

Chapter 70

Manifestation of Ethical Consumption Behaviour through Five Precepts of Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

Consumption is an essential everyday process. By very nature, it is a means of expressing our moral identities and an outlet for ethical obligations. In more recent years, ethical aspects of consumption have come under greater scrutiny with the emergence of ethical consumption discourses, and are currently associated with a range of consumer behaviours and responsible business practices. To this end, religion is considered an undeniably powerful and concurrently the most successful marketing force that can shape the ethical behaviour, yet under-investigated in consumption practices despite the Corporate Socially Responsibility provoked ethical behaviour. Ethical consumption practices are regularly characterised as consumption activities that avoid harm to other people, animals or the environment where basic Buddhist teachings become more pertinent and practiced in Buddhist communities. This Chapter aims to conceptualise the importance of religious beliefs in ethical consumer behaviour and present the findings of a study that explored whether and how ethical consumerism is reflected through Five Precepts of Buddhism [i.e. (1) abstain from taking life, (2) abstain from stealing, (3) abstain from sexual misconduct, (4) abstain from false speech, and (5) abstain from intoxicants that cloud the mind]. The content of the Chapter contributes to the theory and teaching in the marketing discipline by linking how religious beliefs enhance ethical consumerism that remains largely unexplored.

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INTRODUCTION

Ethical consumption and ethical consumer behaviour is a burgeoning social movement (Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2012) and a topic that has received increased attention in recent decades. For example, market research data in UK suggest that ethical food and drink market represents 8% of the total food and drink market (Cooperative Bank, 2009) and 89% of UK consumers report they have ethical issues of concern (Lazzarini & de Mello, 2001). Thus, consumers increasingly express concerns about the ethicality and impact of their consumption choices upon the environment, animals and the society (De Pelsmacker, Driesen & Rayp, 2005; Shaw & Shui, 2002). Based on political, religious, spiritual, environmental or social motives (Harrison, Newholm & Shaw, 2005) consumers seem to be involved in number of ethical decisions including organic production (Clarke, Cloke, Barnett & Malpass 2008; Guthman, 2004; Tullock & Lupton, 2002); environmentally friendly packaging (Bech-Larsen, 1996; Thøgersen & Grunert-Beckmann, 1996) and recycling (Taylor & Todd, 1995; Thøgersen 1994; Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch & Sinkovics, Bohlen 2003) that are predominantly focused on environmental and social concerns.

These ethical decisions may have been derived by consumers either as a result of consumer responses to various Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives enforced/promoted by organisations, or due to their internal and personal moral values developed through religious or spiritual beliefs. Current literature posits the significance of religion in human behaviour including learning and development (Sherkat, 2010); promoting health and reducing risk behaviours such as smoking and drinking alcohol (Sinha, Cnaan & Gelles, 2007; De Micheli & Formigoni 2002; Wallace & Forman, 1998) and consumption of food, clothing and charity (Nam, Jo, & Lee, 2010; Ger, 2005).

Yet, besides CSR oriented or CSR provoked ethical consumer behaviour that are well researched in the consumer research, the impact of one's religious beliefs on ethical decision-making is significantly valid as spiritually oriented consumption behaviour may also encompass consumption choices upon the environment, animals and the society. Thus, investigation of the relationship between one's religious beliefs and ethical decision-making is paramount to advance consumer behaviour theories and address continuous research calls on religion and consumption (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Beruchashvili & Arnould, 2005; Watts & Loy, 1998).

Therefore, this Chapter reviews the theory of ethical consumption behaviour, conceptualises the importance of religious motives (or beliefs) in ethical consumer behaviour and empirically explores whether and how religious beliefs influence consumer ethical-decision making by captivating the Five precepts framework in Buddhism. The study contributes towards consumer research by highlighting the importance of religious beliefs in shaping ethical behaviour that have the ability to precede CSR provoked ethical behaviours put forward by organisation in the current marketing environment.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ethical Consumption and Decision-Making

Defining an Ethical Consumer

Consumption is an essential everyday process; 'to live is to consume' (Borgmann, 2000 p. 418) and today consumers are thought to play an active and skilled role in the consumption process (Barnett, Cloke, Clarke, & Malpass, 2004). Existing marketing literature has predominantly used the term

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