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Consumer Motivations for Mainstream “Ethical” Consumption

1.1 Introduction

Major consumers brands and retailers are increasingly coming under scrutiny for their perceived ethical obligations (Shaw and Riach 2011; Thompson and Arsel 2004). Retailers across North-America and Europe have been promoting ethical or sustainable products as a way of improving their reputation, differentiating themselves, and meeting economic objectives (Nicholls 2002). However in their seminal works Devinney, Auger and Eckhardt (2010) and Eckhardt, Belk and Devinney (2010) suggest that mainstream customers don't purchase products for ethical reasons. Indeed they (amongst others: Arnould 2007; Auger and Devinney 2007; Carrington, Neville and Whitwell 2010) suggest the traditional methods used by consumption researchers to investigate market size and purchase motivation are too distant from behavioral reality, and vastly overinflate the importance of ethics in consumption.

In this paper we step beyond traditional approaches by exploring the “moment of truth” (Carrington et al. 2010: p.139) – the point at which the consumption behavior happens. We ask the question: what motivates mainstream consumers into consuming ethical products? Through an extensive study of mainstream fair trade consumers, utilizing a soft-laddering interview technique (Reynolds 2006; Kaciak and Cullen 2009) we are able to explore underlying motivations for ethical consumption at point of purchase. We find these largely unrelated to the high cognition, high involvement, and information rich consumer debates which the literature. We find many more socio-cultural and nuanced motivations as the core drivers of consumption. However by looking at mainstream ethical consumption, rather than radical or fringe consumers, typically targeted by phenomenological researchers (Arnould

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3 2007; Connolly and Prothero 2008; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), we are able to
4 provide a more market focused analysis of relevance to researchers and practitioners.
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9 **1.2 Ethical Consumption and Retail**

10 In this study we use the term ethical consumption to cover a range of terms circulating in the
11 literature including sustainable (Connolly and Prothero 2003), moralistic (Luedicke,
12 Thompson and Giesler 2010), green (Gleim et al. 2013), organic (van Doorn and Verhoef
13 2011) and fair trade consumption (White et al. 2012). Although these are often discussed in
14 isolation within the literature, they are complementary from a theoretical perspective, with the
15 same methods and theories being applied with similar outcomes in all spheres (Shaw and
16 Riach 2011; Tully and Winer 2014). We therefore adhere to Cooper-Martin and Holbrook's
17 (1993: p.113) definition which broadens other definitions of ethical consumption to
18 encompass 'consumption experiences that are affected by the consumer's ethical concerns'.
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34 Despite the growing practice of mainstream brands positioning themselves within an ethical
35 space (Shaw and Riach 2011; Prothero et al. 2011), the ethical consumption research on
36 which they base their decisions has some major deficiencies both methodologically and
37 theoretically (Arnould 2007; Auger et al. 2008; Eckhardt et al. 2010). Schaefer and Crane
38 (2005) categorizes two schools of ethical consumption research: the Information Processing
39 and Rational Approach, and the Socio-Anthropological Approach. Since 2005 there has been
40 more convergence between the different schools with insights from one being subsumed into
41 the other (see Carrington et al. 2010; Chatzidakis et al. 2015 and Rios, Finkelstein and Landa
42 2015 for recent examples). Therefore below we discuss the limitations of two broad forms of
43 ethical consumption research based on methodological choices: analytical vs.
44 phenomenological.
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1.2.1 Analytical approaches to ethical consumption

Analytical approaches to ethical consumption are underpinned by the assumption that consumers cognitively translate their concerns towards society or the environment into expressed buying behavior (Andorfer and Liebe 2012; Carrington et al. 2010). However as Foxall (1993) and Fukukawa (2003) amongst others suggest, this cognitive view of consumption abstracted from its socio-cultural context have largely been debunked. Furthermore as Andorfer and Liebe's (2012) systematic review shows, very few of these types of study actually explore genuine behavior. Exceptions include De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007), Bjørner et al. (2004) and Shaw et al. (2006), but even these use post-hoc, self-reported behavior. As such they are reliant on intention data which rarely coheres with actual behavior (Sheeran, 2002).

Schaefer and Crane (2005) further identify the dominant assumption of analytical approaches that information rich and informed customers are more motivated to consume ethically. Failure to consume ethically can therefore be overcome through better product availability and culturally relevant communication (Maignan and Ferrell 2004). The majority of experimental studies therefore investigate the role of information dissemination (De Pelsmacker and Janssens 2007; Gleim, et al. 2013; White et al. 2012). These studies produce some excellent results under controlled conditions, however there is a substantial body of evidence which suggests influencing ethical consumption is not this easy outside the lab environment (Auger et al. 2008; Carrigan and Attalla 2001; Prothero et al. 2011). Phenomenological research has therefore emerged to explore the role of ethical consumption as part of an individual's overall consumption experience.

1.2.2 Phenomenological approaches to ethical consumption

Consumption is a socio-cultural experience involving sense-making, identity construction, group membership and affiliation, not just an individual cognitive process (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Bagozzi 1975). Within phenomenological approaches, ethical consumption is often framed as a mechanism for consumers to demonstrate resistance to the mainstream, as part of an identity project or in-group membership such as with voluntary simplicity (Craig-Lees and Hill 2002), political purchasing (Connolly and Prothero 2008; Prothero et al. 2011), or anti-consumption (Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Zavestoski 2002). Therefore resisting one type of consumption forms the basis for another type of consumption - ethical consumption (Arnould 2007).

Phenomenological researchers frame the ethical consumer as on the fringe (Eckhardt et al., 2010; Shaw and Riach 2011), radical (Bezenco and Blili 2010; Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler 2010) or anti-corporate (Thompson and Arsel 2004). Bezenco and Blili (2010) therefore suggest that ethical consumers actively seek out alternatives to mainstream products because they strongly believe in ethical issues (termed *adhesion*). Simultaneously they feel part of a socio-cultural or subversive movement through the relationship they develop with retailers, producers and consumer groups (termed *relational ethics*). Therefore to increase sales, companies need to increase adhesion by creating antecedents of involvement, such as illustrations of empowerment (Bezenco and Blili 2011), justice restoration (White et al. 2012), or a sense of belonging (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). However, it is hard to envision the consumption of a fair trade KitKat, H&M organic clothing, or Ben and Jerry's Ice-cream as resistance to the mainstream. Phenomenological researches focus on fringe consumers has thus created an erroneous assumption about the importance of ethics in purchase decisions, which is unlikely to replicate in mainstream consumers.

1.2.3. Towards an understanding mainstream ethical consumption

The emergence of widely available ethical products has engendered new consumers to behave in ways synonymous with ethical consumption which are poorly served by the extant schools of research. Analytical approaches decontextualize their studies for methodological purity and thus vastly over estimate actual behavior. Whereas phenomenological researchers' adherence to deconstructing identity narratives of radical groups creates an over estimation of motivational drivers. What we actually know about mainstream ethical consumption behavior is actually negligible (Carrington et al. 2010; 2014). Normative assessments such as Ballet and Carimentrand (2010) and Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) suggest that ethical consumption in the mainstream engenders a depersonalization of consumer ethics, symptomatic of low adhesion, low political drive and the demise of market resistance movements. This can in part be seen in Chatzidakis et al.'s (2012) reported disengagement from fair trade consumption by radial consumers. Doherty et al. (2013) go as far as to propose that mainstream ethical consumption can become a totally passive activity with low ethics, low involvement and low information. The question for this paper is therefore: what motivates mainstream consumers into knowingly and frequently consuming ethical products?

1.3 Methodology

Accepting the limitations of the extant theory, it is important to explore ethical consumption from an informed but unconstrained theoretical perspective (Andorfer and Liebe 2012). We therefore wanted a method which would ground the data in its phenomenological context, but allow for the emergence of dominant motivations from within the data to emerge. Soft-laddering was chosen as it is an approach which allows for the free flow of consumer interpretation and storytelling through the use of loose semi-structured interview protocols,

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3 but utilizes prompts to determine the motivations that translate product attributes into
4 meaningful associations for the self. It therefore operates in reverse to the analytical stage
5 models which start with personal values and tracks forwards towards intention to behave, by
6 starting with behavior and encouraging the consumer to link back to their underlying
7 motivations, values, and identities. Unlike hard-laddering, which forces interviewees to
8 produce ladders one-by-one through forced choice and open question surveys (see Jägel et al.
9 2012 as a rare example of hard-laddering in sustainable consumption); soft-laddering requires
10 “conventional, one-to-one, usually tape recorded, semi-structured interviews where the natural
11 flow of speech of the respondent is restricted as little as possible ...” (Kaciak and Cullen
12 2009, p.106) but presents qualitative data in a format more familiar and accessible to
13 quantitative researchers.
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29 The semi-structured interview starts by asking broad questions to identify product attributes
30 and consumption experiences (e.g. "Why did you chose to shop here today?", "Why did you
31 choose that product?") and to probing questions about purchase decisions (e.g. "Why did you
32 chose to buy [this product] over [other brand]", "What is it about [fair trade product] that you
33 like / dislike?"). This progresses on to broader questions about personal motivation ("What
34 does fair trade mean to you?", "What made you chose fair trade products over conventional
35 products?"), onto deeper questions about values ("Why is that [attribute / motivation]
36 important to you?", "How does that reflect your personality?"). However questions varied to
37 elicit the best narrative responses from participants. To allow for more naturalistic responses
38 respondents were also asked if they could remember an example from a recent shopping
39 experience to allow more natural storytelling. Through this process interviewers can gain a
40 deeper insight into the underlying motivations and values behind consumer decisions
41 (Reynolds and Gutman 1988). The interview questions progress from questions about specific
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3 purchases of fair trade, onto questions about fair trade generally, and post consumption and
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5 social experience.
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8 9 *1.3.1 Sample selection*

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11 In line with suggestions of 40-60 respondents in laddering interviews (Reynolds 2006; Kaciak
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13 and Cullen 2009), the data set comprises of 50 interviews conducted in the semi-ethnographic
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15 setting of a UK, high street coffee shop. This context was theoretically sampled based on the
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17 following rationale:
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21 • Fair trade has been one of the fastest growing mainstream ethical consumption
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23 activities, growing at ~30% per year since 2003 and worth over \$7bn worldwide
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25 (Doherty et al. 2013). Fair trade has also become the most common context in which
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27 to study ethical consumption in the last decade making our findings comparable to
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29 existing literature (Andorfer and Liebe 2012; Carrington et al. 2010; Chatzidakis et al.
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31 2015).
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34 • As the biggest market for fair trade the UK is highly mainstreamed and has over 80%
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36 consumer recognition of the Fairtrade (Doherty et al. 2013).
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39 • Coffee shops are the most replicable context internationally and are one of the first
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41 mainstream outlets to offer fair trade products. Other potential contexts are World
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43 Shops and supermarkets. However World Shops are likely to yield “radical”, rather
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45 than mainstream consumers (Bezenco and Blili 2011), and although supermarkets are
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47 mainstream outlets, they are less prevalent as fair trade retailers outside a limited
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49 number of European countries. Both are also hard environments in which to conduct
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51 point of purchase in-depth interviews. Coffee Shops however allow for private one-to-
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53 one interviews, and since coffee shops are a second home to many people (Borghini,
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55 Sherry and Joy 2013).
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- The retail chain selected sells fair trade products including hot beverages, chocolate, sugar, juice, nuts and fruit. None of the three biggest brands in the UK (Costa, Starbucks and Cafe Nero) currently provide 100% fair trade beverages and so a smaller mainstream retailer was selected. The specifically chosen shop is on a major metropolitan city high street with 8 other coffee shops (including Costa and Café Nero) within 50 meters. Within 500 meters there are over 60 coffee shops (including two Starbucks and two further Costa Coffees) affording customers plenty of choice.

Once potential interviewees had ordered drinks they were asked to participate and the researcher offered to pay for the drinks. 96 respondents were recruited, although as we were only interested in consumers that knowingly purchasing ethical produce we excluded respondents if they did not: 1) know they had just bought a fair trade product, or 2) could not identify at least five intentional fair trade purchases in the last month from mainstream outlets (equivalent to an “active” fair trade consumer, Bondy and Talwar 2011). Interviewees were between 21 and 64 years old (mean age of 35), 38% had studied to an undergraduate degree level, 76% were employed, 10% in full-time education, 14% retired or home-makers, and 52% were female. Interviews lasted between 20 and 70 minutes (average 48 minutes).

1.3.2 Analysis

The initial stage of analysis was entirely open coded. This stage involved analysis being carried out through an inductive process using the tools developed for analysing grounded theory research as synthesised by Spiggle (1994). Interviews were transcribed and run through a series of categorisation, abstraction, and comparison processes to identify themes which were then placed into dimensions to aid in integration into theory. Both researchers independently coded the data then compared results. Codes were then linked to extant empirical findings to identify emerging themes and how these related to preexisting themes

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3 within the literature (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Thompson 1997). The final stage was a
4
5 content analysis of the emergent dimensions to identify the sum of different categories and
6
7 how they linked to other categories through the laddering process (van Rekom and Wierenga
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9 2007). Dimensions are classified into attributes, motivations and values. Attributes are defined
10
11 as tangible and in-tangible perceived qualities and features of a product-service. Motivations
12
13 provide the rationalization for why certain attributes are important to respondents for both
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15 themselves and others and are developed through past experience or association (Veludo-de-
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17 Oliveira et al. 2006). Values, represent the ends of the ladder and are beliefs individuals hold
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19 about the self (Reynolds 2006).
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25 After categorizing the codes, each element is processed into the Implication Matrix (Aurifeille
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27 and Valette-Florence 1995). The aim of the matrix is to show how often aspects were
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29 mentioned in relation to others. Through this tool qualitative research is moved onto a
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31 quantitative level and this is seen as “one of the unique aspects of laddering” (Reynolds and
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33 Gutman 1988, p.19). Numbers in the matrix differentiate between direct and indirect relations.
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35 Imagine a ladder A-B-C, A-B and B-C are direct relations, which are the stronger
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37 connections. However, in order to represent the full strength of a ladder it is important to also
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39 consider indirect relations, such as A-C. Both direct and indirect connection are represented
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41 separated by a period, thus [21.12] = [21 direct connections.12 indirect connections]. A
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43 Hierarchical Value Map (HVM) is then used to symbolize the relationships (Gengler et al.
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45 1999).
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51 In order to reduce the complexity of the HVM and to focus on the most generalizable and
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53 stable relations, a cut-off-level needs to be found that allows differentiation between the
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55 relevance of elements. Reynolds and Gutman (1988) recommend a cutoff level of four direct
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3 relations for a sample of 30 to 50 respondents. However this produced a highly complex
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5 HVM due to the high quality and volume of our data, running to over 400 consumption
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7 events. Considering the trade-off between comprehensiveness and parsimony, lines are only
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9 included on the map if 8 direct relations were identified between elements, although all
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11 relations are in the implications matrix.
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14 15 16 **1.4 Findings**

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18 Laddering findings are read by presenting the HVM in Figure 1, direct quotes from interviews
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20 and laddering weights from the implication matrix in Table 1. Keeping the research question
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22 in mind, motivational chains will be described from values to product attributes, even though
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24 the HVM is created vice versa. The centrality of values is determined by the frequency of
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26 ladders mentioned. Chains leading to an item can be read vertically, chains leading from an
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28 item are read horizontally on table 1.
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36 Before describing the main findings; during the interview-process it became obvious that
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38 despite the highly purposive nature of the sample, all but 4 participants are only able to
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40 provide superficial definitions of fair trade:
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43 *“It’s a bit like organics but better isn’t it?”*

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45 *“It means no child labor is used in factories and stuff like that.”*

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47 When confronting their lack of knowledge, participants explain fair trade is a complex issue,
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49 which confuses them. They also face difficulties in distinguishing concepts such as local
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51 trade, organic products and eco-products. Even though participants have positive association
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53 with fair trade, they are not interested in actively seeking information. This falls in line with
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55 Auger et al. (2008) critique of existing research that information is not always a positive
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3 indicator or required entity for consumption behavior. We find not only is information not a
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5 barrier to behavior but simultaneously the consumer has no interest in seeking information on
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7 which to base a decision.
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12 Returning to the main research objective however, three predominant values motivate fair
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14 trade consumption according to our respondents: *health and well-being*, *social guilt* and *self-*
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16 *satisfaction*. However there is a further non-value based dominant factor: *habit*.
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20 21 1.4.1 Habit

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23 The extent to which fair trade consumption reflects resistance to the market is questionable.
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25 Only 2 respondents suggest the café was selected because it sold fair trade. The other 48
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27 suggest convenience (38 respondents), ambience (23), product quality (22), Free WiFi (21),
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29 advocacy (15) and service (10) as their main reasons for coming. When the discussion was
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31 extended out to the full plethora of fair trade products this theme was repeated with
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33 respondents echoing:
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36 *"I buy lots of fair trade – but then again it's hard not to. This coffee, my bananas, my*
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38 *tea! Everything is fair trade when you walk around Sainsbury's. Would I go out of my*
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40 *way to buy it? No!"*

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43 *"I buy lots of fair trade – but not for ethical reasons or anything like that, it's just the*
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45 *brands I like. I have a banana every day and I like a KitKat with lunch."*
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48 For many it just so happens that the brand or retailer the customer buys from converted to fair
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50 trade. For many the decision to buy fair trade was driven not by personal ethics, but by the
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52 most common ladder in the study; a *habit* formed out of *availability* [52.21].
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3 *"It was an accident I guess. I don't remember ever thinking – right I am going to buy*
4 *fair trade from now on. I just started with coffee, then chocolate and now sugar, fruit,*
5 *biscuits. It becomes a habit, but you don't know where it came from."*
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10 It isn't always a simple process to understand what leads to ethical consumption behavior. For
11 many a *habit* is started purely based on *availability*, for others the *habit* is forged by
12 constrained options (18 participants mentioned this) and for others fair trade was a social
13 pressure (16 respondents). Interestingly no respondents suggested they begrudged being
14 constrained into purchasing fair trade. Quite the contrary, most actually expanded from
15 individual episodes of constrained consumption into more general habitual patterns of
16 consumption without ever exploring the ethical issues. However the fairly universal lack of
17 interest in the ethics of the product was reversed in the role of ethics in the perceived quality
18 of the retailer.
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29 *"So many of my basic groceries are now fair trade I am not sure if I could shop*
30 *without buying it. Maybe if I went to Asda or something like that – but I wouldn't shop*
31 *there."*
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36 *"It's not that I have that much understanding of what fair trade is, but if I went to*
37 *shops that didn't sell fair trade then I would be surrounded by; I know this sounds*
38 *really bad, but the sort of person who wouldn't buy fair trade."*
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43 Consumers therefore place a value judgment on the quality of their retailer on the back of
44 stocking fair trade. In-fact 21 interviewees independently raised fair trade as a perceived
45 virtue in their retailer of choice, even where the consumer does not have strong ethical
46 inclinations. However the formation of *habits* we find in the mainstream differ markedly from
47 those Carrington et al. (2014) found in their 13 purposefully sampled respondents. Carrington
48 et al. found a limited number of deeply held beliefs driving the creation of new ethical
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3 consumption habits. Here we are more inclined to find existing *habits* being encroached by
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5 ethical products.
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8 9 10 *1.4.2 Health and well-being*

11 One of the main motivations behind consumption is the (probably wrong) association of fair
12 trade with health benefits. Participants suggest they are concerned about their health and that
13 for them fair trade consumption is strongly related to the intention to improve *health and well-*
14 *being*. A strong antecedent for this is the perception of *high quality*. A total of [62.52]
15 relations lead to it and [39.29] from it, making *quality* one of the most central motivational
16 elements in the HVM:
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25 *"You are what you eat. Fair trade products are higher quality and therefore healthier.*

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27 *You are good to yourself. That is what this whole movement is about."*
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29 The perception of high quality is influenced by two means: *ingredients* and high expectations
30 of *standards*. This association incorporates a variety of perceptions including reduced usage
31 of chemicals and natural cultivation. It seems this assumption is, for 26% of respondents
32 based on a bad perception of multinational corporations (despite buying it from major
33 retailers):
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41 *"With fair trade your products come from smaller companies which mean they are*
42 *pure, you know less engineered."*
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45 Obviously the respondents have strong feelings about what being a big vs. small company
46 means, although whether they accurately portray the results of fair trade accreditation is
47 highly questionable. One product attribute that leads to this association is the perception of
48 *better taste* - a very personal and subjective attribute. Participants strongly connect perceived
49 *taste* to better *ingredients*. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that during the interviews
50 participants started questioning this perception.
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3 *"Maybe there is actually no difference in the quality, but doing a good deed makes my*
4 *chocolate taste so much better."*

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7 *"If I had more money, I would buy fair trade more often. It does tastes a lot better than*
8 *the general stuff. Actually I do not really know if it is the flavor or the emotional part*
9 *that amuses my tongue."*

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14 Compared to the emotional connection of *ingredients*; *standards* appear to be a more rational
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16 influence because participants assume an independent body ensures that buyers and producers
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18 meet specific quality standards (which is slightly inaccurate):
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21 *"If third world countries know that they are controlled by Western organizations they*
22 *will have more hygienic processes and use better ingredients."*

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25 A second chain, which strengthens the perception of *higher quality*, is a frequently mentioned
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27 product attribute: the *price premium*. Within the product attributes, *price* has the highest
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29 amount of relations leading from it [56.22] and consequently strongly influences other
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31 perceptions.
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34 *"I thought fair trade must be some industry thing for better quality because it cost a bit*
35 *more - so started buying it for that originally."*

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38 However, it seems that the willingness to pay increases when a product is purchased in an
39
40 unusual situation or is a special product itself.
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43 *"There are products such as sugar, where I do not really mind about the quality and*
44 *look at the price to make my decision. But there are products which are more special*
45 *to me and where I am willing to spend more, but also expect more."*

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49 Summarizing this chain there are moments were the benefit of fair trade outweighs the price.
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51 Interestingly, the participants link fair trade closely to *high quality*. This is partly explained by
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53 participants linking paying a *price premium* and *fair trade standards* as a guarantee for *higher*
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55 *quality* and therefore (wrongly) healthier products. This whole chain links strongly with the
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3 literatures on ethics in luxury products where price premiums give a perception of both ethical
4 integrity and higher quality (Davies et al. 2012; Moraes et al. 2015). In this instance the halo
5 effect of fair trade expands beyond social good for producers all the way up to perceived
6 quality and health benefits for consumers. This leads to an individualization of the benefits for
7 self, above and beyond any self-benefits embedded within the products.
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13 14 15 16 *1.4.3 Social guilt*

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18 *Social guilt* is only the third most important chain regarding fair trade consumption and can be
19 divided into two intentions: A desire for *social justice*, and the perceived *win-win situation*.
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25 Participants identify an ethical obligation for *social justice* accounting for [68.50] ladders.
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27 *Social justice* is phrased by participants as to share wealth and feel committed to providing
28 equal opportunities in undeveloped countries. Many participants explain that by travelling the
29 world they have seen the poor conditions people live in and should take action. However this
30 is most often (~70% of the time) phrased from a personal benefit or individualistic
31 perspective:
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39 *"Some people need to be supported. If I can do that by purchasing something I need*
40 *anyway why not? Seems very decent to me."*
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44 *"It makes me feel as if I fulfilled my responsibility. I am single handed saving the world*
45 *one pot of coffee at a time."*
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48 On the one hand *social justice* is influenced by fair trade *standards* being perceived as
49 improving *production processes*. On the other hand participants see that their *money goes*
50 *back* to producers, leading to a feeling of *social justice*. This association is the second
51 strongest in the chain [34.06] although only accounts for 16 respondents. Here participants
52 acknowledge fair trade is an investment in *social justice*:
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3 *"You are not just buying a fair trade product. You are donating that bit you pay extra in*
4 *order to support the only way for people to get out of poverty: Trade."*
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7 Two product attributes strengthen this association. The emotional attribute of *supporting fair*
8 *trade* where participants feel fair trade is an institution that itself needs supporting:
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11 *"By buying fair trade I am hoping to keep the whole concept alive and make it profitable.*
12 *Maybe other industries will take over the concept as well then."*
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16 The other attribute is the *country of origin*. When discussing that coffee was produced in
17 Africa, participants create an image in their mind. This personalizes the product by making
18 participants believe that they are making a difference:
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22 *"I am often missing the personal aspect of fair trade. If I can see the country of origin*
23 *on the packet I have a better idea of where my money goes to."*
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27 However there is also a role for *peer influence* in mediating *social justice* with [08.09] ladders
28 between *social justice – peer influence* and [12.08] statements linking *peer influence* with
29 *social guilt*. Participants feel pressure to engage in fair trade because products become more
30 widely available and more people engage in ethical consumption:
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34 *"When all my friends order fair trade coffee, I will do the same. I do not want to*
35 *exclude myself from this group of better people."*
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39 *"I have to buy fair trade otherwise people would look down on me"*
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43 A second motivational pattern that peaks in the alleviation of *social guilt* is the assumption of
44 engaging in *win-win trade*. Participants appreciate not only satisfying basic, but also
45 psychological needs:
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49 *"I do not give to charity. But I need coffee... It is easy to be responsible by buying fair*
50 *trade coffee, which might cost more but also gets me something out of that. Tick in the*
51 *box. I fulfilled my responsibility as a good citizen."*
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3 As such the fair trade *label* has become a crucial element for participants and has been
4 mentioned in almost every interview. On a cognitive level the *label* stands for a certified
5 product. On an emotional basis it seems to offer participants something to trust and *reduces*
6 *skepticism*:
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10
11 *"I do not think I would buy fair trade products without the label. I would not believe it is*
12 *actually fair trade. If anybody could write that their product was produced fair trade,*
13 *they would do it. I would do it. It just makes the product more attractive. So yes, the*
14 *label gives me security."*
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20 Therefore the role of the consumer in fulfilling the *win-win* of fair trade is complex. For
21 instance we see a strong relationship between *standards* and a *label* representing a short-cut
22 for feeling engaged in *social justice*. It is not close engagement with other moral actors that
23 leads to engagement, as is reflected in the extant phenomenological research (Bezenco and
24 Blili 2010), but interaction on a superficial level with a *label* which has significance for both
25 self-perception and the perception of important others to alleviate guilt. When we link this
26 *social guilt* with the *habit* forming discussed earlier, we can see the importance of Moraes et
27 al. (2012) call for exploring ethical consumption as a socially embedded everyday practice,
28 rather than individual decision processes.
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43 1.4.4 Self-satisfaction

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45 The most central value behind fair trade consumption is the aim for *self-satisfaction*. A total
46 of [66.100] ladders lead to this element, which is a third more than the *social guilt*. The
47 strongest motivational aspect of fair trade consumption appears to be to please oneself rather
48 than helping others. Every participants clearly states that fair trade consumption makes them
49 happy. This motivation is not only identified in terms of having purchased something unusual,
50 but also in terms of having fulfilled responsibility towards the self:
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3 *"Buying fair trade generally makes me feel happy and good about myself."*

4
5 *"I know it is supposed to be about making other peoples' life easier. But to be honest,*
6
7 *for me it is more about making my own life better."*

8
9
10 The chain is mainly emotionally motivated and can be divided into patterns of *achievement*,
11 *treating oneself, felt compensation* and *self-justice*.
12
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16 Participants summarize *achievement* as perceiving that they are intelligently buying the best
17
18 products available. This mirrors the *health and wellbeing* chain because consumers believe
19
20 they are buying the best taste or ingredients and therefore buying themselves better quality.
21

22
23 *"If I buy something of really high quality, such as a fair trade coffee, I feel that I get the*
24
25 *most out of the options available to me."*
26

27 However, the *achievement* chain is most strongly connected to fair trade as a *treat*.
28

29
30 Participants enjoy the idea of rewarding themselves:

31
32 *"I like to purchase fair trade chocolate or coffee. Both are not really products that I*
33
34 *need in order to survive but I like them. They are my treat and when I buy them fair*
35
36 *trade, they are even more special."*
37

38
39 However, participants seem to occasionally suffer from consumption guilt in retail
40
41 environments when faced with a conflict between free-choice and fair-choice. 22 respondents
42
43 indicate they do not wish to confront the ethics of their consumption, and prefer unobtrusive
44
45 messages by retailers rather than overt signposting of ethical products:
46

47
48 *"If you want to buy fair trade you can shop in places such as Co-op because you know*
49
50 *that you will have the option. [...] When I go to Morrison's they do not offer fair trade*
51
52 *and I do not need to have a bad conscience for not purchasing. I simply did not even*
53
54 *have the option."*
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3 Participants do not want to be perceived as a “bad person” by making the “wrong” choice.
4
5 However they view fair trade as compensating for their “bad” consumption activities of
6
7 buying cheap clothes or notorious brands. We term this form of guilt alleviation as *felt*
8
9 *compensation*:

10
11 *"I know that the big companies do shit all the time. Hopefully I can make up for some of*
12
13 *it by buying fair trade from time to time."*

14
15
16 We therefore see respondent using fair trade in the pursuit of *self-justice*, or doing right by
17
18 oneself, which is likely to be determined by their social environment with [07.06] ladders to
19
20 *peer influence* and a total of [19.19] ladders with *belonging*:

21
22
23 *"It feels sophisticated to be a conscious consumer. I have not signed a membership, but*
24
25 *I am part of a socially accepted and maybe even admired group."*

26
27 However *belonging* connects the aim for *self-justice* to *feeling good* and having *emotional*
28
29 *benefits* from consumption. It does not link back to relational ethics as suggested in the
30
31 phenomenological literature. In fact we found very little link between ethical behavior and a
32
33 desire to be part of a social movement. This underlines the assertion that fair trade
34
35 consumption might be individualistic and hedonistically motivated:

36
37
38 *"Fair trade products are about the emotional value and the feeling that you get when*
39
40 *you have just purchased something. You not only get the emotional benefit of feeling*
41
42 *better about yourself, but this benefit also reflects on you."*

43
44
45 *"If I take a girl home I want her to see I have fair trade coffee, organic food, books on*
46
47 *the environment. You know! So she thinks I am a good guy."*

48
49 It can be concluded that by purchasing fair trade in the mainstream, participants aim to
50
51 express a self-identity that values morality without always sharing these values. This not only
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53 seems to be important for the self, but also in terms of representing the self to others and
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55 demonstrating belonging to an ethereal “in-group”.
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1.5 Discussion

This paper set out to investigate the motivation for mainstream ethical consumption behavior. In our attempt to bridge the gulf between the two schools of ethical consumption research we uncover a range of motivations which differ in context from the picture painted by both the analytic and phenomenological schools. The paper therefore makes contributions to two fields of research: ethical consumption and ethical retailing, which we shall cover in turn.

1.5.1 Ethical Consumption

Devinney, et al. (2010) and Eckhardt, et al. (2010) make the clear proposition that deeply held ethical values do not necessarily drive consumption choice in the mainstream, despite its prevalence as an assumption in the literature. Stern et al. (1993) identified three types of personal value relevant to ethical consumption: altruistic, biospheric and egoistic values. Our research strongly suggests an overestimation of the role of altruistic values in the current literature, suggesting *habit* and egoistic values (*self-satisfaction, belonging, health etc.*) as considerably more dominant drivers of "ethical" behavior than *social justice*. Even within *social guilt* we see less altruistic and more egoistic motivations such as *win-win* and *peer-pressure* than existing work would suggest (Doran 2010; White et al. 2012; Shaw et al. 2006). In line with Devinney, et al. (2010) we believe current literature vastly overstates the role of morality in consumption. There are however a large group of consumers who are *ethically influenced* in their consumption (rather than ethically led as in phenomenological studies). In this paper we expand on Devinney, et al.'s (2010) assertion by exploring the motivations for these ethically influenced consumers. Ethically influenced consumers are open to ethical alternative products and are willing to absorb them into their current stock of habituated consumption. They would be unlikely to go out of their way to purchase them, but are happy

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3 to have retailers constrain their choice to the ethical alternative; just so long as they can
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5 perceive benefits to *self* through *peer* esteem, *accomplishment* and perceptions of *higher*
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7 *quality*.
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11 Ethically influenced consumers are not underpinning consumption choice with strongly held
12
13 values. They are not changing *habits* due to existential crisis brought about through deep
14
15 reflection as per Carrington et al. (2014). The analytical school has always focused on the
16
17 moral attitudes of consumers as the dominant precursor to ethical consumption, which other
18
19 (usually external) constraints prevent actualization into behavior (i.e. poor information, price,
20
21 availability etc.). These authors may find heart in the volume of ladders passing through
22
23 *social justice* in our model. However the impact of the social-cultural context in enacting
24
25 behavior with *peer pressure*, *belonging* and the strong emotional responses like guilt and
26
27 being seen as a good person, clearly question the extent to which ethical values are an
28
29 internally consistent and measurably relevant phenomena in mainstream consumers. Although
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31 some analytical authors do place socio-cultural aspects as impediments to enacting behavior
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33 (Carrington et al. 2010; Chatzidakis et al. 2015), they are often ignored by modelers (Doran,
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35 2010; De Pelsmacker and Janssens, 2007) and are controlled out in most experimental designs
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37 (Gleim et al. 2013; White et al. 2012). Our research suggests they are too fundamental to
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39 ignore because they are the primary frame for even perceiving ethical dilemmas. They do
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41 appear in Hunt and Vitell's (1986) and Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) models as elements of
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43 social norms or subjective norms respectively, but are treated as static external pressures, not
44
45 dynamic conflicts. Questions used to elicit them are also fairly rudimentary (see Ajzen, 2006
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47 for example) and provide a limited reflection of the complex inter-relationship of ones-self
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49 and the rest of society.
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3 The phenomenological research conversely represents ethical consumers as heavily ingrained
4 within social movements, highly knowledgeable and with a deeply held set of ethics which
5 drive their identity projects (Luedicke et al. 2010; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007).
6
7 However, our mainstream consumers wish to be *seen* to belong to a “better group of people”
8 but don’t (in most cases) wish to be engaged, or have deeply held beliefs. They are certainly
9 not radical or market resistant and are often not knowledgeable about what they buy. In this
10 respect we empirically support Auger et al. (2008) questioning the assumption that
11 knowledgeable consumers are more likely to be ethical consumers. We purposefully sampled
12 active consumers who were enacting behavior in the mainstream. However respondents
13 acknowledge a distinct lack of knowledge about their purchases. Furthermore most
14 participants highlighted that they did not wish to know more or have higher involvement with
15 social movements. They felt good about what they were doing but did not want to face the
16 potentially guilt laden position increased knowledge might incur. Other authors such as
17 Carrigan and Attalla (2001), and De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007) have also suggested that
18 individuals can be negatively inclined towards information, and in our study consumers seem
19 to engage in *willful ignorance* (Ehrich and Irwin 2005) - preferring not to know or not to face
20 the dilemma. Ethical consumers (the minority represented in phenomenological works) invest
21 and engage in information gathering to ensure they make the most ethically available choice.
22 Conversely ethically influences consumers want to make the best choice for the self and
23 others perception, rather than best ethical choice. For ethically influenced consumers, more
24 information runs the risk of more guilt, and negative benefits for self (see the preference for
25 constrained choice over a free market in retailers).
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51 52 53 54 *1.5.2 Retailing Ethics* 55 56 57 58 59 60

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3 Retailers approaches are a fundamental link in delivering the availability and/or choice
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5 constraint which drive these ethically influenced consumers. Here willful ignorance has
6
7 potential for exploring the future of retailing ethical goods in the mainstream. Mainstream
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9 customers suggest being bombarded with ethical information led to a negative retail
10
11 experience. Even more so, having the option of ethical vs. regular products forces a consumer
12
13 to confront the uncomfortable, guilt laden proposition of choosing the “wrong” product. Not a
14
15 single respondent highlighted having the choice taken out of their hands by the retailer as a
16
17 negative issue. None begrudged shopping where they could only buy fair trade, and many
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19 highlighted that the retailer taking this choice gave a positive result for the customer in terms
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21 of their identity construction and their perception of the quality of the retailer. Therefore
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23 retailers should either fully convert to ethical product lines, or simply not start.
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30 The finding that knowledge is not always positively orientated with ethical consumption may
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32 be counter to the prevailing rhetoric of the literature (Gleim, et al. 2013; White et al. 2012),
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34 but it provides opportunities for retailers. We find that having a lack of in-depth knowledge
35
36 allows consumers to create a halo effect by imparting attributes and values to products which
37
38 potentially don’t exist. They get to imbue products with ethics that they want to believe in,
39
40 which provide benefits for the self: *health benefits, better quality ingredients, emotional*
41
42 *benefits, belonging* and above all *self-justice*. In the context of fair trade most of these
43
44 attributes are myths; for example a Fairtrade Mark can only guarantee that a company has
45
46 bought enough fair trade inputs to accommodate the outputs which carry the mark – not that
47
48 the product itself contains any fair trade ingredients (Doherty et al. 2013). Yet the customer
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50 believes so strongly in these mythical benefits that they gain an enhanced product experience
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52 regardless. Providing more specific information about what an ethical product actually is
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54 would totally undermine this halo effect. Therefore ethical communications and brand
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3 messages benefit from vagueness and ambiguity, not specificity as suggested in most
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5 literature. This does raise potential ethical issues about purposely under-informing consumers
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7 about ethical standards, but certainly reframes our understanding of the literature.
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11 The findings also suggest a reconceptualization of the impacts of availability and labeling in
12
13 ethical retailing. Situational factors such as these are often conceptualized as a barrier between
14
15 intention and behavior (Carrington et al. 2010; Gleim, et al. 2013; Shaw and Clark 1999).
16
17 However in a low cognition environment dominated by *habit* and *availability*, retailer
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19 labelling is often articulated by respondents as a prerequisite for the identification of a moral
20
21 issue. As with Humphrey's (2010) assertion that there is little market for a casino until a
22
23 region has one, there are very few "radical" customers searching for alternative goods until
24
25 goods are readily available (Bezenco and Bili 2010; Connolly and Prothero 2008). Our
26
27 respondents repeatedly reiterated that they are aware of issues of sweatshop labor,
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29 exploitation and abject poverty, but do not link this to their own consumption without
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31 prompting. Dependent on the interplay of social-cultural cues, the situation of their
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33 consumption, levels of guilt etc.; the emergence of a label or ethical product can be a
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35 requirement to even raising an ethical decision process. Availability can be an antecedent as
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37 much as a barrier to moral imagination.
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45 *1.5.3 Future research directions*

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47 The implications of this study for future research are substantial. What it exposes is the huge
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49 gap we have in our knowledge about both ethical consumption in the mainstream and the role
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51 of habit and social influence. In the first instance we need to address the abject lack of
52
53 behavioral data within the field of ethical consumption. That this single study can
54
55 counterpoint so many base assumption in the literature is driven by one basic problem:
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3 researchers are not conducting research in the field. We have known for decades that intention
4 based surveys in ethical consumption are fatally flawed, but they still account for the
5 overwhelming percentage of empirical studies (Andorfer and Liebe 2012). Speaking as a
6 researcher who has published survey based ethical consumption research: we must move on!
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14 The recent progression to more experimental approaches has been a positive change, but our
15 research also suggests caution here. By framing ethical consumption as individualized,
16 cognitive decision-making process; as is a basic assumption of most lab experiments, research
17 has quickly perpetuated myths about information framing which almost certainly would not
18 stand up to practical inquiry. If we agree that consumption is a socio-cultural experience
19 (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Bagozzi 1975), assuming away social context undermines any
20 results. The means to overcome this critique is to embed natural field experiments as the final
21 stage test of experimental work. Failure to do so leave the hypothesis un-validated in practice.
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23 Ideally longitudinal natural field experiments would be preferred to overcome issues of
24 experimental effects (i.e. novelty of change) being the significant variable.
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38 From a qualitative perspective we have a lack of research in the mainstream domain. There
39 has been little work on social influence in ethical consumption and, other than Carrington et al.
40 (2014), no explicit exploration of habit forming. There is also a lack of research like this paper
41 unpicking motivations or meanings of ethical consumption to mainstream consumers. All of
42 these are vital fields of study due to their dominant influence on actual ethical consumption
43 behavior.
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54 A further direction for future research should be interventionist qualitative methods such as
55 action research. How businesses influence ethical market-making could be highly informative
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3 on mechanisms required to change consumption habits for the better. We also have little in the
4
5 way of historical analysis of ethical consumption at a macro-market or institutional level. Full
6
7 economic case histories investigating the birth, growth and death of ethical consumption
8
9 practices may shed a great deal of light on the institutional forces which normalize ethical
10
11 habits such as reducing liter, recycling, free range eggs, low energy bulbs etc.
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16 **1.6 Conclusions**

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18 As FMCG companies move into the ethical retailing space, the reliance on traditional ethical
19
20 consumption research is going to cause significant problems due to its over-reliance on none-
21
22 behavioral data and assumption of high cognition, rational and information rich decision-
23
24 makers. However, even with phenomenological insights on the importance of the socio-
25
26 cultural environment on consumption, there is still a mismatch with motivations for ethical
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28 consumption in the mainstream, which is of most relevance to practitioners.
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34 The purpose of a laddering approach is to expose new phenomena influencing consumption
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36 behavior, not deliver broad reaching generalizations. This paper therefore provides a
37
38 pragmatic, behaviorally driven research insight into mainstream ethical consumption, rather
39
40 than relying on either of the dominant approaches to the field. We therefore find, in contrast to
41
42 most extant literature, that ethical consumption is largely not altruistic, low cognition and not
43
44 driven by knowledgeable, information rich consumers. We find a habitual and self-
45
46 satisfaction driven consumption experience, where even the discussion of ethicality and social
47
48 justice is still highly individualist and social-identity driven.
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53 We also find that an information vacuum is potentially a positive thing for ethical retailing as
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55 it allows scope for consumers to invent self-meaning and find greater satisfaction for self in
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3 the augmentation of ethical products. We therefore suggest it is in retailers' self-interest to
4
5 take a light-touch approach to marketing ethical produce, allowing plenty of space for
6
7 consumers to co-create meaning. They will also benefit from focusing on issues such as how
8
9 the ethicality of the product enhances quality, versatility and usability, rather than on the
10
11 altruistic benefits to others. However we also caution the over emphasis of ethicality in some
12
13 retail environments as potentially a barrier to positive customer experience.
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18 This research is not without its limitations. Laddering as mentioned above is about identifying
19
20 new motivations for consumption, not about generalizations. Laddering is based on a means-
21
22 end theory approach to consumer decision-making which has assumptions of there being
23
24 underling values impacting upon decisions. This relies on a consumers' capability for
25
26 enlightened self-reflection. It is impossible to know whether consumers were capable of
27
28 articulating the true nature of their motivations, or what ethical consumption meant for them.
29
30 Our study was also very carefully sampled to isolate frequent ethical consumers that
31
32 purchased mostly in the mainstream. There are potential areas for bias based on the choice of
33
34 such a low involvement consumption activity as beverages as the observed activity. However
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36 questions expanded well beyond the observed purchase with every participant, giving a
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38 broader coverage.
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43 44 **1.7 References**

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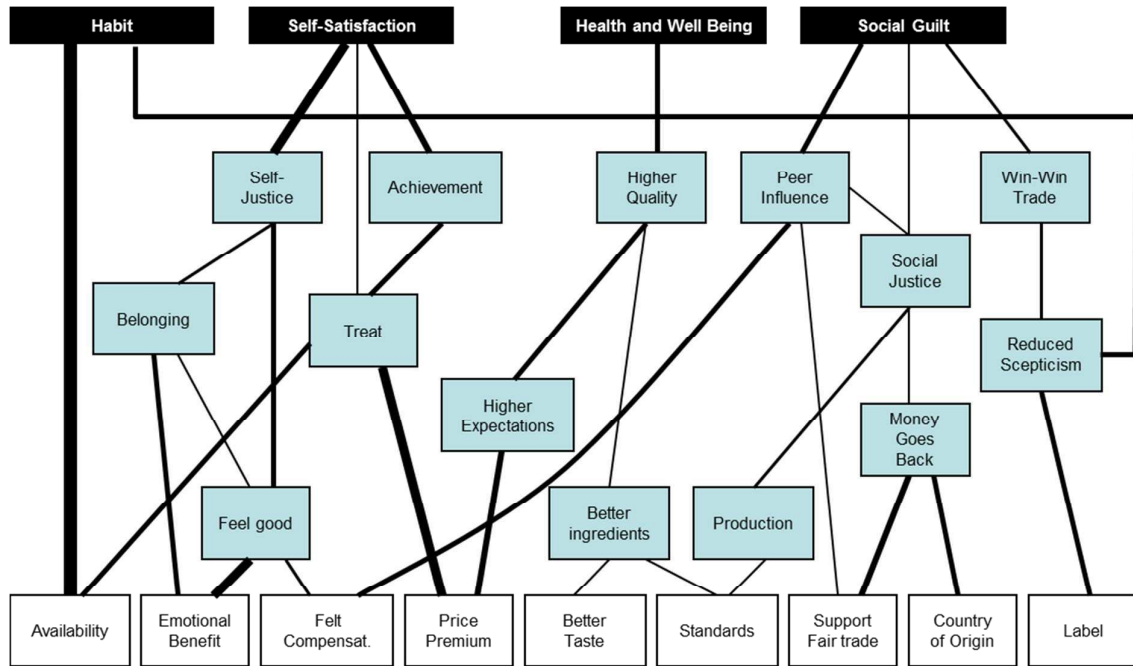
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Figure 1: Hierarchical Value Map for Fair Trade Consumption



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Table 1: Implication Matrix

	Better ingred.	Belonging	Production	Reduces skept.	Social justice	High expec.	Higher quality	Win-win trade	Treat	Money goes back	Self-justice	Peer influ.	Feel good	Achieve.	Habit	Social guilt	Self-satis.	Health & well-	To	From	Sum
Emotional benefit		16.08										19.07	28.00	0.04			6.00			69.19	69.19
Better taste	8.06		2.04				4.06							0.02			6.00	6.00	02.01	28.19	30.20
Label	0.06			22.00			6.16						0.02							28.24	28.24
Price premium	0.02					30.00			24.12					0.06				2.02		56.22	56.22
Availability								14.06			8.00		0.04	0.10	52.21	0.02	0.04			74.47	54.47
Felt compensation		4.06			0.04				0.02		6.12	10.14	12.00	0.06			0.14			32.58	32.58
Support fair trade		0.04	0.02		4.00					36.00		5.08	0.04			0.18			09.03	45.36	54.39
Country of origin				8.16	0.06					12.02	0.02		0.02			4.12			02.07	24.40	26.47
Standards	18.12	0.06	8.04	2.10	6.14		2.04							0.04		4.00				40.54	40.54
Better ingredients						6.04	12.02	0.04					0.02				4.00		30.46	22.12	52.58
Belonging					0.04					0.02	10.12		4.02				4.08		39.45	18.28	57.73
Production				14.00				4.02		0.04	0.02					0.08	4.00		22.26	22.16	44.42
Reduces skepticism		0.08	0.04		6.10			18.04		0.02						14.09	0.02		32.26	38.39	70.65
Social justice		0.04	8.00			0.02						08.09				10.08			68.50	26.23	94.73
High expectations	4.14						20.14		6.00	0.02			0.02	0.02			0.10	4.14	45.19	34.58	79.77
Higher quality	0.04					9.07			6.04				0.02	10.04			0.06	14.02	62.52	39.29	101.81
Win-win trade						0.04									2.02	18.06			22.12	20.12	42.24
Treat	0.02	4.02					4.00				6.06		4.00	20.08			4.06	0.04	59.38	42.28	101.66
Money goes back			4.12		34.06			0.06					2.10			2.00			48.12	42.34	90.46
Self-justice		9.07	0.00										07.06	18.08				28.18	42.44	62.39	104.83
Peer influence																12.08			49.44	12.08	71.52
Feel good about myself		6.00				0.02	2.06		6.00		4.04			0.02			0.10		68.38	18.24	86.62
Achievement									0.04								18.22		32.50	18.26	50.76
Habit									3.06										66.30	03.06	69.36
Social guilt					4.06														50.62	04.06	54.68
Self-satisfaction											8.06								66.100	08.06	74.106
Health and well-being							12.04												34.22	12.04	46.26