic activity, irrespective of its legal form”(page 12). There are three criteria set by the European Commission to help define SME’s. These are: staff headcount, annual turnover and annual balance sheet figures. All three criteria are important in order to categorise an enterprise as a micro, small or medium sized one.

For this study, only the number of employees was measured so as to give an indication of the size of the respective organisations. Getting detailed information on annual turnover and balance sheets is believed to not add any particular insight critical for this study.

Question A4: This question asked whether the organisation has actively sought to stock “ethically” marketed products within the last five years. This question made use of the same categories of “ethically” marketed products as question A3. Participants were prompted to answer “Yes/ No” for each of these five categories.

Question A5: This question was designed to measure the participant’s perception of any changes in the consumer demand of “ethically” marketed products within the last five years. This question used again the same categories of “ethically” marketed products as questions A3 and A4. The options given for each of the categories was “increased; decreased; stayed the same; don’t know/NA (Non Applicable)”.

Question A6: This question aimed to measure the participant’s perception of the importance of the following factors for the organisation and its image: *low prices; quality of products; service; convenience of location; specialisation (offering of goods not available elsewhere); ethical business policies*. The option to answer “other” as an important factor for the organisation and its image was also provided.

Question A7: This question asked respondents to provide an estimate of the percentage of their customers who incorporate political or ethical issues in their shopping decisions. The available answers were: less than 10%; 11-30%; 31-50%; 51-70%; more than 70%; don’t know/don’t wish to answer.

Question A8: This question was adopted from an HSRM survey in 2007 in order to measure practices of the retailers that could be considered as expressions of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Participants could choose amongst eleven different practices and/or provide other ones that they felt were related but not included.

Questions A9 and A10: These questions aimed to generate some insight into the views of retailers with respect to consumer power and consumer attitudes. Participants were

asked to indicate on a Likert scale the degree they agree or disagree with the following six statements: *Our customers determine what we stock; Feedback from our customers does not influence how we run our business; Consumer activism constitutes a serious danger to our business; Consumers ultimately care only about price; Consumer boycotts have never been successful; Consumers care about ethical issues when shopping.* The six statements were grouped under two set of questions: question A9 included statements concerning consumer power in relation to the particular businesses, whereas question A10 included more general views on consumer power and attitudes.

Question A11: This question was a closed-ended one prompting participants to indicate whether their organisation has ever responded to a consumer boycott. If participants provided a positive answer, they were also invited to explain how they responded to such boycott.

Question A12: This question aimed at measuring the awareness of participants of Tesco's development plans to build a large-scale supermarket in the area of Partick. Available answers were "Yes" and "No".

Question A13: The aim of this question was to measure the perceived impact of Tesco's development plans for Partick on the participant's organisation as well as the local businesses and community. The question was designed as a Likert scale inviting participants to rate the extent of the impact by providing answers from 1= to a great extent up tot 5= not at all.

Question A14: This question measures the participants' awareness on the existence of the STOP campaign group. Available answers for this question were "Yes" and "No".

Question A15: This was an open ended question providing space for the participants to add their comments. The question was purposively worded in such way so as to invite

participants to include anything they thought was relevant but not integrated in the questionnaire.

Question B1 and B2: These questions invited participants to take part in the follow-up interviews. Participants were asked to indicate their interest in being interviewed (question B1) and then to provide some dates and times when they would be available to be interviewed (question B2).

Questions C1 and C2: At this final part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked some personal details that were deemed necessary. Question C1 asked participants to indicate for how long they have been working within their organisation. Available answers were: for less than a year; between one year and five years; for more than five years. This information was considered as necessary in order to evaluate to some extent reliability of responses. For the same reason the participants' position within their organisation was also asked (question C2). Finally, respondents were asked to provide their name (question C2) mainly in order to facilitate further communication.

7. Interview guide for retailers

1. Could you tell me more about the organisation (and the branch) you are representing?

- How long have you been working in the retail sector?
- How long have you been working in this particular shop?

2. Have you heard the term ‘ethical’ consumption before?

- In the retail sector, who do regard as ethical consumer?

3. Does your organisation have ‘ethical’ customers?

- Does your organisation address the needs of such customers?
- How and in what way?

4. Can a corporation be ‘ethical’?

- How?
- To what extent would you describe your organisation as such?

5. Does your business have any positive or negative impact on the society and/or environment?

- In what way?
- Who is accountable for this? How?

6. What is the role of government and governmental policies in this?

7. Do you feel have the power to change business practices?

- How
- Have concerns about ethical consumption changed your business?

8. In the past, has your organisation been the target of consumer activism?

- Why and how?
- What happened?

9. Could you tell me a little more about Tesco and Stop.

- How did you find out about this?
- Where you involved in this in any way?
- What were the issues in this conflict?

Are you an ethical consumer?

Your views are welcome and invaluable for an academic study aiming to explore ethics in the context of consumption.

To arrange for an interview over coffee/tea, please contact:



Margarita Kominou
PhD student
Sociology, The University of Edinburgh
THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Tel: 07787 09 72 52
<http://ethicalconsumptionstudy.wordpress.com>

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9. The interview guide for ethical consumers



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Interview Guide for Ethical Consumers

Name:	Date:
Contact details:	Time:
	Location:
	Duration:
Give details on study, use of data, anonymity and confidentiality...	

Questions

1. *How did you find about this study?*

2. *Could you tell me a few things about yourself and your consumption.*
 - what is your occupation, family status?
 - who is usually doing the shopping in your household?
 - which issues are important to you when buying products and services?
 - what do you buy every/most of the weeks and where from?

3. *Have you heard the term 'ethical consumer' before?*
 - when/where?

- can you remember the first time you heard/read this term being used?
 - do/would you use this term to describe yourself or others?
- 4. *What does being an 'ethical' consumer means for you?***
- who is, in your opinion, an ethical consumer?
 - what makes an ethical consumer stand out from the rest of consumers?
- 5. *What is the 'ethical' aspect in your consumption?***
- can you give me some examples (practices and /or lifestyles) that justify you being an ethical consumer?
- 6. *When, how and why did you become an 'ethical' consumer?***
- was there a conscious decision involved?
 - was there a specific point in time, or event that played a catalytic role in this?
 - have you made any particular changes in your consumption patterns and lifestyle from the moment you ascribed yourself to such an identity?
- 7. *How does ethical consumption work for you in practice?***
- do you follow any rules on what you should buy or avoid, for example? who makes those rules?
 - what sources of information do you use in order to make choices in shops?
 - how does being an ethical consumer translates to you in different contexts?
(eg. family, workplace etc.)

8. *How easy or difficult is for you to be an ethical consumer?*

- are there any situations/factors which constrain you from practicing 'ethical' consumption?
- could you think of me some recent examples?

9. *How do you feel about your consumer power?*

- as an ethical consumer, to what extent do you feel you can make a difference?
- to what extend do you feel you have made a difference until now?
- are there any stories of success or failure you could give me?
- what would in your opinion make ethical consumption be more effective?

10. *Are your decisions in the marketplace sufficient to effectively pursue changes? For example, except shopping, have you ever engaged in any (other) activities (such as joining campaigns, protests, lobbying, etc.) in order to pursue the same issues that you also address through your consumption?*

- how would you compare ethical consumerism with other forms of protest available to you?
- would you consider your consumption a political act? if yes, to what extent?
- have you ever been across the term political consumerism? What do you think is the meaning of this term?

11. Were you aware of Tesco's development plans in the area of Partick?

- *of the existence of STOP campaign group?*
- *where you involved in any way in this conflict?*

12. Is there anything relevant to our discussion that you would like to add before we end this interview?

13. You have contributed greatly to this study. Please take one-two of these chocolate bars as a small thank you gift. Could you tell me why you chose those specific ones?

Thank you for the time you put aside to do this interview!

10. Informed consent for ethical consumer interviews

Ethical Consumption Study 2009: Interviews with ethical consumers

This study is an integral part of my PhD thesis. It aims to gain insight into the 'ethical' aspect of consumption through a series of interviews and surveys with consumers - as well as retailers.

I will be analysing and presenting data gathered from this interview anonymously: your real name and your contact details will not appear in any report I produce. For the purpose of being able to contact you, however, I will store all personal information (i.e. name and contact details) you provide to me in a secure place where - except myself - no third party will have access. I will be keeping these data for a maximum of one year after the completion of this study (estimated time September 2011) and then I will destroy them.

Findings of this research will be mainly used to inform my doctoral thesis. Access to a report illustrating main findings will be available to all participants in this research. Some research findings will also be published in the study's internet blog (<http://ethicalconsumptionstudy.wordpress.com>). Where appropriate, data might also be used at a later time for the production of academic articles.

Your Consent

To make use of the data you provide through this interview, I am required by my university to demonstrate that you voluntarily take part in my research and that you are happy with the way data will be treated as explained above. Before proceeding with the interview, please answer the following:

	<i>NO</i>	<i>YES</i>
Has the purpose of this research been explained to you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you aware of the uses to which data will be put?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would you like to receive a copy of the report?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

To receive your copy, please provide an email address
and I will send it to you

Date: __/__/2009

Your signature: _____

Thank you for your time and willingness to help me with this study!

Please keep this copy for your records. For any further questions, please contact me (Ms Margarita Kominou) on 07787 09 72 52 or ethicalstudy2009@gmail.com

11. Letter to request access

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Margarita Kominou and I am a doctoral student in Sociology at the University of Edinburgh. As part of my thesis on ethical consumption, I am currently undertaking some research in Partick and would like your help in accessing consumers in this area.

In particular, I would be very grateful if you could grant me permission to stand outside your premises (entry/exit doors of your building) for some hours within the month November 2009 and invite people to participate in my study by filling a short anonymised questionnaire – a copy of which I have attached for you to have a look.

This survey is an integral part of my research and will complement a series of in-depth interviews already carried out with both consumers and retailers in Partick. I would like to reassure you that both the questionnaire and my practice of recruiting participants are in line with the British Sociological Association's and my University's codes of conduct for social research .

In return for your generous help, I will be able to provide – upon request- a detailed report of the findings of this study.

To let me know of your decision upon this request and/or to obtain some more information on the study, please contact me directly on 07787 XX XX XX or email me at M.Kxxxx@sms.ed.ac.uk. If needed, you may contact my supervisors Dr Hugo Gorringer (xxxxx@ed.ac.uk) or Professor Janette Webb (xxxxxx@ed.ac.uk).

Thank you in advance for your consideration and I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

12. Survey Demographics

gender				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
male	45	40,2	40,2	40,2
female	67	59,8	59,8	100,0
Total	112	100,0	100,0	

age group				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
16 to 21 years old	7	6,3	6,3	6,3
22 to 26 years old	20	17,9	17,9	24,1
27 to 35 years old	29	25,9	25,9	50,0
36 to 45 years old	13	11,6	11,6	61,6
46 to 64 years old	34	30,4	30,4	92,0
65 years old and over	9	8,0	8,0	100,0
Total	112	100,0	100,0	

nationality				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
British	93	83,0	83,0	83,0
other EU national	16	14,3	14,3	97,3
non-EU national	3	2,7	2,7	100,0
Total	112	100,0	100,0	

employment				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
part time	15	13,4	13,4	13,4
full time	51	45,5	45,5	58,9
unemployed	10	8,9	8,9	67,9
retired	20	17,9	17,9	85,7
student	15	13,4	13,4	99,1
other	1	0,9	0,9	100,0
Total	112	100,0	100,0	

highest educational level achieved				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
primary education	1	0,9	0,9	0,9
lower level of secondary education	5	4,5	4,5	5,4
secondary education	21	18,8	18,8	24,1
college degree	26	23,2	23,2	47,3
university undergraduate degree	43	38,4	38,4	85,7
university postgraduate degree	16	14,3	14,3	100,0
Total	112	100,0	100,0	

residency				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Partick	87	77,7	77,7	77,7
other area of Glasgow	18	16,1	16,1	93,8
other	7	6,3	6,3	100,0
Total	112	100,0	100,0	

gross income				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
On benefits	14	12,5	12,5	12,5
0 - 15,000	46	41,1	41,1	53,6
15,000 - 30,000	42	37,5	37,5	91,1
More than 30,000	10	8,9	8,9	100,0
Total	112	100,0	100,0	

political beliefs				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
right	13	11,6	11,6	11,6
centre	34	30,4	30,4	42,0
left	44	39,3	39,3	81,3
not interested	13	11,6	11,6	92,9
other	8	7,1	7,1	100,0
Total	112	100,0	100,0	

13. Survey Cards

Q1: How much involvement do you have in decisions on what groceries your household buys?

- [1] *I make all the decisions*
- [2] *I make most of the decisions*
- [3] *I have a bit of involvement*
- [4] *I am not involved in decisions*
- [5] *Don't know*

Q2 and Q3

- ◆ Supermarket
 - ◆ Online
 - ◆ Small independent shops (Greengrocer/ Bucher / Fishmonger / Bakery)
 - ◆ Farmers Market / Farm shop
 - ◆ Convenience store / corner shop
 - ◆ Have vegetable box delivered
 - ◆ Health Food shop
 - ◆ Other type of shop
 - ◆ Don't know
- Other...?

Q4: The reason I buy my grocery from supermarket outlets is because...

- ◆ It's cheaper
- ◆ It's closer to my house/work place
- ◆ I can find everything I need under one roof
- ◆ It's the only shop offering grocery in the area
- ◆ I can't find the products I want in other shops
- ◆ I am used to do my shopping there
- ◆ I have no other alternative
- ◆ I enjoy shopping there
- ◆ It has longer opening hours

Other...?

Q6 and Q7

- [1] *Very important*
- [2] *Moderately important*
- [3] *Unimportant*
- [4] *Don't know*

Q5: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- [1] *Strongly agree*
- [2] *Agree*
- [3] *Disagree*
- [4] *Strongly disagree*
- [5] *Don't know*

Q8: How often do you...

- [1] *Always*
- [2] *Very Often*
- [3] *Sometimes*
- [4] *Rarely*
- [5] *Never*

Q9: What do you think prevents you from buying food produced locally?

- ◆ I don't think about/pay attention to where the food I buy is produced
- ◆ I don't have time to think about where the food I buy is produced
- ◆ I don't know which food is locally produced and which isn't
- ◆ I don't know where I can buy locally produced food
- ◆ I like to eat a variety of foods
- ◆ Locally produced food is more expensive
- ◆ Locally produced food is not available where I do my shopping
- ◆ I buy whichever looks the nicest
- ◆ I don't buy the food for my household

Other...?

Q9: What do you think prevents you from buying organic certified food products?

- ◆ I don't know what organic certification is
- ◆ I don't think about/pay attention to how the food I buy is produced
- ◆ I don't trust that organic certified products are any different from other products
- ◆ I don't know where I can get organic certified products
- ◆ Organic products are not available where I do my shopping
- ◆ Organic certified products are available in a limited range
- ◆ Organic products can be expensive
- ◆ Organic certified products are sometimes of a less-quality than other non-organic ones
- ◆ I don't buy the food for my household

Other...?

Q9: What do you think prevents you from buying fair-trade certified food products?

- ◆ I don't know what fair-trade certification is
- ◆ I don't think about/pay attention to how the food I buy is produced
- ◆ I don't trust that fair-trade certified products actually benefit producers
- ◆ I don't know where I can get fair-trade certified products
- ◆ Fair-trade products are not available where I do my shopping
- ◆ Fair-trade certified products are available in a limited range
- ◆ Fair-trade products can be expensive
- ◆ Fair-trade certified products are sometimes of a less-quality than other non fair-trade ones
- ◆ I don't buy the food for my household Other...?

Q10: During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?

- ◆ Contacted a politician or civil servant to try and get them to take action on an important issue
- ◆ Done some work for a political party
- ◆ Joined or worked for an organisation set up to influence political decisions
- ◆ Volunteered at a club, charity or other NGO

Q10: During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?

- ◆ Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons
- ◆ Deliberately bought any products for political, ethical or environmental reasons
- ◆ Taken part in a public demonstration
- ◆ Exercised your right to vote

Other...?

Q11: How interested would you say you are in politics?

- [1] *Very interested*
- [2] *Somewhat interested*
- [3] *Hardly interested*
- [4] *Not interested at all*

Q12: Thinking about your consumption practices, which of the following words do you feel can describe you as a consumer?

thrifty (bargain-hunter)
 ethical other...? lazy
 traditional self-indulgent sceptical
 political green pragmatic moral
 empowered excessive well-informed
 practical frugal
 socially-responsible unpredictable

Q13: To what extent would you consider your self ?

- [1] *To great extent*
- [2] *To some extent*
- [3] *To little extent*
- [4] *Not at all*
- [5] *Don't know*
- [6] *I don't know what an _____ (ethical/ green/ political/ socially responsible) consumer is*

Q17: What is the highest educational level you have achieved?

- [1] *Not completed primary education*
- [2] *Primary education*
- [3] *Lower level of secondary education*
- [4] *Upper level of secondary education*
- [5] *College degree*
- [6] *University undergraduate degree*
- [7] *University postgraduate degree*

Q21: Your gross income?

- [1] *on benefits*
- [2] *0 - £15,000 per year*
- [3] *£15,000 - £30,000 per year*
- [4] *more than £30,000 per year*

14. The survey questionnaire

Ethical Consumption Study 2009

Views of consumers in Partick

Q1 How much involvement do you have in decisions on what groceries your household buys?

- I make all the decisions*
- I make most of the decisions*
- I have an equal share in the decisions*
- I have a bit of involvement*
- I am not involved at all*
- Don't know*

Q2 At which of the following do you / your household do grocery shopping at least once a month?

- Supermarket*
- Online*
- Small independent shops*
- Farmers market / farm shop*
- Market*
- Convenience store/ corner shop*
- Vegetable box delivered*
- Health food shop*
- Don't know*
- Other*

Q3 Where does you / your household do most of it's grocery shopping?

- Supermarket*
- Online*
- Small independent shops*
- Farmers market / farm shop*
- Market*
- Convenience store/ corner shop*
- Vegetable box delivered*
- Health food shop*
- Don't know*
- Other*

Q4 The reasons I buy grocery from supermarket outlets is because... (tick all that apply)

- it's cheaper*
- it's near my house/work place*
- I can find everything under one roof*
- it's the only shop offering groceries in the area*
- I can't find the products I want in other shops*
- I am used to do my shopping there*
- I have no other alternative*
- I enjoy shopping there*
- it has longer opening hours*
- Other*

Q5 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	1	2	3	4	5
Local shops play an important part in the local community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supermarkets benefit local economies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supermarkets can harm an area's unique character.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The increase in large supermarkets is a good thing for me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q6 With regard to groceries, how important are the following for you when deciding where to shop?

	1	2	3	4
Retailer's prices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Retailer's treatment of employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Retailer's corporate social responsibility policies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Range of products offered	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Closeness of shop to your house/ work place	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Convenience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Other</i>			

Q7 With regard to groceries, how important are the following for you when deciding what to buy?

	1	2	3	4
Culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Price	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brand-name	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taste	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Country of origin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Impact on the environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Existence of boycott campaigns for that product	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organic, fair-trade or other similar certification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uniqueness of the product	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Other</i>				

Q8 How often do you...

	1	2	3	4	5
buy organic products when available?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
buy fair-trade products when available?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
buy local produce when available?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
re-cycle paper/glass?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
re-use your shopping bags?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
buy in charity shops?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
buy from small independent shops?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
cycle to work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
try to avoid flying when you need to travel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
use the car to go shopping?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
try to avoid wasting food?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
try to avoid over-packaged goods?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
make or mend your own clothes, bags etc.?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
eat red meat?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Other</i>					

Q9 What do you think prevents you from always buying:

food produced locally?...	<input type="text"/>
organic certified food products?.....	<input type="text"/>
fair-trade certified food products?.....	<input type="text"/>

Q10 During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? [please answer Yes or No]

contacted a politician or civil servant	<input type="checkbox"/>
done some work for a political party	<input type="checkbox"/>
joined or worked for an organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
volunteered	<input type="checkbox"/>
boycotted	<input type="checkbox"/>
deliberately bought	<input type="checkbox"/>
public demonstration.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
vote	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Other</i>	

Q11 How interested would you say you are in politics?

1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q12 Thinking about your consumption practices, which of the following words do you feel can describe you as a consumer? [show table]

Q13 Thinking about your consumption practices, to what extent would you consider yourself...

	1	2	3	4	5	6
an ethical consumer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
a green consumer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
a political consumer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
a socially responsible consumer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q14 Why do you think you are/aren't an ethical consumer?

Q15 What do you hope to achieve by being an ethical consumer?

A few things about yourself....

Q16 What is your age?

Q19 Your nationality?

Q17 What is the highest educational level you have achieved?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Q20 Your gender?
Male Female

Q18 Are you currently employed...
part-time.....
full time.....
I am unemployed.....
Other

Q21 How much do you earn per year?
1 2 3 4

Q22 Do your political beliefs tend to be towards...
the right.....
the centre.....
the left.....
Not interested.....

15. Street survey questionnaire development

notes

Q1: How much involvement do you have in decisions on what groceries your household buys?

I make all the decisions

I make most of the decisions

I have a bit of involvement

I am not involved in decisions

Don't know

This question is adapted without alternations² from the Scottish Environmental attitudes and Behaviour Survey [c27 on eco-friendly purchasing]. Similar question has been asked in the interviews with ethical consumers, were all claimed to have a great involvement with their household's shopping. (A great involvement in the household shopping might signify a greater 'expertise' of the respondent on the issues examined in this questionnaire?)

Q2 and Q3: At which of these types of shops does your household do grocery shopping at least once a month? / Where does your household do most of its grocery?

Supermarket

Online

Small independent shops (Greengrocer/ Bucher / Fishmonger / Bakery)

² "refused" to answer will be implied by leaving the question blank. This is to save space in the questionnaire. The option "refused" however will be entered in SPSS for analysis. This applies for all questions of the questionnaire.

Farmers Market / Farm shop

Convenience store / corner shop

Have vegetable box delivered

Health Food shop

Other type of shop

Don't know

Other...

Both questions are adapted from the Scottish Environmental attitudes and Behaviour Survey [c28 and c29 on eco-friendly purchasing]. These questions aim to elicit information on the different types of shops that the responders use for their grocery shopping and also to reveal the main type of shop that they use. The questions offer the potential to explore relationships such as the choice of retailer and degree of self-identification as ethical consumer, etc, as well as possibility to compare with SEAB survey findings.

Q4 : I buy my grocery from supermarket outlets because... (Tick all that apply).

It's cheaper

It's closer to my house/work place

I can find everything I need under one roof

It's the only shop offering grocery in the area

I can't find the products I want in other shops

I am used to do my shopping there

I have no other alternative

I enjoy shopping there

It has longer opening hours

Other...

This question aims to gain some insight on why people do their grocery shopping in supermarkets. The question offers possibility to examine further why supermarkets are used by the majority of consumers as main retailer (is there really a choice?).

**Q5: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
[1 strongly agree... 4=strongly disagree, 5=don't know]**

Local shops play an important part in local community

Supermarkets benefit local economies

Supermarkets can harm an area's unique character

The increase in large supermarkets is a good thing for me

This question offers the possibility to get the views of ethical and non-ethical consumers on supermarket development. The first and last statements are adopted from Robinson et al's (2000) survey on views on access to shops from a low-income population (along with one more statement which is: *shopping facilities are designed for the wealthy instead of the less well off*). I decided to drop that statement as not very relevant with my study, and added the second and third statement as more relevant. The issue of benefiting or not the local economy is a major issue when conflicts arise on whether a supermarket outlet should be built or not. Also, the argument of destroying an areas unique character mostly because of the knock on effect of local shops loosing business and closing down is another argument often apparent in such conflicts.

Q6: With regard to groceries, how important are the following for you when you decide where to shop?

Retailer's prices

Retailer's treatment of employees
Retailer's corporate social responsibility policies
Service
Range of products
Closeness of shop to house/work place
Convenience
Other

Get a better feeling of how consumers chose retailers for groceries. Also offers an indication on whether treatment of employees or corporate social responsibility policies are amongst the issues that concern 'ethical' consumers. (Do ethical consumers care from where they will buy the 'ethical' product from?)

Q7: With regards to groceries, how important are the following for you when deciding what to buy?

Culture
Price
Health
Brand-name
Fashion
Taste
Country of origin
Impact on the environment
Existence of boycott campaigns for that product
Organic far-trade or other similar certification
Uniqueness of product

Other

This question offers insight on issues important to consumers when choosing products. The question also offers the possibility to test various relationships such as similarities and differences between ethical and green consumers in terms of issues involved with their purchasing decisions.

Q8: How often do you... [1=always, 5=never] - Please see questionnaire

This question examines frequency of buying local, organic, fair-trade products and also engagement with other lifestyle practices to be thought as relevant with ethical consumers. I have added one more question about re-cycling glass/paper.

Q9: What do you think prevents you from buying food produced locally [tick all that apply] - Please see questionnaire for statements...

This is a question adopted from SEAB [D12] with changes: some statements were dropped to accommodate popular reasons according to the findings. Answers to this question are expected to indicate problems related with buying local produce.

Q10 and Q11: What do you think prevents you from buying organic/ fair trade certified food products [tick all that apply] - Please see questionnaire for statements...

The statements are inspired from the previous question and changed so as to relate with issues dealing with organic and fair trade food products. Amongst others, these questions offer the possibility to examine trust in certification, perceived differentiation between certified and other products, as well as price sensitivity.

Q12: During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? – please see questionnaire for the statements.

This question is inspired from the European Social survey questionnaire to measure political participation. Changes after your feedback include the addition of a statement about volunteering at charities, clubs and NGO's, and deletion of the statement: *participated in protest activities.*

Q13: How interested would you say you are in politics?

Question aiming in getting information on perceptions about interest in politics. Among others, this question offers the possibility of testing perceived interest in politics and engagement in practices that could be thought as political. (Also, to what extent boycotting and boycotting is practiced by people claiming not to be interested in politics?)

Q14: Thinking about your consumption practices, to what extent do you consider yourself to be:

An ethical consumer

A political consumer

A green consumer

A socially responsible consumer

[NOTE: 1= To great extend, 2= to some extend, 3=to little extent, 4= not at all, 5= don't know, 6= I am not sure what an ethical/political/green/socially responsible consumer is]

I have dropped the active citizen label which was included in previous version of the questionnaire. The extent consumers identify with the label ethical consumer can be

tested against findings of the Co-Op bank on ethical consumers. Perhaps, there is the potential for drawing lines or not between green and ethical consumers. Also, examining awareness of different identities..?

Q15: Why do you think you are/aren't an ethical consumer?

Open ended

I could put responders in the category of an ethical consumer for example because they buy organic. None the less, their reasoning for stating that they are or are not ethical consumers might be surprising!}

Q16: [Only for those that said they are ethical consumers]...what do you hope to achieve by being an ethical consumer?

Interested to see whether change (social/political/economic) is one of the ultimate aims?

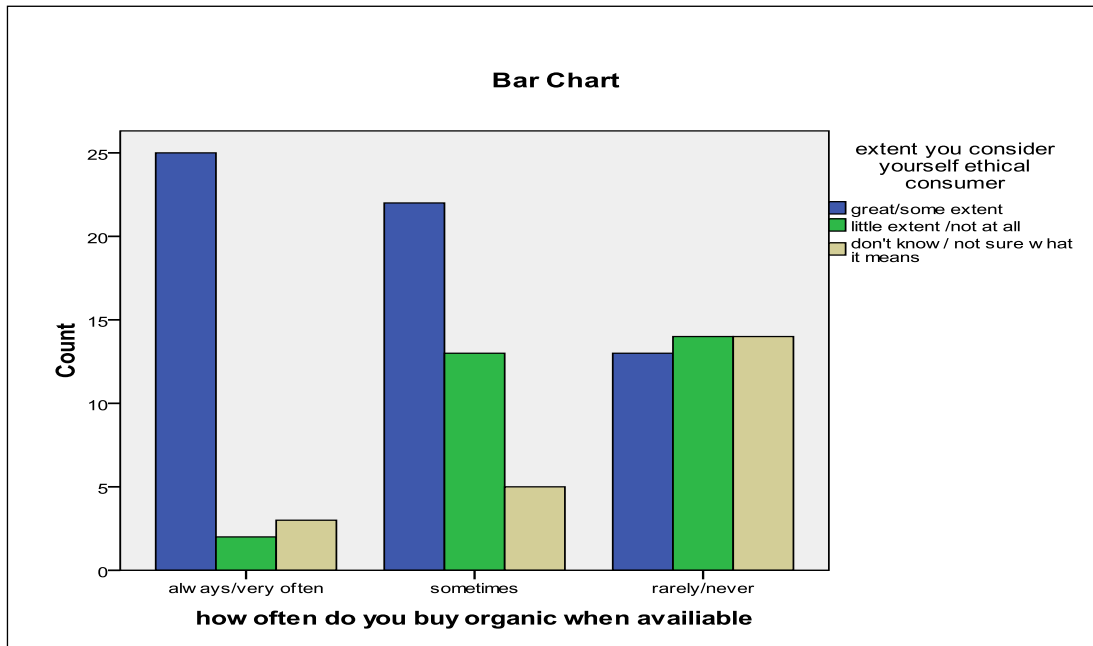
Q17 – Q23: Demographics

16. Chi-Square Tests between Degree of Identification and Frequency of Consumer Practices

how often do you buy organic when available * extent you consider yourself ethical consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.319 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	22.763	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	16.339	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	111		

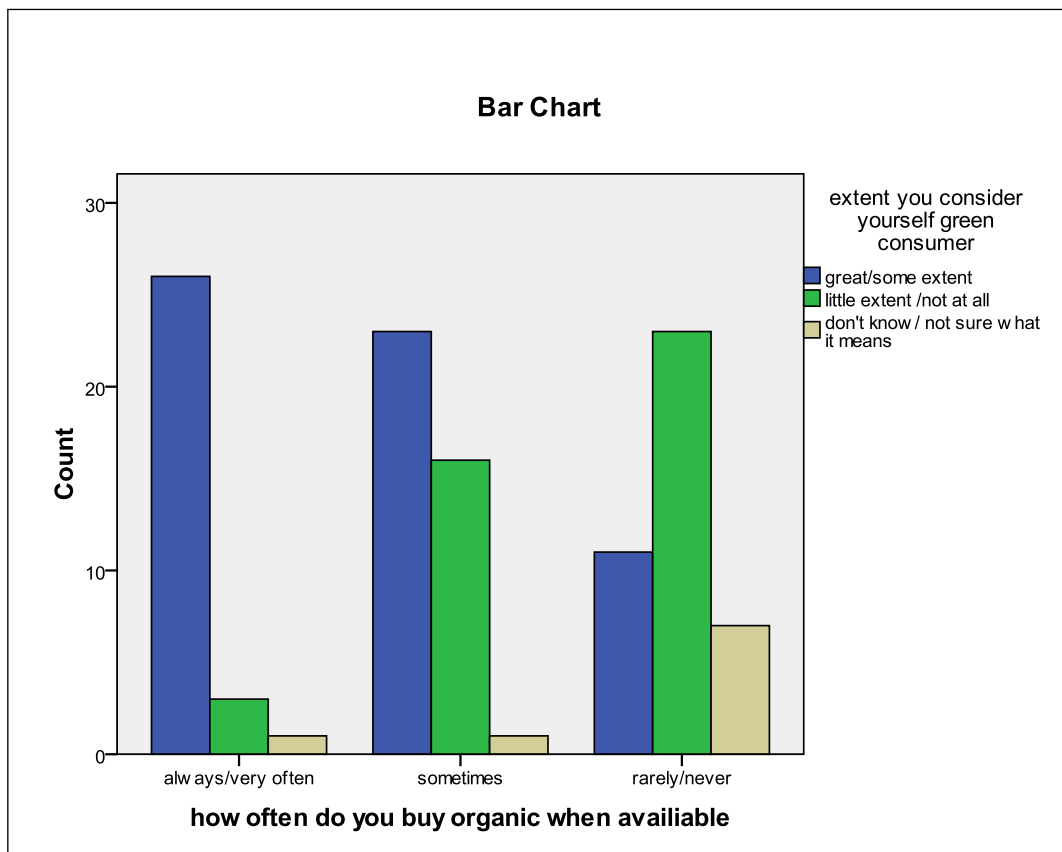
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.95.



how often do you buy organic when available * extent you consider yourself green consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	27.878 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	30.182	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	23.440	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	111		

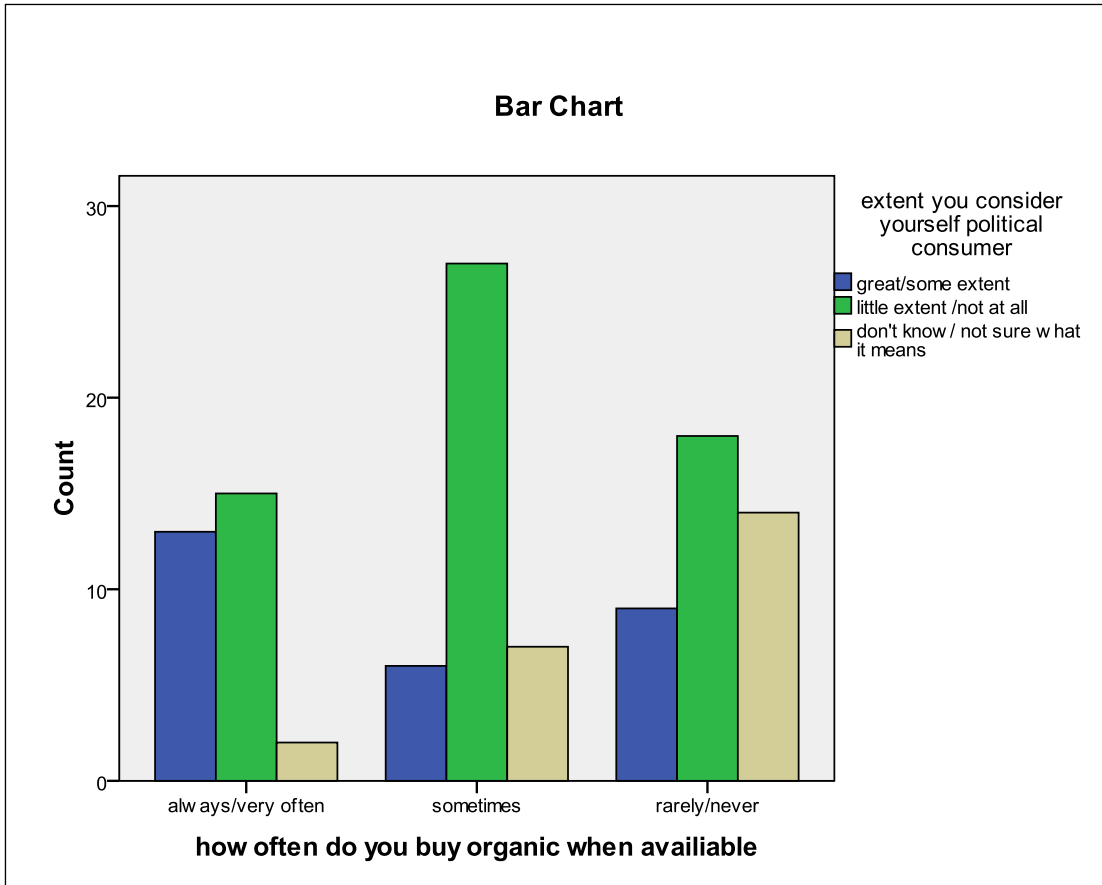
a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.43.



how often do you buy organic when available * extent you consider yourself political consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.569 ^a	4	.006
Likelihood Ratio	14.582	4	.006
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.432	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	111		

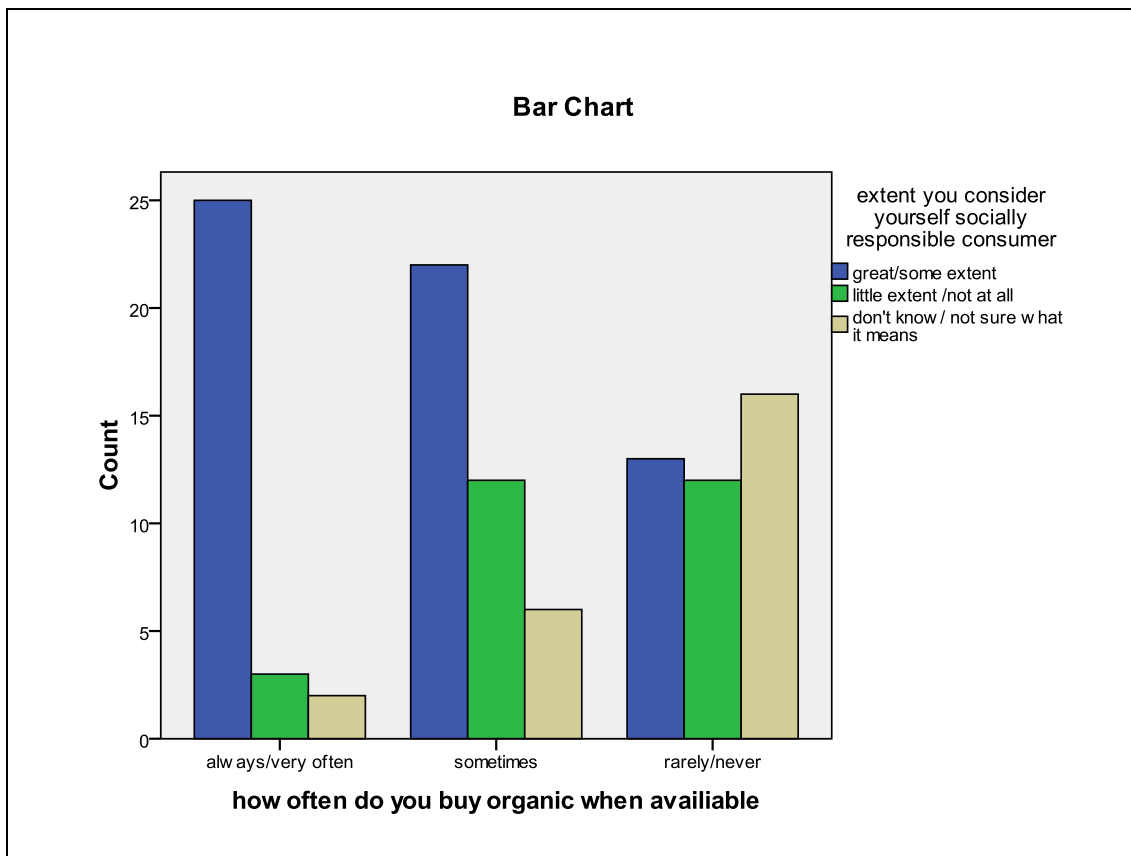
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.22.



how often do you buy organic when available * extent you consider yourself socially responsible consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.682 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	22.480	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.020	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	111		

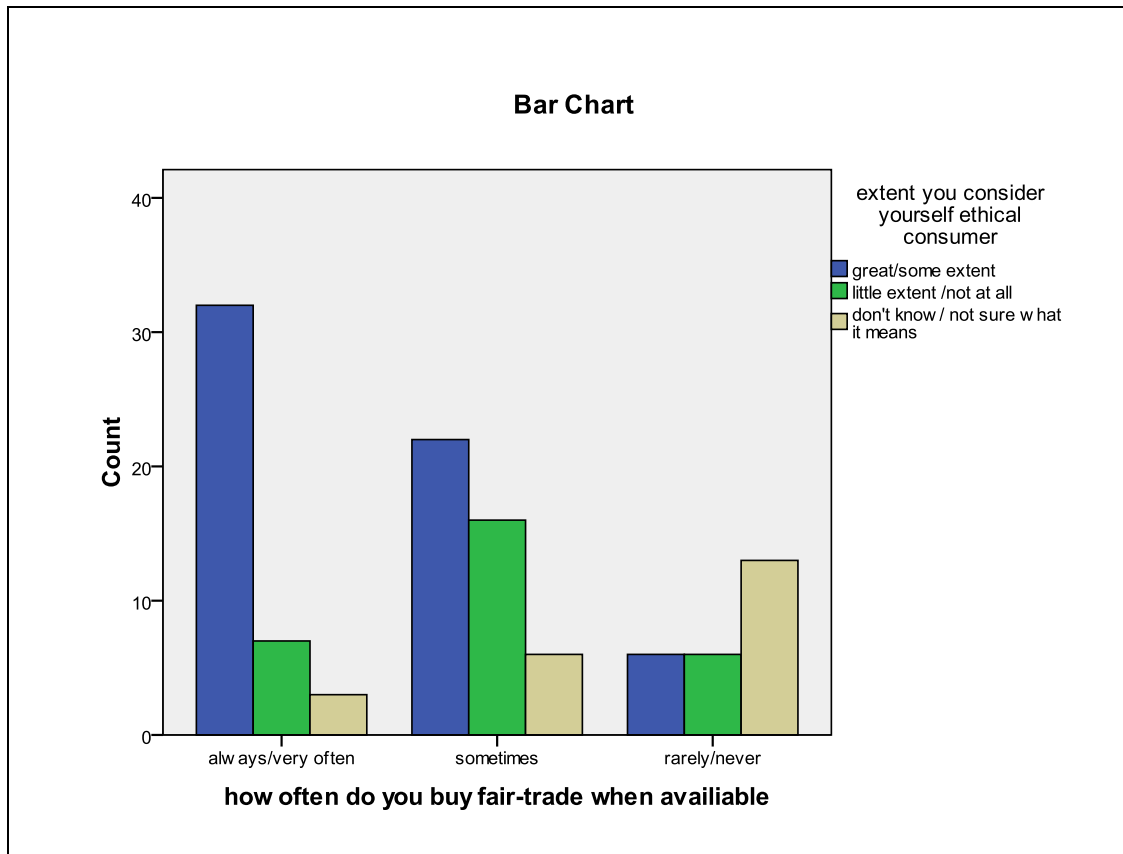
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.49.



how often do you buy fair-trade when available * extent you consider yourself ethical consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	28.682 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	26.531	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	22.552	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	111		

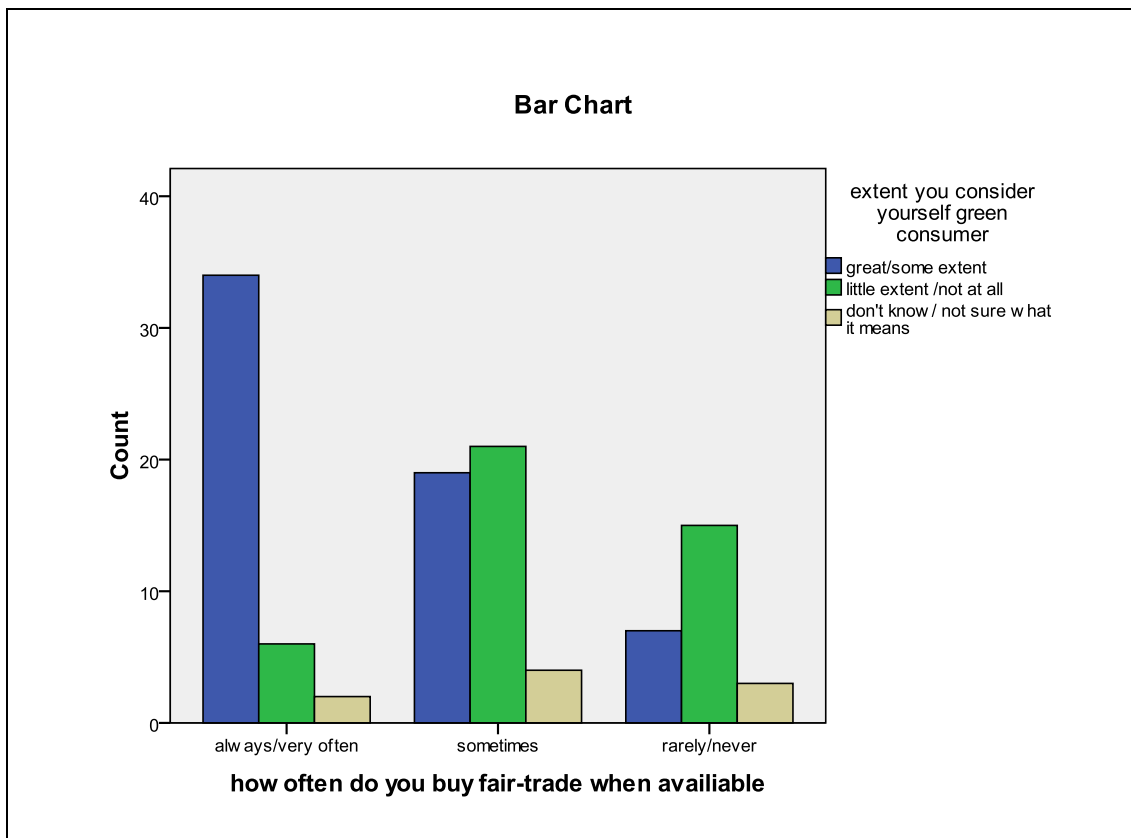
a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.95.



how often do you buy fair-trade when available * extent you consider yourself green consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.363 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	22.754	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	15.280	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	111		

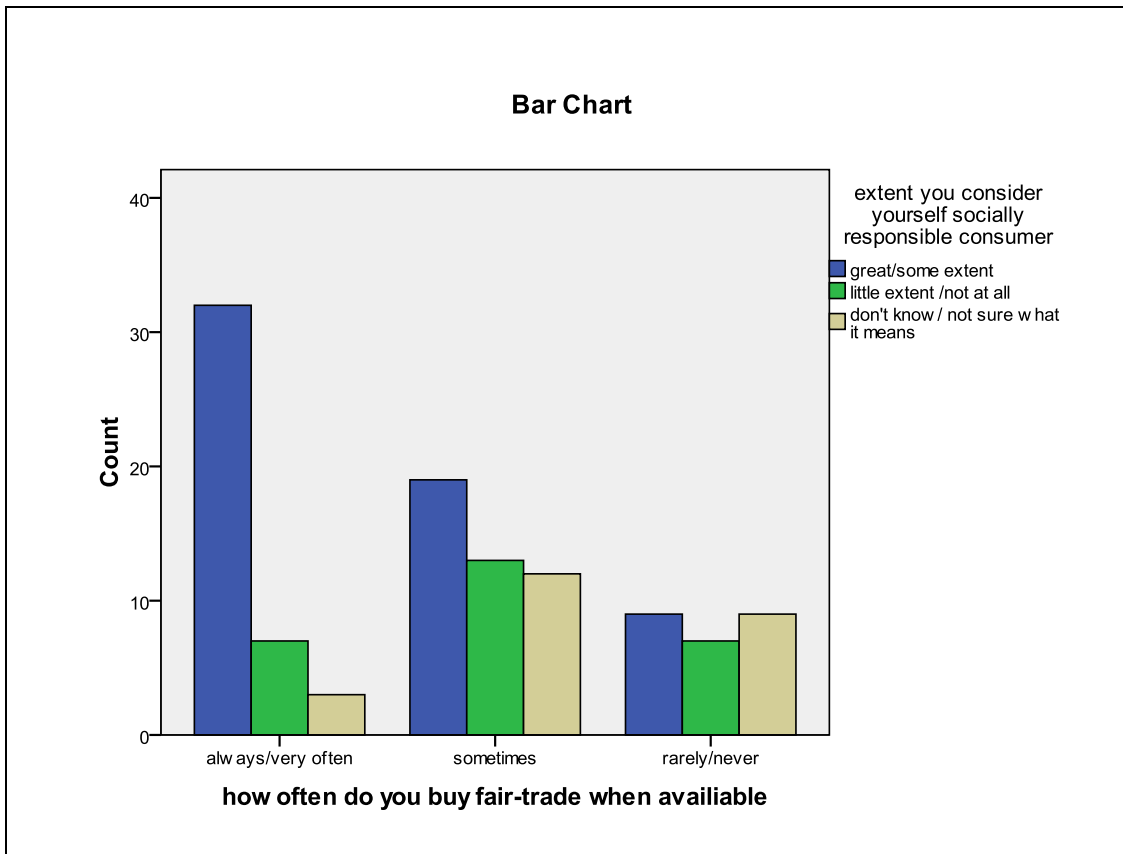
a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.03.



how often do you buy fair-trade when available * extent you consider yourself socially responsible consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.034 ^a	4	.005
Likelihood Ratio	15.955	4	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	13.028	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	111		

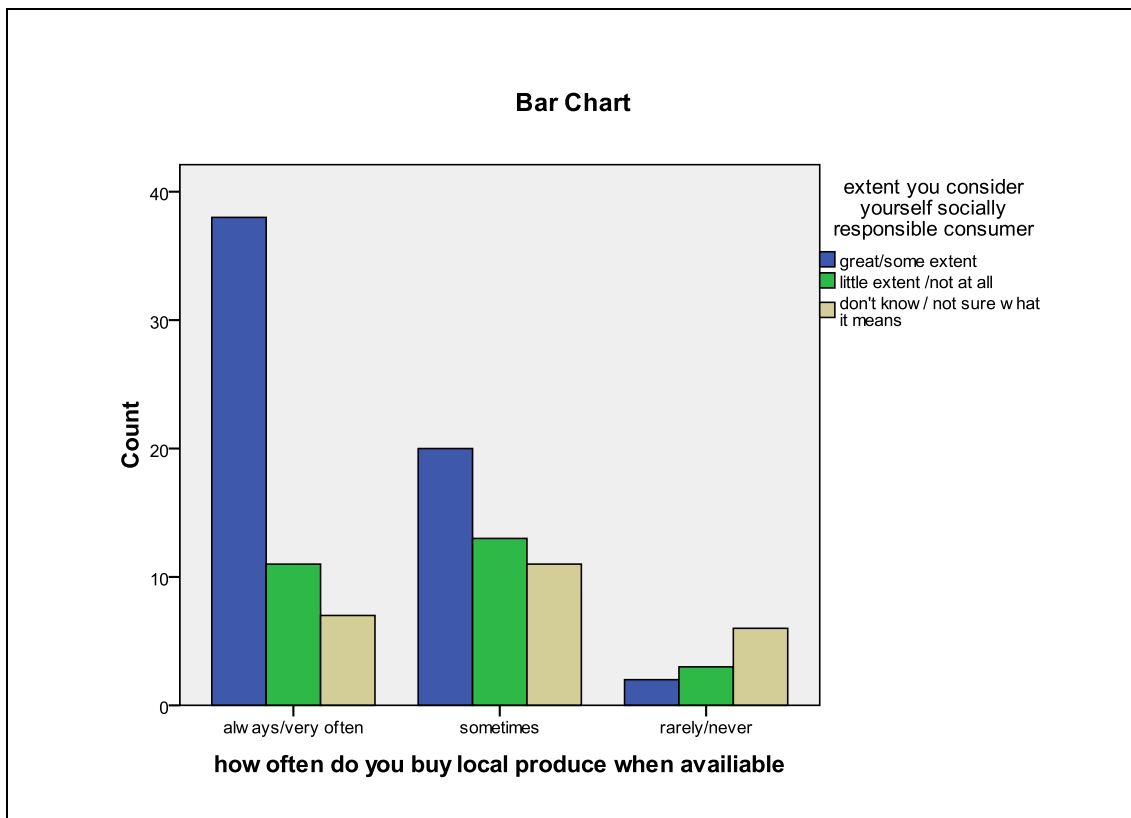
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.41.



how often do you buy local produce when available * extent you consider yourself socially responsible consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.133 ^a	4	.007
Likelihood Ratio	13.661	4	.008
Linear-by-Linear Association	12.989	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	111		

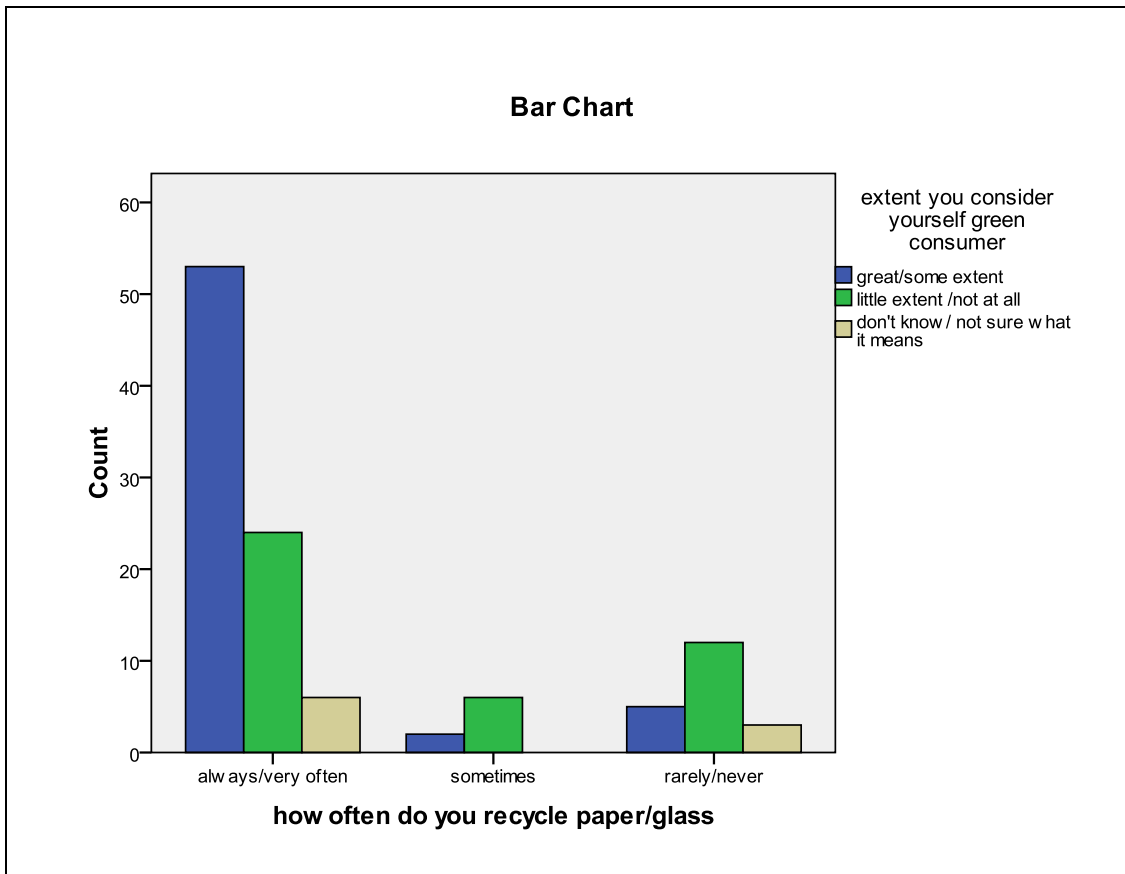
a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.38.



how often do you recycle paper/glass * extent you consider yourself green consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.009 ^a	4	.005
Likelihood Ratio	15.548	4	.004
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.252	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	111		

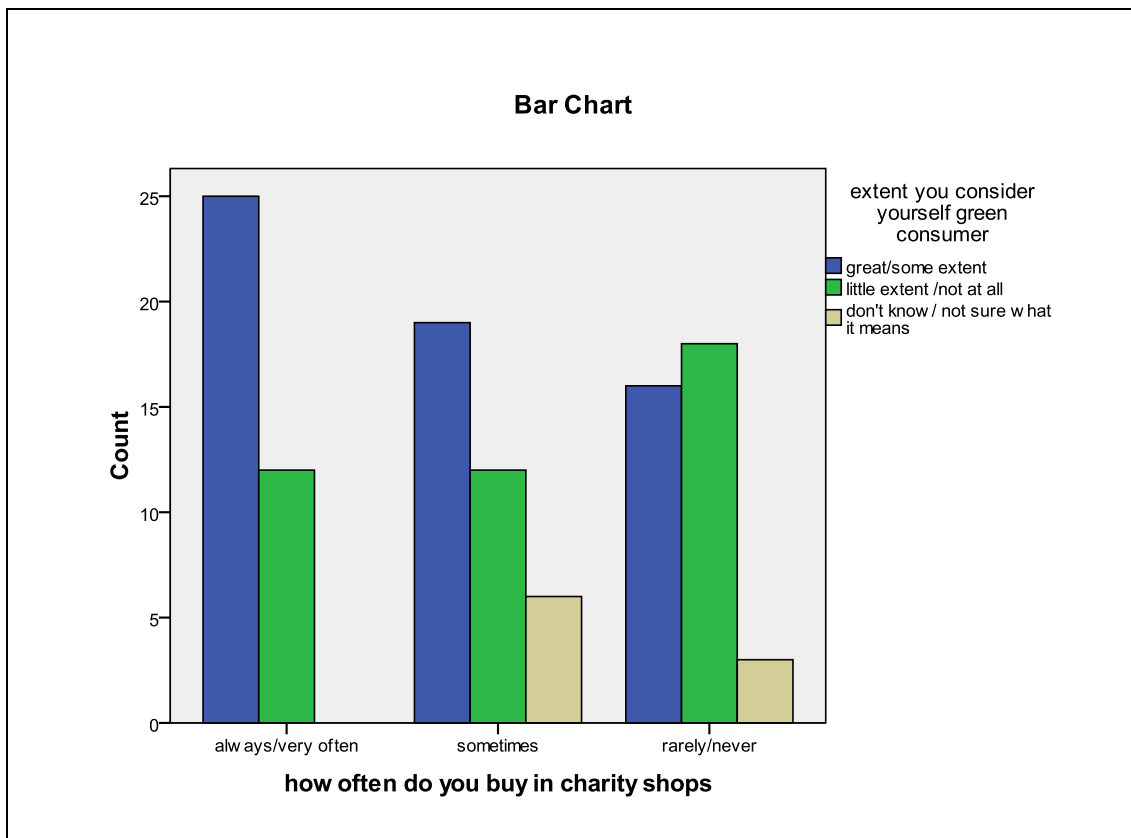
a. 4 cells (44.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .65.



how often do you buy in charity shops * extent you consider yourself green consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.814 ^a	4	.044
Likelihood Ratio	12.033	4	.017
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.698	1	.030
N of Valid Cases	111		

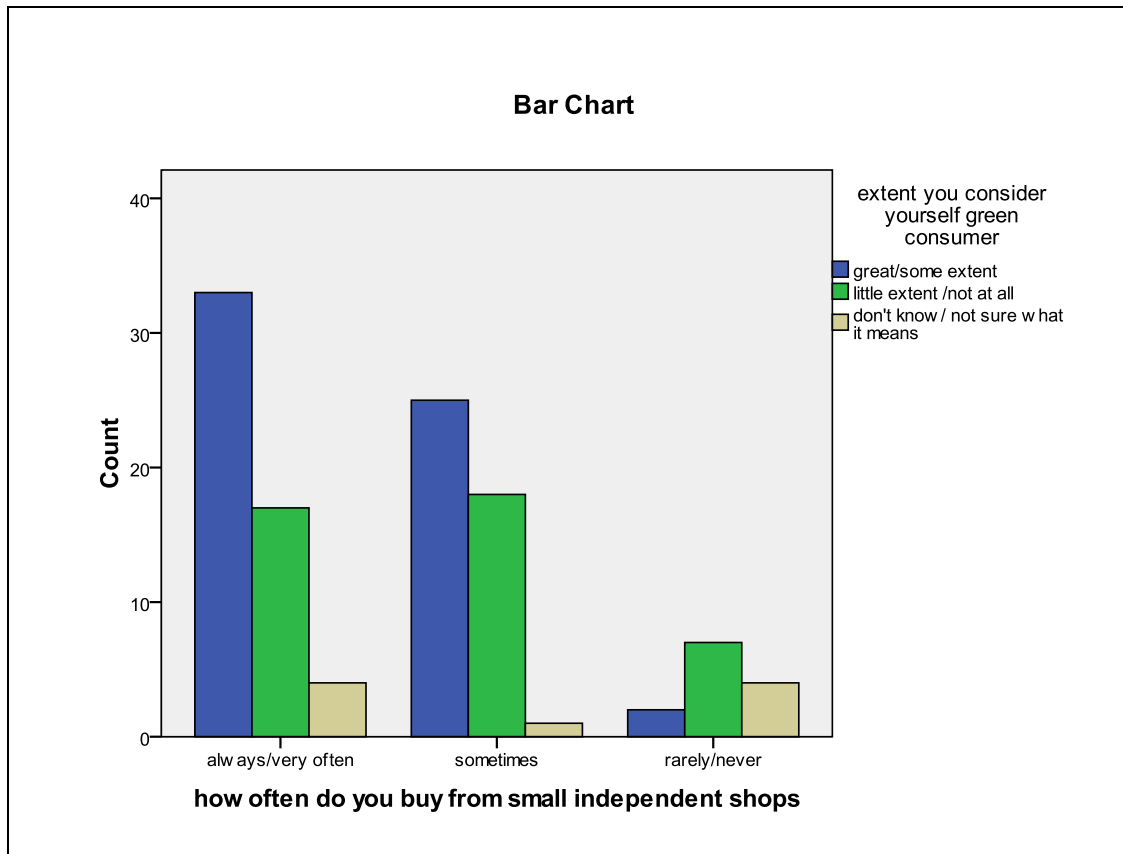
a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.00.



how often do you buy from small independent shops * extent you consider yourself green consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.837 ^a	4	.003
Likelihood Ratio	14.464	4	.006
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.886	1	.009
N of Valid Cases	111		

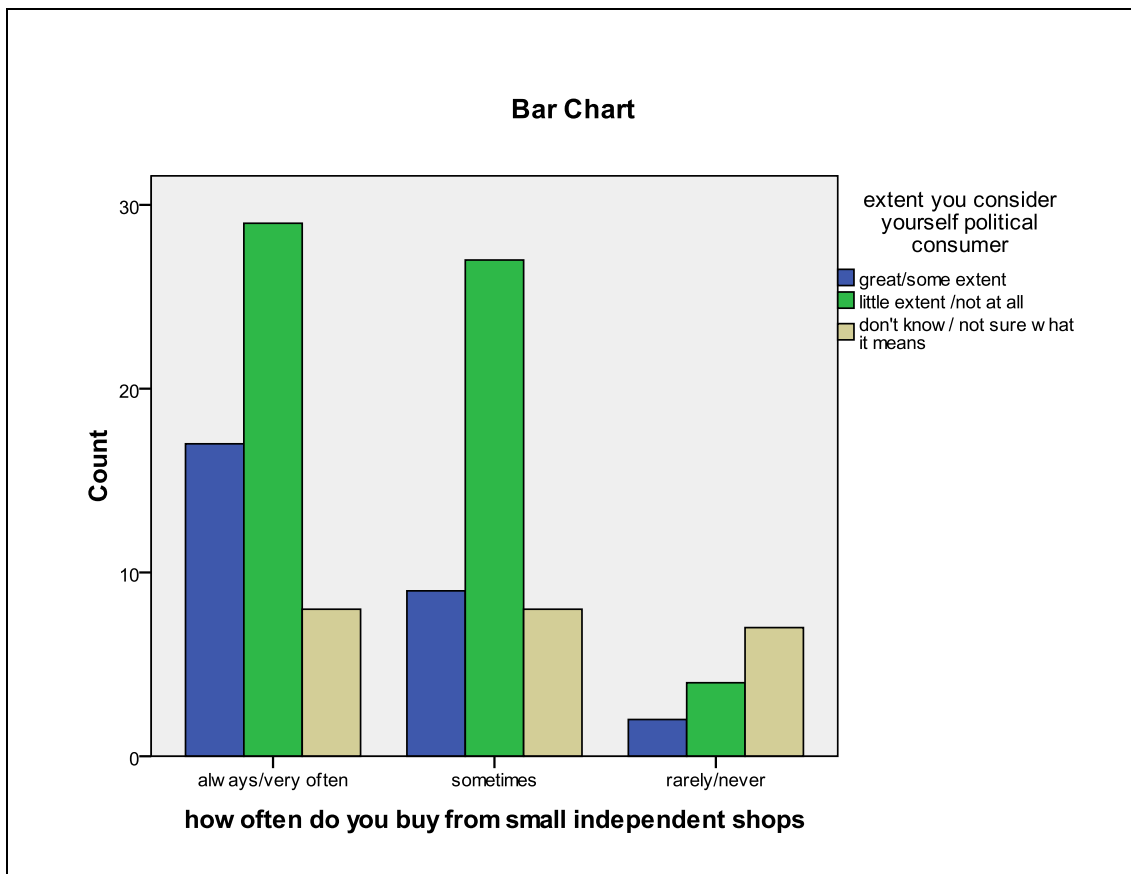
a. 4 cells (44.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.05.



how often do you buy from small independent shops * extent you consider yourself political consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.404 ^a	4	.022
Likelihood Ratio	9.656	4	.047
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.171	1	.013
N of Valid Cases	111		

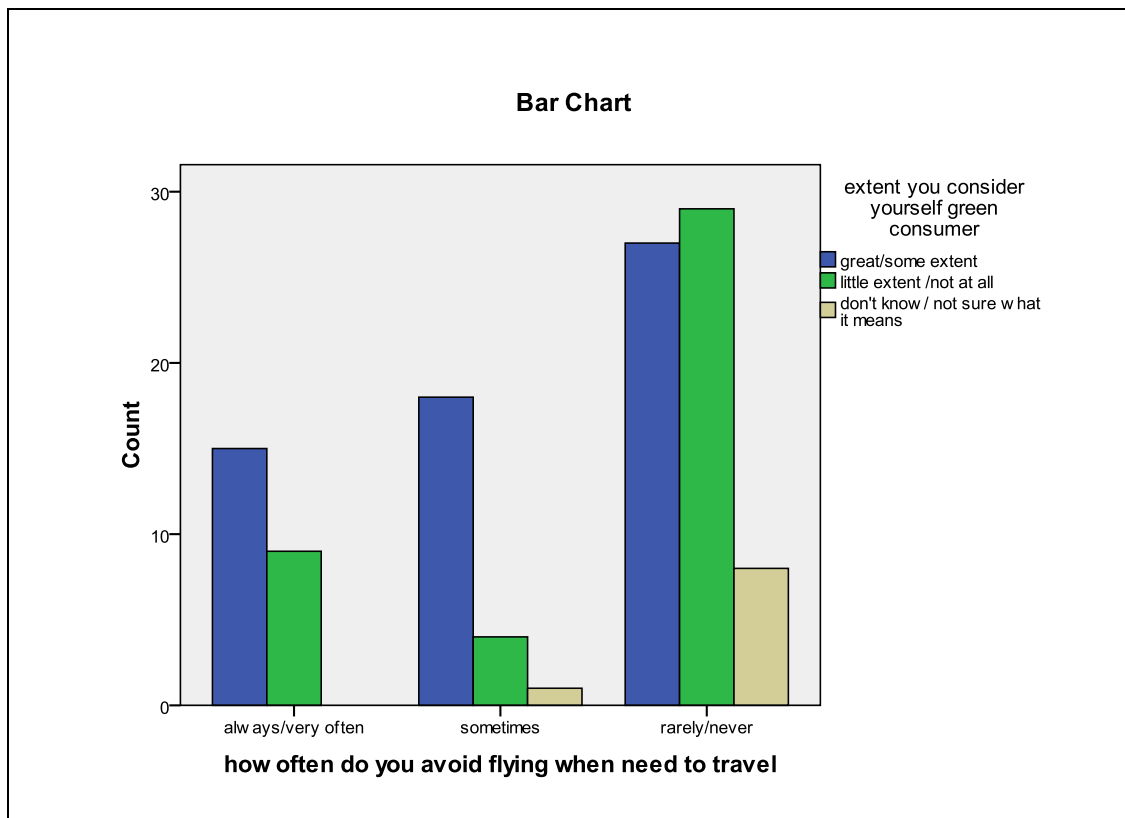
a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.69.



how often do you avoid flying when need to travel * extent you consider yourself green consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.834 ^a	4	.019
Likelihood Ratio	14.048	4	.007
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.782	1	.009
N of Valid Cases	111		

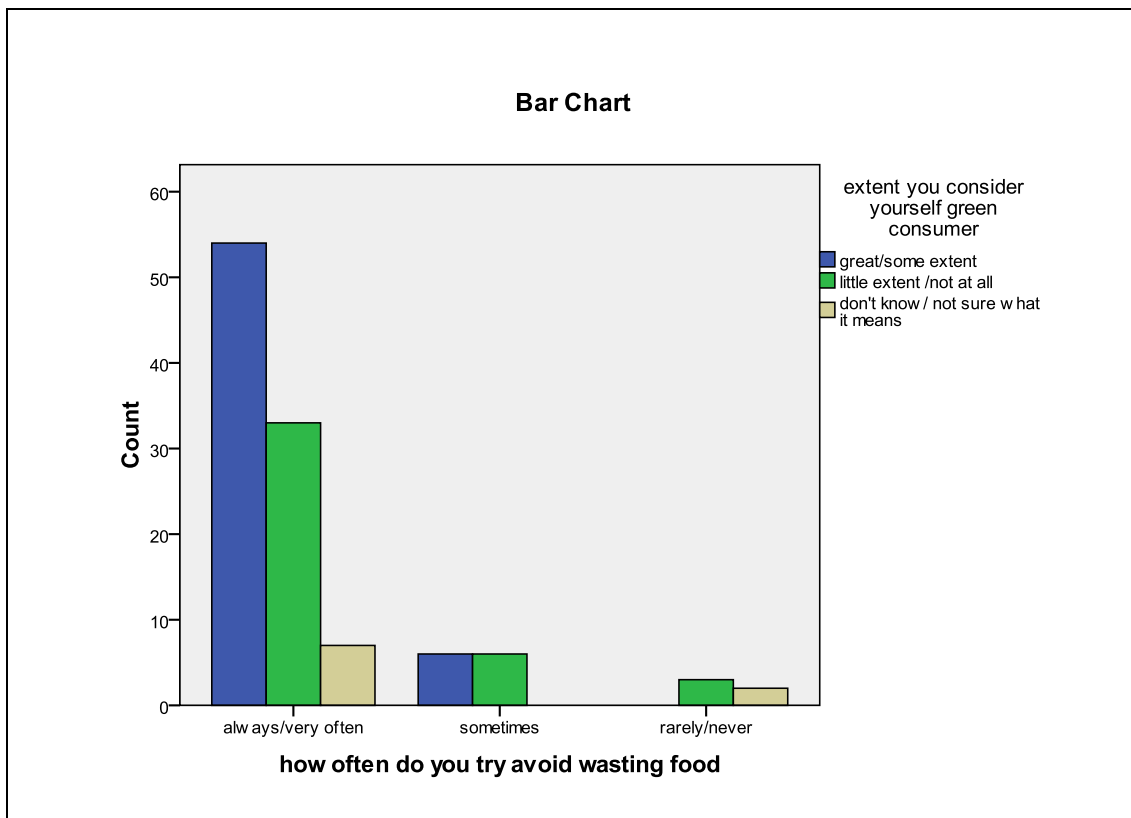
a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.86.



how often do you try avoid wasting food * extent you consider yourself green consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.539 ^a	4	.021
Likelihood Ratio	11.998	4	.017
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.742	1	.017
N of Valid Cases	111		

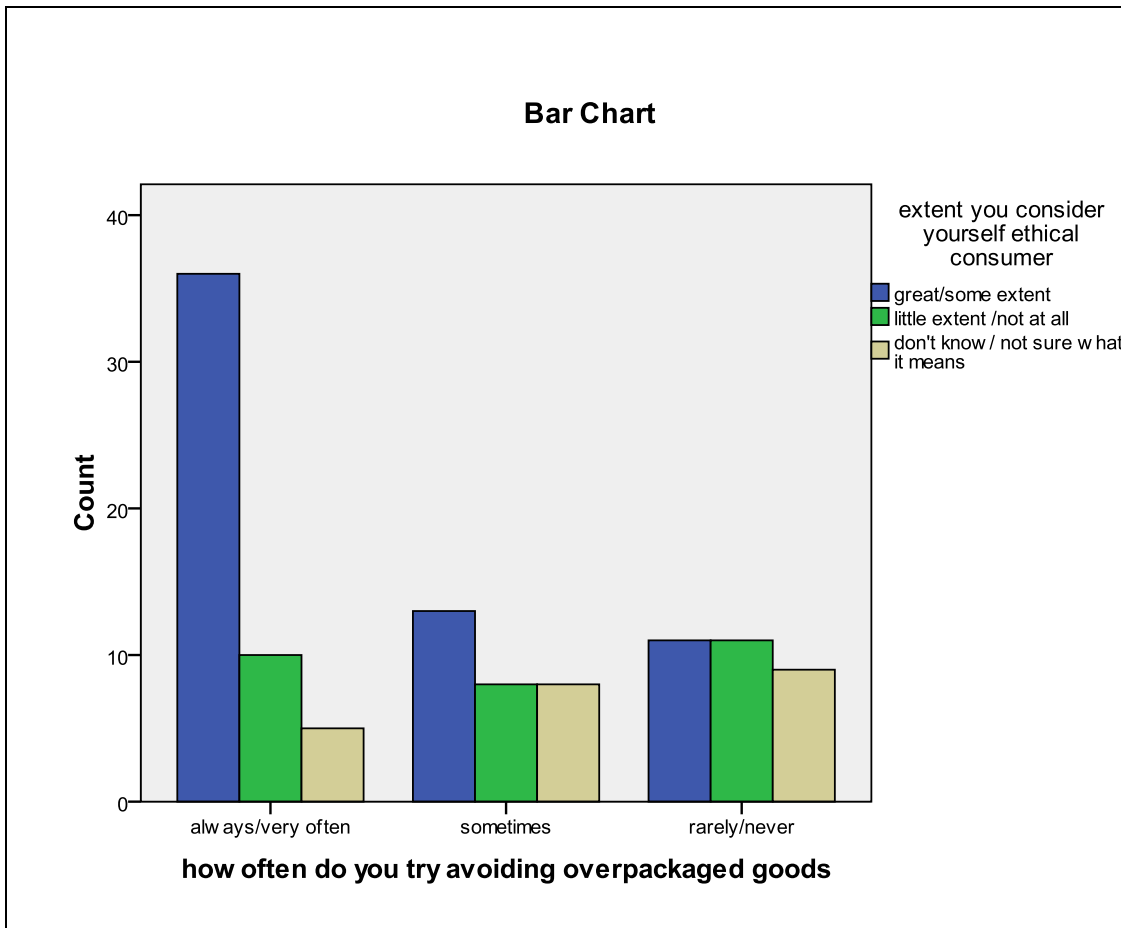
a. 5 cells (55.6%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .41.



how often do you try avoiding over-packaged goods * extent you consider yourself ethical consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.697 ^a	4	.020
Likelihood Ratio	12.076	4	.017
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.981	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	111		

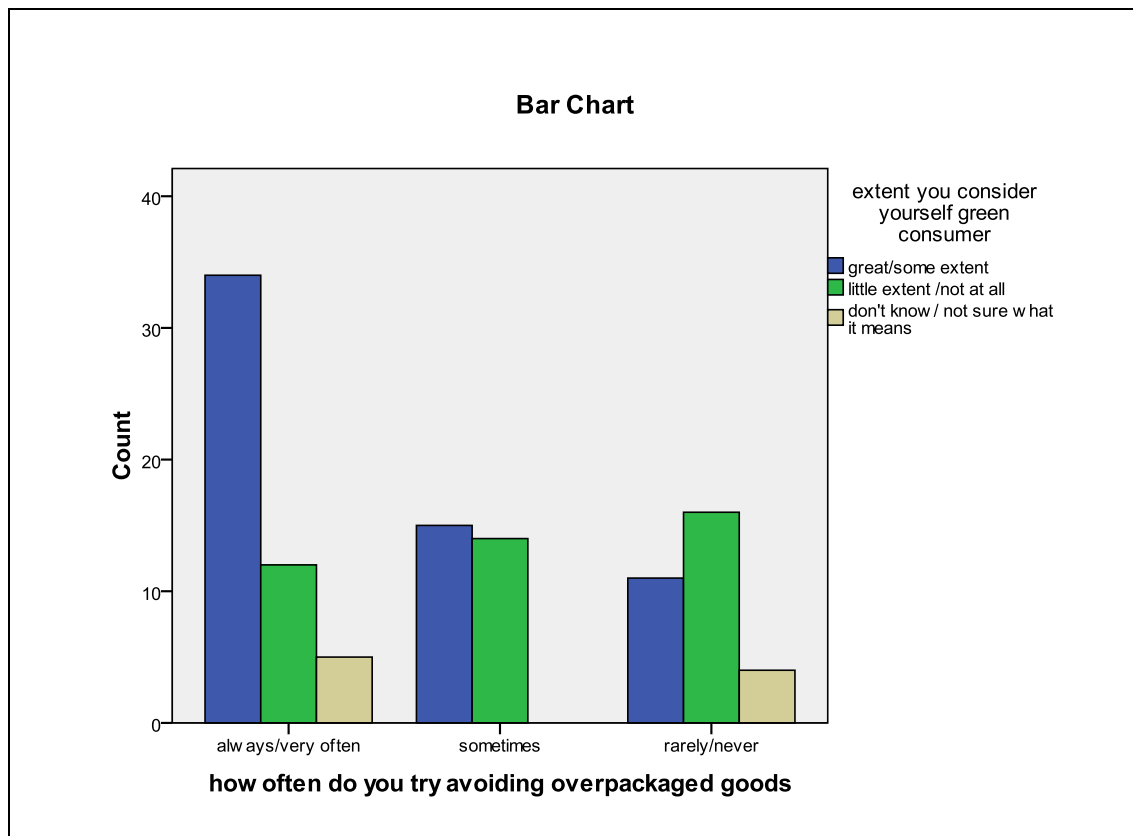
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.75.



how often do you try avoiding over-packaged goods * extent you consider yourself green consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.068 ^a	4	.017
Likelihood Ratio	14.650	4	.005
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.054	1	.025
N of Valid Cases	111		

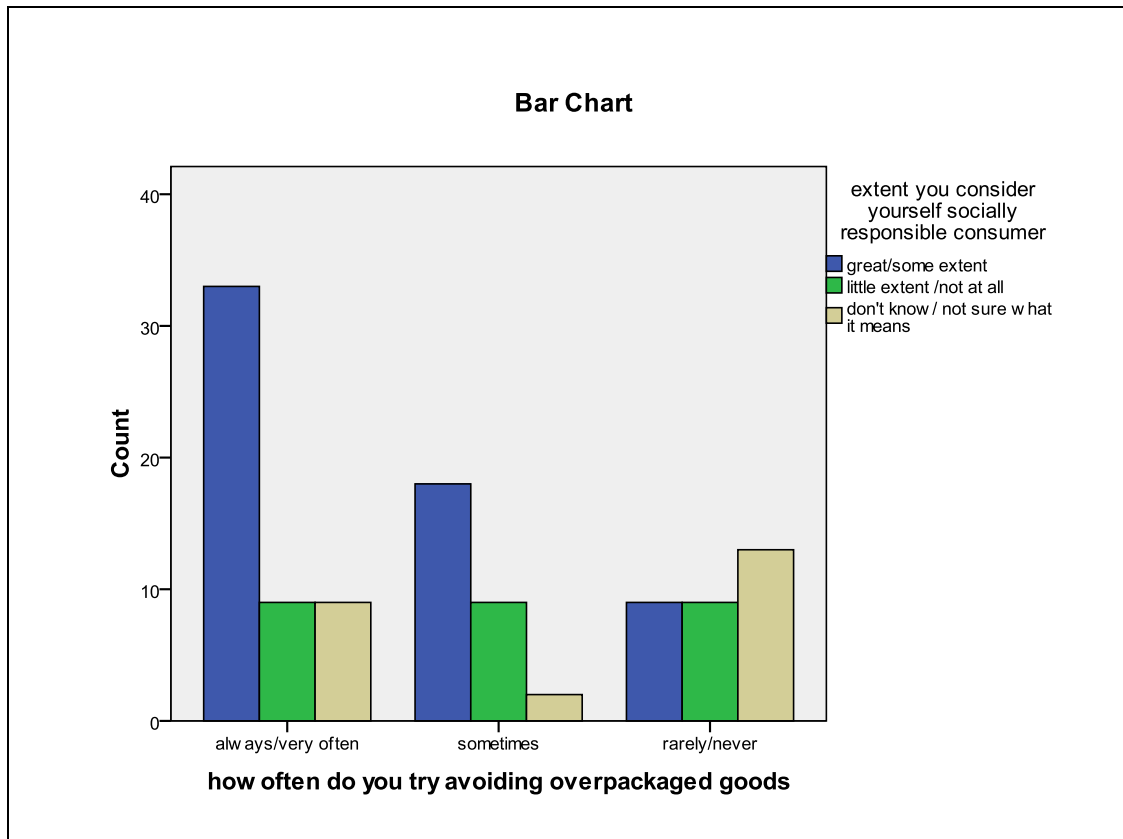
a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.35.



how often do you try avoiding over-packaged goods * extent you consider yourself socially responsible consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.957 ^a	4	.003
Likelihood Ratio	16.450	4	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.979	1	.003
N of Valid Cases	111		

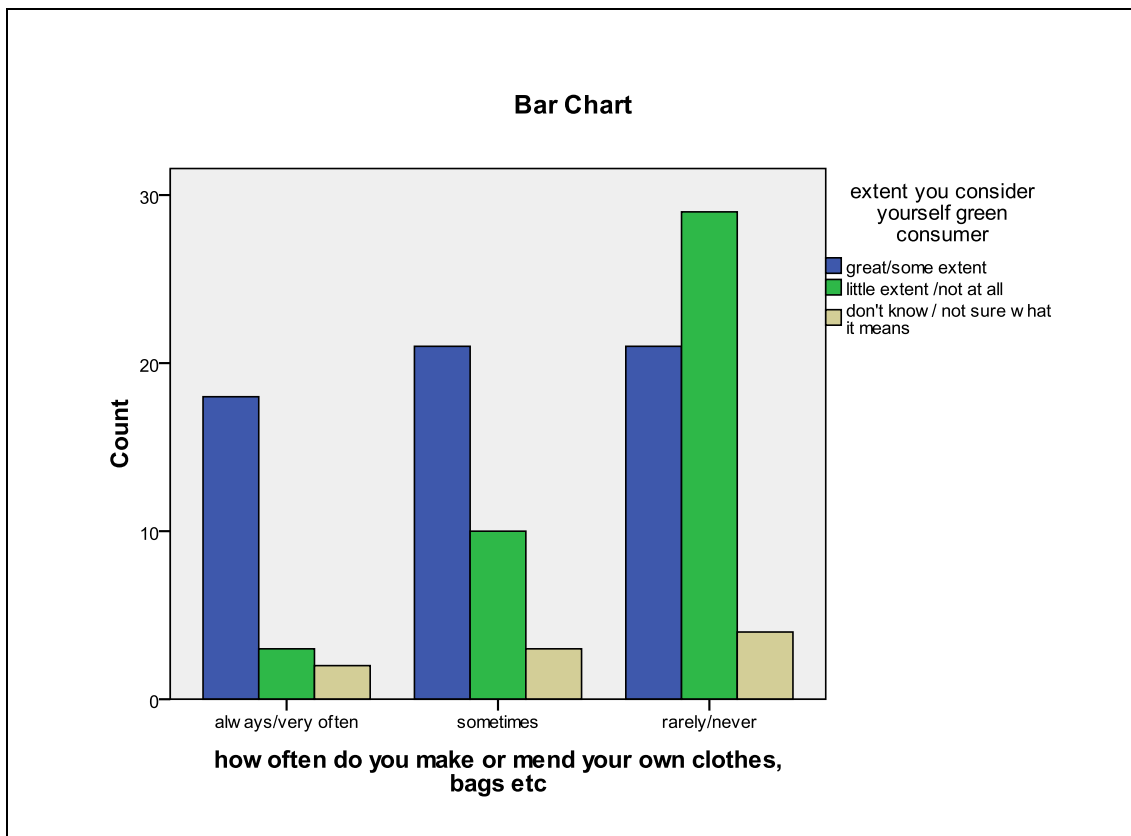
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.27.



**how often do you make or mend your own clothes, bags etc *
extent you consider yourself green consumer**

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.196 ^a	4	.010
Likelihood Ratio	14.039	4	.007
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.195	1	.013
N of Valid Cases	111		

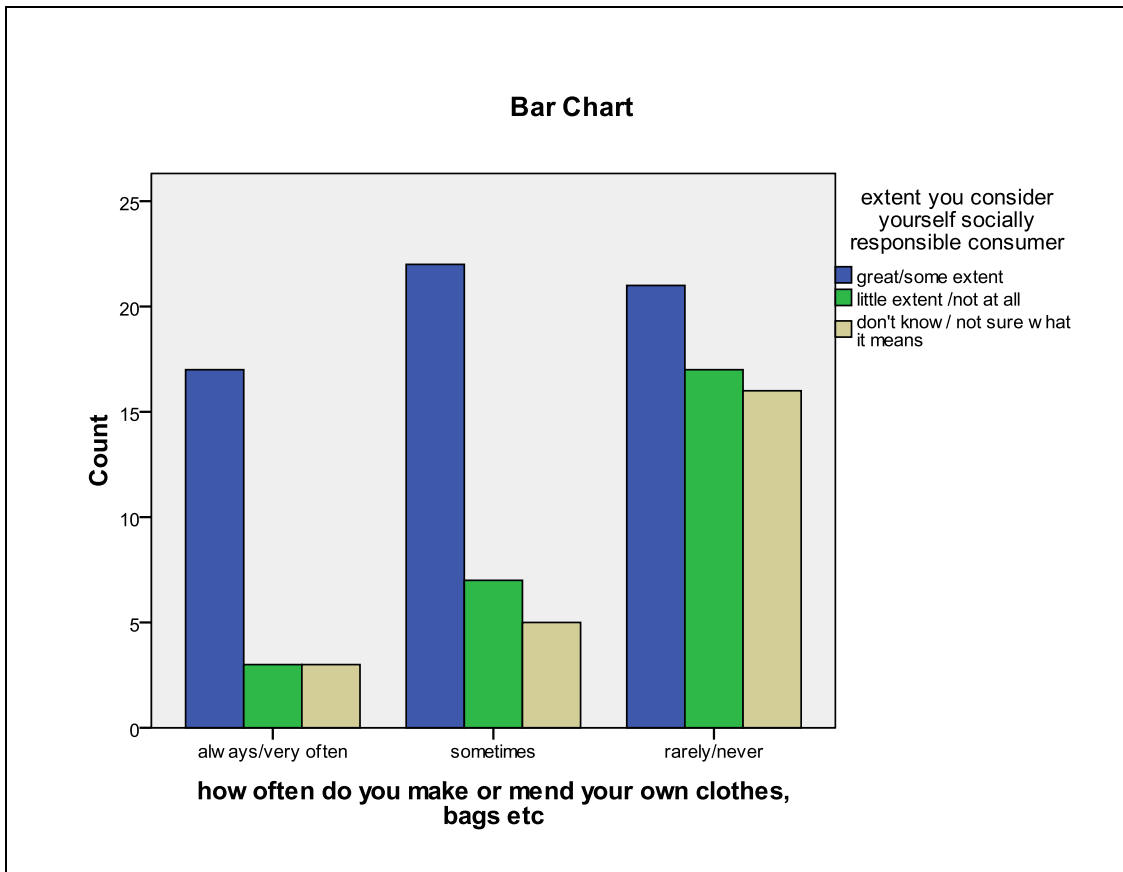
a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.86.



**how often do you make or mend your own clothes, bags etc *
 extent you consider yourself socially responsible consumer**

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.361 ^a	4	.035
Likelihood Ratio	10.615	4	.031
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.080	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	111		

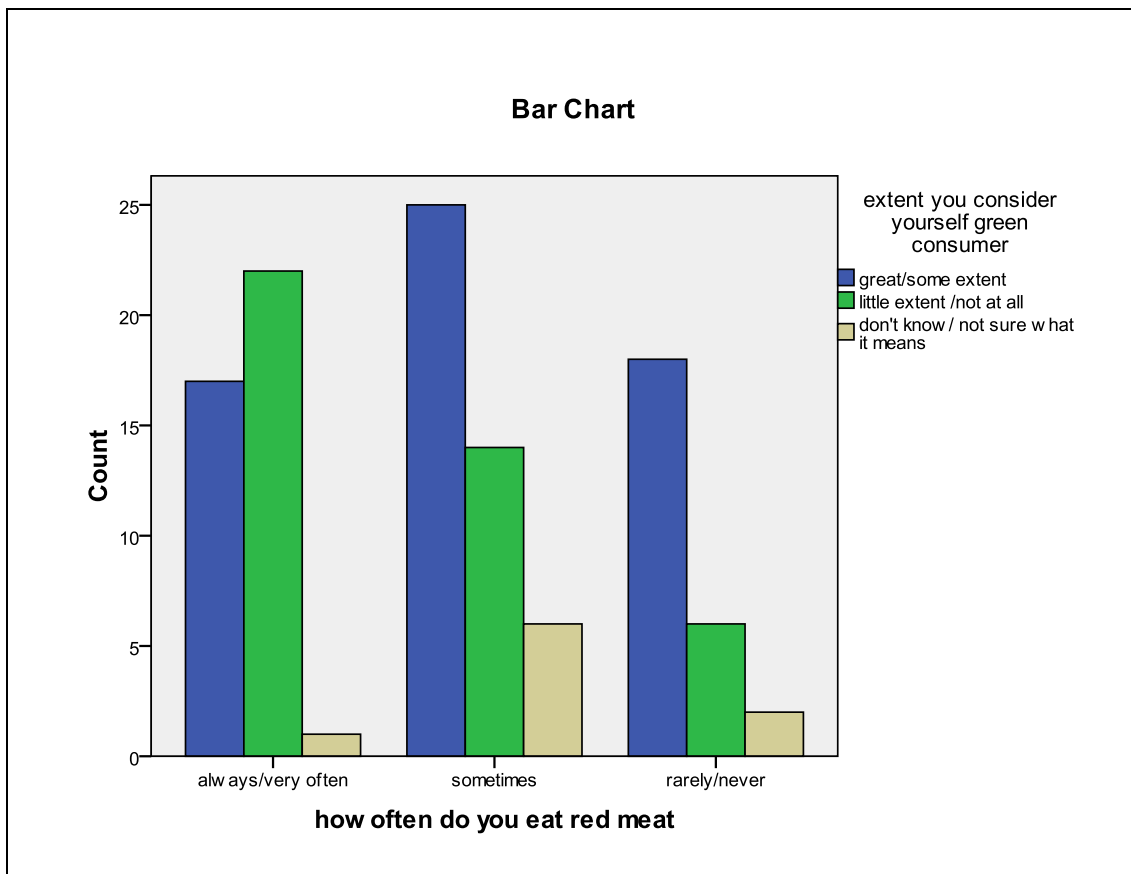
a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.97.



how often do you eat red meat * extent you consider yourself green consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.336 ^a	4	.035
Likelihood Ratio	10.550	4	.032
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.555	1	.212
N of Valid Cases	111		

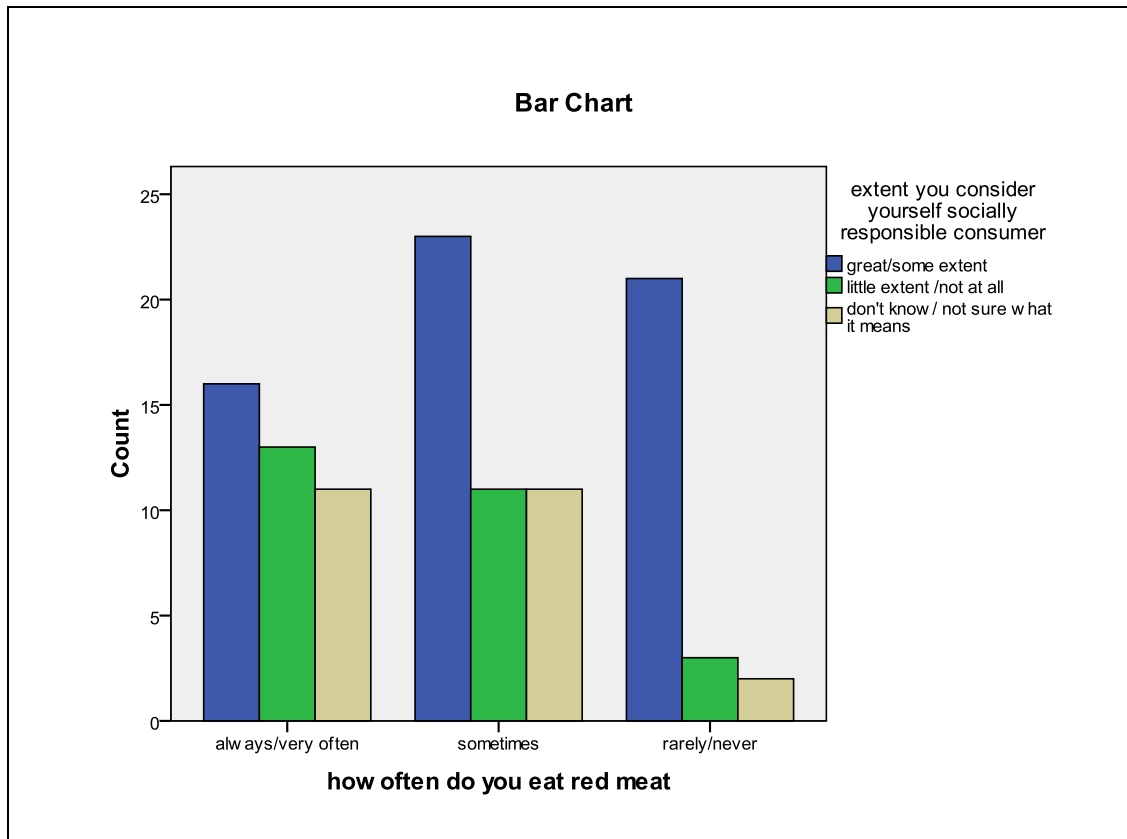
a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.11.



how often do you eat red meat * extent you consider yourself socially responsible consumer

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.952 ^a	4	.027
Likelihood Ratio	11.681	4	.020
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.139	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	111		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.62.



17. Publication

The Tactic of Collective Expropriation in Greece

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Reactions to ‘Austerity Politics’: The Tactic of Collective Expropriation in Greece

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Abstract

Masked activists, self-identifying as anarchists, taking from supermarkets and handing goods to passers-by are the topic of this Profile. Over 50 such acts have occurred across Greece since the onset of the financial, political, and social crisis in 2008. We present a snapshot of the phenomenon of collective expropriation and position it within a context of further market-oriented forms of resistance to ‘austerity politics’.

Key words: expropriation, appropriation, anarchism, Greece, social banditry, market disobedience, collective action

The Tactic of Collective Expropriation in Greece**Introduction**

'Just half a minute is enough to detract a satisfactory quantity of the essential products, and another three to five minutes to distribute them in the street'
(Pamphlet, 2009, p. 2)

While conventional forms of channelling and settling social conflict such as participation in electoral politics or trade union activism are becoming less popular in liberal parliamentary democracies, new forms of collective action in various guises appear as promising to those wanting to express their grievances and achieve change. In this Profile, we wish to acquaint readers with the phenomenon of collective expropriation of supermarkets as one expression of resistance to the current 'austerity politics' in Greece.

Collective expropriation is not a new phenomenon and not specific to Greece. In Europe, collective appropriation acts can be traced back at least to the 1970's Italy, with the development of the 'autoriduzione', 'spesa proletaria' and autonomist movements (Balestrini & Moroni, 1988). More recently, in 2002, the Catalan YoMango movement organised a day event of collective expropriation of goods in order to 'take to the extreme the free circulation of goods' (quoted in Andrews, 2005). In 2004, French electricity workers helped poor families to free power. In the mid 2000s, German activists claimed geographical mobility as a social right and denied the legitimacy of transport fares. At the same time, the 'Superheroes', playfully masked activists, raided shops and supermarkets in the context of the Euro MayDays 2004 and 2005 in Hamburg (Kominou & Pautz, 2010; Hauer, 2005).

What makes the Greek case particularly interesting is that the country's continuing crisis

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has functioned as an opportunity structure and catalyst for the idea and praxis of expropriation to evolve and spread. Over the past four years, expropriation of supermarkets has emerged as a new tactic of resistance within the Greek anarchist movement. Moreover, market disobedience as a market-oriented act of resistance has been embraced by people and groups not necessarily sharing the same ideological platform. This article, based on the analysis of secondary data (including activists' statements and media articles), focuses on collective expropriation of supermarkets between 2008 and spring 2012 but also briefly describes and places into context further moments of resistance in the sphere of consumption.

Overview of supermarket expropriations (2008 to 2012)

Between June 2008 and March 2012, over fifty acts of collective expropriation, all of them in branches of large supermarket chains, took place across Greece. The expropriations occurred in several Greek cities (including Athens, Thessalonica, Kavala, Xanthi, Larissa, Patra and Volos). Those behind them were, as far as we can tell, from local backgrounds. Nonetheless, the carefully planned acts followed similar patterns. The continuity, number and geographical spread of these incidents warrant the need to look at the phenomenon as a conscious form of tactic.

The first collective expropriation occurred in June 2008, well before the 'December Riots' of the same year. Twenty unarmed persons entered a supermarket in the Athens neighbourhood of Exarheia – an area with an anarchist political history – and left with trolleys full of basic foodstuffs. Immediately afterwards, the goods were distributed to random passers-by on a street market nearby, together with a leaflet addressing rising

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food prices. Exarheia was chosen because it was familiar urban terrain for the expropriators. As one of the activists said: 'Our actions always take place in the working class and immigrant quarters [...]. And always on days when there is a so-called people's market beside the supermarket and when streets are busy' (Savra, 2008). Street markets in Greece present, to the expropriators, opportunities to communicate with people on median and lower incomes as they are a considerable cheaper alternative to supermarkets. This first expropriation occurred at a time of growing dissatisfaction with the centre-right government of Kostas Karamanlis whose administration had been involved in a number of financial scandals since its re-election in 2007. It was also the time when economic recession started hitting Greece and worries over inflation and the rising cost of living were growing. This explains why the reactions of witnesses to the expropriation and redistribution acts were usually 'positive und inspiring; in a few minutes the shopping trolleys are empty' (Savra, 2008).

A further act followed in early September 2008 in Thessalonica. Again, about twenty people mostly wearing black hoods entered a supermarket from the large Masoutis chain and took pasta, rice and milk and deposited them in the middle of a nearby street. Calling themselves 'Initiative Against Rising Prices' they presented their protest as resistance to 'the consumerist mechanism which places profits ahead of survival' (Communiqué, 2008b).

Then came the December unrests after the shooting of Alexandros Grigoropoulos on December the 6th by Athens police forces. For three weeks, in a number of cities across Greece disaffected protestors had running battles with the police. Government buildings, shops and banks were targeted with arson attacks. The first three days of the riots,

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Reuters reported that already over 130 shops had been destroyed (Flynn & Kyriakidou, 2008). While the unrest was triggered by the shooting, it arguably expressed more than that; 60% of Greeks did not see the riots as perpetrated by 'thugs' but understood them as part of a wider 'social uprising' (Eleftherotypia, 2008). Up until the riots, twelve incidents of collective expropriations of supermarkets had occurred. However, while shoplifting and looting of stores was a fairly common practice during the riots, only one incident of collective supermarket expropriation – i.e. a collective act with a specific political purpose – was reported from Thessalonica on the 17th of December during the riots.

The acts of collective expropriation continued throughout 2009 and 2010 in the context of demonstrations, strikes and turbulent electoral politics which saw a PASOK government under Georgios Papandreou come to power in October 2009. But with the crisis continuing under the new government, expropriations continued. On the 10th of March 2010, a group calling itself 'Desperate Housewives' raided a supermarket in Athens. On the 7th of June 2010, 'The 40 Thieves Without Ali Baba' entered a large supermarket and distributed their goods on a street market. Again, a few days later, a group calling itself 'The Thieves' Thieves' took basic foods and destroyed the shops' surveillance system. Upon leaving they set fire to money they took from the tills and posted video footage on Indymedia (Communiqué, 2010a).

While all these actions were non-violent, at least one involved the setting on fire of a supermarket in May 2010. A note left by the activists said: 'whatever cannot be expropriated will surrender itself to destruction' (Communiqué, 2010c). In October 2010, two years after the first incident, Athens police assigned a special squad to guard supermarkets. However, so far, only four arrests have been made. A court trial is to begin

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in spring 2012 against activists from Larissa. Whilst the police authorities have been slow to respond to the difficult-to-control expropriation tactic, the management of the affected supermarket chains have also said little in public.

The most recent actions of expropriation include one which occurred on the 11th of February 2012 in the context of demonstrations and strikes organised throughout Greece to coincide with a parliamentary vote on the 'Second Memorandum' that would allow a continuation of Greece's 'bail out'. On that day in Patras, shortly before the start of the central rally, a group of 30 activists entered a supermarket and appropriated foodstuffs. The action had been organised specifically for that day to complement the more mainstream demonstrations.

The latest incident was recorded on the 10th of March in Ano Liosia, an Athens neighbourhood. Following the familiar pattern, activists distributed a leaflet entitled 'Charity: The Alibi of Barbarism' (Communiqué, 2012). It argued against the government's recent plans to only allow official bodies such as the Church, governmental institutions and certain NGOs to operate charity initiatives including the collection and distribution of free food and clothes to Greece's destitute and disadvantaged population.

The political discourse of the expropriators

The number of incidents, their occurrence across Greece and the fact that they were mainly carried out by activists self-identifying as anarchists shows that they constitute deliberate acts of resistance against a political, economical and social system that the perpetrators identified as dysfunctional. The communiqués accompanying most appropriation acts and two more extensive pamphlets offer an insight into the political

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discourse of the expropriators. We decided to quote from these communiqués at some length for the Profile.

Activists consistently criticise capitalism as a failed system, responsible for the social inequalities and hardships faced by the underprivileged in Greece. Moreover, they criticise calls for obedience and dismiss hopes that a 'solution' can be achieved top-down:

Today they tell us to share our poverty, to happily accept the ever increasing intensity of exploitation, to be silent when facing mass redundancy, decreasing wages [...], to be patient because the legitimate economists and technocrats will find the solution (Pamphlet, 2009, p. 4).

The expropriators view their actions as a legitimate and emancipatory response, a grass-roots approach to the immediate problem of rising cost of living, public service cuts and growing unemployment. It is the surplus value of the goods stashed on supermarket shelves that legitimates expropriation. Ownership and property relations are contested, along with the monetary-exchange mechanism which dictates consumption:

The expropriations of supermarkets constitute the appropriation of products which we [should] own anyway by revoking in practice the money-exchange relationships, thus producing self-praxis and class solidarity (Pamphlet, 2009, p. 4).

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Expropriation is viewed as a market-oriented tactic of resistance from the pallet of direct action. Activists call for this form of action to complement the social struggles performed in everyday life:

Around us, a big chunk of the world lives in poverty, unemployment and brutality. [...] We are youth. Foreign. Locals. Students. Unemployed. Pensioners. Workers. We are those who live under oppression in every field of life. [...] it is time to wake up, to look around us, to act and to talk for ourselves and not through our masters. To define our needs. With equality, in solidarity, everywhere. With daily militant struggles everywhere. Squares, neighbourhoods, associations, workplaces, schools, universities (Pamphlet, 2012, p. 8).

Media framing: the 'Robin Hoods of the Supermarkets'

Positive media coverage is often seen as paramount to social movements. Supermarket expropriators have not suffered criticism from the Greek media in terms of the 'ethics' and 'legality' of their actions per se. Within a discourse of 'justified grievances', the appropriators have benefited from relatively benign media reporting: 'They might hide their face behind hoodies [...]. However, they show a social face that moves the customers of the street markets', as a journalist reported (Ritzaelou, 2009). Nonetheless, the 'noble robber – Robin Hood' frame extensively deployed by the mass media has been received by the activists as largely problematic and as a threat to their cause.

Ever since the first instance of expropriation, collectives across Greece seemed to have

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remained autonomous in the way they acted, defined themselves and presented themselves to the public. While most communiqués bore the hallmarks of anarchist iconography, signatures reading ‘The Raging Consumers’ or more creative names such as ‘The 40 Thieves Without Ali Baba’ and ‘Desperate Housewives’ were also used. The Robin Hood imagery was used only once by the activists themselves when they signed as ‘Robin Hood, Zorro, Hulk and Others’ (Communiqué, 2010b). The majority of activists rejected this metaphor as it contradicted the meaning behind their direct action: the promotion of self-help and autonomous, leaderless collective action. The idea that they were committing ‘theft’, or that they were simply trying to restore an old and ‘just’ order, as implied in the Robin Hood metaphor, was also rejected. After all, the appropriators ‘want everything for everyone’ and their actions were to ‘take back what always belonged to us’ (Communiqué, 2011a; Communiqué, 2011b; Communiqué, 2008a).



Figure 1. The photo shows activists during an expropriation in Persiteri, Athens, on the 24th of December 2011. The banner reads ‘Expropriations in Supermarkets – War Towards the Masters’

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In an attempt to highlight the misleading media framing, the ‘Thieves’ Thieves’ – after an expropriation in Thessalonica where goods were kept by the activists rather than distributed – commented:

From the beginning we had decided that the expropriated goods would be shared amongst the participating comrades and not distributed. With this choice we wanted to make clear that [...] the aim is not for some saviours of society to emerge. We want society itself to act and not to wait for a philanthropist ‘revolutionary’. [...] As for the term ‘Robin of the Supermarkets’: it constitutes one more classic attempt from the mass media to extract the original and ascribe a new meaning to these actions by portraying our comrades as an elite that steals for the poor, resulting in the distribution of the goods being presented in such a way that can lead to the narcosis and passivity of ‘someone will think-act-care for us’ (Communiqué, 2010a).

Despite the problems it generated, the framing of expropriation acts in the ‘Robin Hood’ terminology served as a catalyst for the development of the collective action itself. Activists felt misrepresented and therefore compelled to re-define and re-articulate the nature and meaning of their actions. Ultimately, this led to the development of a more concrete political consciousness of the specific act. This is particularly evident in the second pamphlet from February 2012 in which the expropriators tried to communicate

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the politics and ideology behind their actions and to connect it with the everyday relevance and meaning of expropriation: 'we realise the meaning of such types of action, a fact that urges us to publicize and defend them in political terms (Pamphlet, 2012, p. 2).

Spreading market disobedience: further forms of direct action

The practise of supermarket expropriation represents one of the most radical moments of resistance to 'austerity politics'. However, disobedience in the sphere of consumption in Greece has spread beyond the anarchist movement

One particular new movement is 'Den Plirono' (translated as 'I Am Not Paying'). It started as action against road tolls in 2009. Today it is taking the lead in organising local groups opposing the cutting-off of electricity to people refusing to pay a new property-related tax paid through the electricity bills. Den Plirono has also staged interventions regarding public transport, for example its members occupied metro stations or let passengers use public transport for free. It also tried to reduce supermarket prices through negotiations, albeit unsuccessfully. The movement inspired the creation of a similar movement in Spain, the 'Yo No Pago' movement which campaigned against rising transportation costs in Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville and Bilbao in January 2012 (Alex B., 2012).

February 2012 saw the appearance of the 'Potato Movement'. Set up by the local Consumer Union in the northern municipality of Pieria, the idea behind it rapidly spread across Greece. The Potato Movement urges consumers to collectively place large orders straight to producers in an attempt to abolish the middlemen and so to reduce prices. Thus far, the initiative – greeted as well as criticised, for example by the Greek Communist

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Party – has been successful with prices being two and three times lower than previously. Consumers now arrange deals for oil, rice and meat products, too (Skai News, 2012).

Conclusion and outlook

Can collective expropriation become a successful political praxis against austerity politics in Greece? Expropriation (and distribution) expresses the rejection of particular social, economic and political conditions. Such 'social crime', to use Eric Hobsbawm's terminology (Hobsbawm, 2001), has the potential of becoming a culture of everyday resistance. In particular the situation in today's Greece – a government in meltdown, a retrenching welfare state, a catastrophic labour market situation, powerful elites and impenetrable social barriers, a corrupt and ineffective state with ever-decreasing legitimacy – provides fertile ground for social crime. Therefore, many in Greece's anarchist circles consider collective expropriation to be an appropriate tactic to bridge the divide between 'activists' and 'ordinary' people, in particular when during a crisis as has been unfolding in Greece more and more people started questioning the concept of 'property' and existing power relations. The resentment felt by many against public spending cuts, redundancies in the private and public sectors, transport fare rises, privatisation of once public goods and services, the resentment against a discourse which preaches austerity to the majority of the population whilst remaining silent in the face of an ever-increasing gap between rich and poor, could further transform into a thinking that goes beyond conventional 'reform ideas'. The Den Plirano movement and other attempts by local groups, constituted of formerly passive citizens and members of the middle classes, indicate this. Maybe Greece indeed presents us with a scenario in which

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collective appropriation is successful as a method to make links between existing 'resentment against state-imposed regulations and micro-political, often individual covert acts of appropriation based on anti-capitalist sentiment' (Kanngieser, 2007).

DRAFT

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