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Are Greeks' Unconcerned about Ethical Market Choices?

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Abstract. *An Ethical Unconcern (EthU) scale was constructed and its impact on Positive Ethical Consumption was examined. The procedure of EthU included literature search, brainstorming and discussion groups to generate the preliminary pool of 99 items, refinement of the scale via a students' survey by the employment of item-to-total correlation and alpha-if-item deleted techniques. The initial scale was tested in a consumer survey conducted in the urban area of Thessaloniki, Greece. Item-to-total correlation and alpha-if-item deleted techniques were applied again, followed by Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) by the employment of PCA. The procedure left 21 items in five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 explaining 61.34% of the variance. The five factors were named Boycott/ Discursive, Fair-Trade, Scepticism, Powerlessness and Ineffectiveness. The AMOS SPSS was then used to conduct confirmatory factor analysis. Goodness-of-fit results indicated that the measurement model fit the data well ($\chi^2=594.226$, $p<0.000$, CFI=0.926, NFI=0.899, TLI=0.910, RMSEA=0.066). The examination of the Positive Ethical Consumption indicated rare to occasional ethical buying choices among Greek consumers. The inhibiting role of Ethical Unconcern on Positive Ethical Consumption was found to be rather low.*

Keywords: Ethical Consumption; Ethical Unconcern; Measure Development

JEL Codes: M31 Marketing

1. Introduction

Ethical Unconcern is a suggested term that aims to represent negative attitudes towards Ethical Consumption. The usual approach in consumer research is to examine which attitudes are able to motivate, to influence specific consumer behaviours positively. With reference to socially desirable behaviours, such as ethical behaviours, the usual approach has been to investigate those concerns that drive consumers to act pro-socially. Although Nielsen (2012) still defines the "socially-conscious consumer" as those who say they would be willing to pay a premium for the ethical products, academic research indicates a considerable gap between what people feel, think and believe and what people actually do (Cowe and Williams, 2000; Bray *et al.*, 2011, Delistavrou and Tilikidou, 2012, Tilikidou, 2013). Nevertheless, it would be worthwhile to wonder what prohibits people to act upon their feelings and beliefs. In an effort to understand better a subset of ethical consumption, that of ecological behaviour, Tilikidou and Delistavrou (2005) examined which negative attitudes might inhibit pro-environmental actual behaviours, instead of examining those attitudes that might enhance them.

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Following this direction of research, this study aimed to construct a reliable and valid scale to measure negative ethical attitudes, namely ethical unconcern and also explore its inhibiting role on ethical purchasing choices.

2. Ethical Consumption

Ethical consumption does not concern merely individual satisfaction of needs and wants, as it simultaneously aims at the overall social welfare (Crane, 2001; Tallontire *et al.*, 2001). It might be rationally argued that the economic crisis would not assist any shifts towards ethical consumption patterns in the European market. On the other hand, the Ethical Consumer Markets Report in U.K. indicated that markets for ethical goods and services have remained resilient throughout the economic downturn. (The Co-operative Bank, 2012).

Ethical consumption is a relatively new topic within the marketing academic community. Although its roots might be found back in the seventies, it cannot be considered as a topic of the mainstream within the marketing academic community yet.

There are three types of ethical consumption: a) the positive type (choose eco-friendly and fair products, prefer firms that take care of fair labour conditions) b) the negative type (boycotting unethical products or firms) as suggested by Tallontire *et al.* (2001) c) the discursive type (digital communication about consumption issues) as suggested by Michelletti *et al.* (2005).

The first type is the most interesting one of course, in terms of a marketing viewpoint. The positive ethical consumption has been suggested as a rather broad concept, including buying, eco-friendly and fair products (Tallontire *et al.*, 2001), recycling, repair, reuse as well as donate, volunteer etc. (Tilikidou and Delistavrou, 2012). The part of the ecologically related consumer research has obviously gained most of the researchers' attention the last three or four decades, while examination of the overall concept of ethical consumption has been rather neglected so far.

Nonetheless, there is already a small but dynamic academic stream addressing the challenge to understand this type of consumption better. Cowe and Williams (2000, p. 2) asserted that, "shoppers are highly aware of ethical issues and many are ready to put their money where their morals are". De Ferran and Grunert (2007) also believe that moral values will be a significant driving force of the buying and/or not-buying behaviours among consumers of the western societies in the near future.

There have been some studies (e.g. Creyer and Ross, 1997; Mohr *et al.*, 2001; Fernandez-Kranz and Merino-Castello, 2005; Delistavrou and Tilikidou, 2012), which indicated a considerable segment of consumers ready to prefer firms that are socially responsible towards the natural and the human environment. In fact, the overall, global actual market share for these products is much more limited than what the studies suggested (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000; Cowe and Williams, 2000; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Tilikidou, 2013). Cowe and Williams (2000) more than a decade ago, underlined that although most surveys reveal that around 30% of the population is particularly motivated to buy ethical products, these products make up only fewer than 3% of their individual markets. This phenomenon has been named the "30:3 syndrome" in ethical consumption (30% of population reported ready to buy ethically featured products, but ethically featured products typically account for 3% of the market share).

3. Ethical Attitudes

With regards to the antecedents of positive ethical consumption, of course attitudes (plus demographics) have attracted the greatest part of the researchers' attention so far. Nevertheless, in the



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consumer research context there has always been a debate as to whether attitudes can be considered a valid predictor of an individual's behaviour, as attitudes are often not translated into action (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Sheeran, 2002; Papaoikonomou *et al.*, 2011; Delistavrou and Tilikidou, 2014). This phenomenon is even more obvious when the behaviours under examination are socially desirable (Peattie, 1995, p. 154; Shrum *et al.*, 1995; Thørgensen and Ölander, 2003; Tilikidou, 2013). Therefore, the emergence of the attitude - behaviour gap was expected in the ethical consumer research (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Auger *et al.*, 2004; Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2007; Papaoikonomou *et al.*, 2011). Papaoikonomou *et al.* (2011) commented that all relevant studies explain the existence of word/deed inconsistencies, merely to an extent. On the other hand, the assumption that attitudes are able, at least to an extent, to describe and/or predict behaviour cannot be taken for granted, as the attitude - behaviour link can provide important implications for the marketers of ethical products (Papaoikonomou *et al.*, 2011). In fact, explaining and/or eliminating the attitudes-behaviour gap might be considered as one of the most important challenges ethical consumption should face in the future.

Which attitudes to examine is another part of the debate, however. There is a list of issues, relevant to the attitudes investigation. For example, the response-scale in an attitudinal measure, the positive or negative sign of the attitudes under measurement, the components of the measure etc. are some of the issues that should be addressed.

To begin with the response-scale, the employment of a semantic differential scale (Han *et al.*, 2010) to examine attitudes towards green hotels (namely choices between two opposite perceptions, such as favourable-unfavourable, positive-negative etc.) has been discussed as rather unsatisfactory (Tilikidou *et al.*, 2013). Suggestions have been previously made that there is a need to develop more reliable and valid instruments to investigate ethical attitudes, measured on the typical Likert scale Tilikidou *et al.* (2013).

With regards to the ecologically related attitudes, Tilikidou and Delistavrou (2005) pointed out that most of the scales, which have been used to measure attitudes, had been designed to estimate positive "pro-environmental concern" scores (e.g. among others Bohlen *et al.*, 1993; Tilikidou, 2001, p. 64; Fotopoulos and Krystallis, 2002; Carrus *et al.*, 2008). It has been observed (Tilikidou and Delistavrou, 2005) that the attitudinal scores have been always significantly higher than the behavioural scores. Eventually it was claimed that the social desirability effect must have been extremely remarkable in the attitudes measurement. Therefore, it might be argued that the examination of negative attitudes might hopefully be found more efficient in capturing more sincere beliefs; those beliefs that in overall express indifference, disinterest, recklessness about environmental issues. The above mentioned authors indeed developed the Environmental Unconcern scale which provided lower attitudinal scores and better evidence of correlation with pro-environmental purchasing behaviour (see: Tilikidou and Delistavrou, 2005).

Moreover, with reference to the broader topic of ethical consumption, it has been previously suggested that there is a need to employ both qualitative and quantitative research approaches in order to understand more deeply the complexity in the antecedents of the ethical decision making (Papaoikonomou *et al.*, 2011; Newholm and Shaw 2007; Bray *et al.* 2011).

The above mentioned issues, among others, clearly indicate definite voids with relevance to a reliable and valid measure of ethical unconcern, which might capture more deep, more sincere beliefs and feelings of consumers and hopefully indicate a more truthful relationship with positive ethical consumption.

4. Research Objectives

- to develop a reliable and valid measure of Ethical Unconcern



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- to examine its impact on Positive Ethical Consumption

5. Methodology

The methodology of this study consisted of two stages: a) a measure development procedure to construct a scale of Ethical Unconcern (EthU) and b) an exploratory field research to test the impact of EthU on Positive Ethical Consumption (PEC).

5.1. The measure development

The measure development procedure incorporated the following steps: domain definition, literature search, focus group, brain storming, items generation, a preliminary survey to students, item analysis, reliability estimation and factor analysis (PCA) following the suggestions of Churchill (1979), Spector (1992) and Robinson *et al.* (1991).

Domain definition: Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, p. 6) wrote that attitudes are “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object”. Hawkins *et al.* (1998, p. 396) suggested that “attitude is an enduring organization of motivational, emotional, perceptual and cognitive process with respect to some aspect of our environment”. For the requirements of this study we defined Ethical Unconcern as “negative feelings, thoughts, ideas and beliefs with respect to Ethical Consumption”. An effort was made to ensure that the under construction measure would have incorporated attitudes towards all three types of Ethical Consumption, as well as items capturing all components of the domain definition.

Literature search: Previous research papers (qualitative and quantitative) on the topic of ethical attitudes were collected and the relevant scales and qualitative findings were reviewed. (John and Klein, 2001; Klein *et al.*, 2004; Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004; Shaw *et al.*, 2005; Fraj and Martinez, 2006; Freestone and McGoldrick, 2007; Tilikidou, 2007; Delistavrou and Tilikidou, 2009; among others)

Brainstorming: two different groups were organised, one of academics (5 persons) and another one of students (9 persons). Considering that both groups were from the Marketing Department of the Thessaloniki TEI, just a brief presentation of the aim of the meeting was considered necessary. After that they were just asked, which items an ethical attitudes scale should include according to their point of view.

Discussion group: A discussion group of 7 consumers was organised. The consumers were asked to discuss and express their thoughts, feelings, ideas about the three types of ethical consumption namely Positive, Negative and Discursive Ethical Consumption, through a semi-structured procedure. The procedure was videotaped. A thorough study of the records provided fruitful information as to each one of the above types of ethical consumption. Based on the information provided, the components of the under construction scale were decided to be the following 5: ethical concerns, ecological concerns, fair-trade concerns, attitudes towards boycotting and discursive actions.

Item generation pool and pre-testing: Editing and re-editing followed to gain the initial items generation pool. In an effort to cover all the components 99 items in total were generated and measured on a 7-point Likert scale. A students’ survey was then conducted in order to pre-test the initial measure of Ethical Unconcern. A cluster sample of 290 students of the TEI of Thessaloniki was used and the data were input in the analysis.

Refinement of the scale: Item analysis was conducted by the employment of the item-to-total correlation and alpha-if-item-deleted techniques. Item analysis indicated that 25 items obtained



coefficients greater than 0.45 and the initial scale indicated a Cronbach’ alpha value of 0.903. Contributions to the journal are welcome from throughout the world.

5.2. The consumers’ survey

The newly constructed Ethical Unconcern (EthU) scale was included in a structured questionnaire together with the scale of Positive Ethical Consumption (PEC) adopted from Delistavrou and Tilikidou (2012). The PEC consists of 19 items, measured on a 7-point frequency scale from 1= Never to 7=Always; in this study it provided a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.905.

The sample size was set at 600 households of the urban area of Thessaloniki. The sampling method was a combination of the two stage area sampling and the systematic method (Tull and Hawkins 1993; p. 544; Zikmund 1991, p. 471) and resulted in 565 useable questionnaires.

6. Results

6.1. Item Analysis

Item-to-total correlation and alpha-if-item deleted were applied in the consumer sample and the results indicated that all items obtained coefficients greater than 0.30.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted with the employment of PCA to explore if there are any possible factors in the measure of EthU. Five factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1 were found to explain 61.34% of the variance. The factor loadings indicated 4 items (EthU05, EthU13, EthU14 and EthU25) that should be eliminated. Two of them (EthU05 and EthU25) did not indicate factor loadings above 0.50, while the other two (EthU13 and EthU14) were double loaded. The remaining 21 items in EthU provided Cronbach’s alpha of 0.923, which indicates exemplary level of internal consistency.

Table 1: Item analysis results

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Alpha if Item Deleted	Item-Total Cor.	Factor loadings				
						1	2	3	4	5
EthU1	The relevant to ethical consumption information require time and effort, which is difficult for me	4.02	1.664	0.936	0.357	0.045	0.086	0.035	0.750	0.083
EthU2	I do not believe that consumers are able to get united and fight against “unethical” business practices	3.45	1.748	0.934	0.527	0.214	0.066	0.014	0.616	0.439
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Alpha if Item Deleted	Item-Total Cor.	Factor loadings				
EthU3	It is rather impossible for us to find products and services provided by firms that are responsible towards the natural and the human environment	3.78	1.778	0.935	0.470	0.152	0.183	0.136	0.698	0.052
EthU4	I do not think that we could stop buy products from business that have been accused about unethical practices	3.40	1.664	0.933	0.604	0.336	0.282	0.175	0.540	0.121
EthU5	I would never be able to judge if the products I buy cause trouble to somebody else	2.53	1.583	0.933	0.616	0.425	0.087	0.134	0.384	0.422



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EthU6	I think that ethical consumption is just temporarily on fashion	3.35	1.807	0.932	0.635	0.308	0.068	0.607	0.335	0.237
EthU7	I am more concerned with my own financial problems than with the elimination of poverty in the under-developed countries of the so-called Third World	3.84	1.729	0.933	0.589	0.163	0.631	0.160	0.233	0.298
EthU8	It is useless to buy Fair Trade products if there are not many consumers doing the same	2.94	1.559	0.933	0.588	0.281	0.246	0.121	0.294	0.511
EthU9	I am exclusively interested in the economic problems of my own country; problems in the economically weaker countries are not my concern	3.73	1.787	0.933	0.600	0.173	0.761	0.121	0.179	0.263
EthU10	There are other problems that bother me more than environmental destruction	3.63	1.790	0.933	0.599	0.223	0.760	0.043	0.128	0.315
EthU11	I don't believe that the environment would be protected if we used less water, electricity and oil	2.93	1.722	0.934	0.539	0.176	0.156	0.177	0.178	0.699
EthU12	I do not think we should sacrifice economic development just to protect the environment	3.23	1.635	0.933	0.580	0.201	0.276	0.234	0.074	0.670
EthU13	More money to the natural environment means less money to jobs	3.23	1.579	0.934	0.553	0.294	0.226	0.485	-0.104	0.429
EthU14	I am not willing to pay more in order to buy ecological products	3.78	1.694	0.934	0.531	0.243	0.653	0.426	0.109	-0.153
EthU15	Most ethical products are of lower quality	3.27	1.572	0.934	0.517	0.167	0.160	0.721	0.061	0.205
EthU16	I think that the so called ecological products is another advertisement trick	3.33	1.700	0.933	0.619	0.309	0.158	0.768	0.132	0.133
EthU17	If a boycotting is successful my participation is not necessary	3.04	1.620	0.932	0.652	0.574	0.173	0.222	0.116	0.356
EthU18	It is impossible for me to participate in a boycotting against my favourite brands	3.30	1.700	0.932	0.660	0.522	0.311	0.186	0.249	0.213
EthU19	Boycotting of products or firms is always useless	3.13	1.636	0.931	0.705	0.604	0.246	0.283	0.194	0.223
EthU20	I think that marches, demonstrations and other events against the so – called "unethical" business practices are all meaningless	3.20	1.698	0.933	0.616	0.743	0.092	0.196	0.029	0.196
EthU21	I would never be interested to get to know and evaluate activities of a firm in order to make a judgment about its ethics	2.89	1.611	0.932	0.696	0.730	0.228	0.123	0.232	0.140
EthU22	There is no personal responsibility of mine, as a consumer, about profiteering or labour rights removal	3.12	1.636	0.932	0.646	0.741	0.260	0.019	0.167	0.137
EthU23	Petition gathering have never been effective to any issue	3.34	1.686	0.933	0.599	0.726	-0.012	0.218	0.073	0.224
EthU24	Fair Trade claims are nothing more that advertisement tricks	3.38	1.638	0.932	0.655	0.660	0.128	0.417	0.131	0.055
EthU25	It is hard to search and find ecological products	3.27	1.764	0.934	0.522	0.486	0.280	0.268	0.323	-0.209

Taking a close look at the items entered in each factor, it was observed that the first factor includes eight items expressing consumers' refusal to care about boycotting and discursive actions and it was named



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Boycott/Discursive. The second factor contains three items expressing consumers' objections to fair-trade and it was named Fair-trade. The third factor included three items expressing the consumers' reservations towards ethical products with regard to their quality, price and ethical claims and it was named Scepticism. The fourth factor includes four items expressing the consumers' lack of empowerment with regards to their impact on business' unethical practices and it was named Powerlessness. The fifth factor contains three items expressing the consumers' sense of ineffectiveness regarding economic conservation and adoption of ethical choices and it was named Ineffectiveness.

The AMOS SPSS (Table 2) was then used to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Goodness-of-fit results indicated that the measurement model fit the data well ($\chi^2=594.226$, $p<0.000$, CFI=0.926, NFI=0.899, TLI=0.910, RMSEA=0.066).

Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Results

	1 Boycotting/Discursive	2 Fair Trade	3 Scepticism	4 Powerlessness	5 Ineffectiveness
EthU17	0.722				
EthU18	0.699				
EthU19	0.775				
EthU20	0.697				
EthU21	0.760				
EthU22	0.726				
EthU23	0.665				
EthU24	0.696				
EthU07		0.734			
EthU09		0.820			
EthU10		0.789			
EthU06			0.736		
EthU15			0.807		
EthU16			0.626		
EthU01				0.518	
EthU02				0.685	
EthU03				0.628	
EthU04				0.689	
EthU11					0.712
EthU12					0.715
EthU8					0.681
Construct Reliability	0.895	0.825	0.769	0.726	0.745



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It is observed that the construct reliability of each factor is satisfactory enough (above 0.70).

6.2. Descriptives

The Positive Ethical Consumption (PEC) scale (range 19-133, Mean 66.15), indicated “Rare” to “Occasional” engagement of consumers in PEC. The Ethical Unconcern (EthU) scale (range 21-147, Mean 70.30) indicated that consumers “Somewhat Disagree” to ethical unconcern in overall. It is to be further discussed if this finding could be interpreted that consumers are at least somewhat concerned about ethical issues.

6.3. ANOVA One-way

The ANOVA One-way was applied to explore the mean differences in EthU across demographical categories. Statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) were found of Ethical Unconcern with gender (women less unconcerned than men), education (graduates less unconcerned than their counterparts).

6.4. Pearson’s Correlation

The Pearson’s parametric correlation indicated statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) negative and weak relationships between EthU and PEC ($r = -0.169$). With regards to each one of EthU factors, the results indicated the following: Scepticism and PEC ($r = -0.179$), Fair-Trade and PEC ($r = -0.162$), Ineffectiveness and PEC ($r = -0.158$), Boycotting/Discursive and PEC ($r = -0.125$) and ($p < 0.05$) between Powerlessness and PEC ($r = -0.083$).

7. Discussion and Limitations

A preliminary effort to construct a scale of Ethical Unconcern was undertaken in this study, which should be followed by further validity and stability evaluations of the newly constructed scale in as many as possible different samples across time and place. There are certain phrasing amendments that might be attempted in the future, as improvement of a scale never ends as Spector (1992) pointed out. For example, the considerable disagreement scores indicated in items EthU5 and EthU 21 (Table 1) might be very well driven by the words “judge/judgment”. No Greek would be willing to confess that he is not capable of judging/evaluating a certain phenomenon or occurrence.

Further, the results indicate (Table 1) that consumers are inhibited to adopt ethical choices mostly by their perceptions that they need time and effort in order to obtain relevant information (EthU1). Finding and evaluating, which firms are ethical, seems to be equally difficult for the consumers (EthU3). Moreover, as the fourth factor indicates, consumers feel rather powerless towards unethical business practices (EthU2, EthU4). As expected, consumers were found highly concerned with the problems that economic crisis caused to their lives and thus less interested into what happens in the Third World country, what the Fair Trade movement is, etc. (EthU7, EthU9). In addition, as the second factor indicates, their own problems diminish their concerns about global environmental destruction (EthU10). These findings are at least to an extent in contrast to UK findings (The Co-operative Bank, 2012). The fact that Greeks seem more concerned about water, energy and oil conservation would not be safely interpreted as ethical attitudes; these attitudes may very well be driven by financial motives (EthU11). Also, as factor five indicated, this issue is associated with two other consumers’ attitudes: perceived ineffectiveness of Fair Trade and overall consumption reduction (EthU8 and EthU12 respectively). It has to be taken into consideration that the distribution and promotion of Fair Trade products are much limited in comparison to UK. Most of all, it is to



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be mentioned that due to economic crisis, Greek economy functions under a Memorandum of E.U. and International Monetary Fund; drastic spending cuts in households have been imposed increasing people's resistance in further consumption reduction in favour of the natural environment or any other ethical cause.

8. Conclusions and Further Research Suggestions

In this study, an effort to develop and test an Ethical Unconcern scale was attempted following the assumption that the examination of negative rather than positive attitudes, might provide more truthful outcomes in a topic such as ethical consumption, which is expected to be highly socially desirable.

The newly developed scale consists of 21 items indicating an exemplary lever of internal consistency. It provided five factors that reflected all aspects of negative consumers' perceptions, feelings and attitudes towards ethical issues in the consumption field. Of course, there is much more to be further pursued in order to increase validation of Ethical Unconcern and/or examine its impact on all types of ethical consumption, namely positive (ethical preferences), negative and discursive (boycotting and digital societal action).

In this study, the positive ethical consumption was also examined and the results indicated that Greeks merely occasionally take into consideration ethical criteria when buying. In addition the prohibiting role of ethical unconcern seems to be rather low in this regard.

It has been previously claimed that ethical consumer behaviour is more complex and heterogeneous than may at first be apparent (Shaw and Clarke 1999; Cherrier 2007; Newholm and Shaw 2007). Ongoing research effort is needed in order to understand better each and every link in consumers' decision making chain and subsequently provide relevant implications.

With respect to implications that can be extracted by the results of this study, it is to be noted that firms - interested in adopting and implementing ethical strategies and claim a relevant strategic advantage - should concentrate on improving consumers' perceptions about the cost, in terms of money and time, included in ethical market choices.

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