

## News

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### Sweden

#### Book chapter looks at organisations building smartphone apps as 'ethical choice prescribers'.

In a new book called "Digitalizing Consumption: How Devices Shape Consumer Culture", Chapter 7 explores how smartphone apps are beginning to appear as a new way of promoting ethical consumption. Lena Hansson, from the University of Gothenburg in Sweden notes the appearance of a variety of apps designed to help consumer address ethical issues such as those from SeafoodWatch and iRecycle.

Three Apps, which appeared on Swedish market between 2012 and 2014, are looked at specifically in this study: they are the Fairtrade app, the 'GreenGuide' and 'shopgun'. The method she used for the study was apparently 'object ethnography'.

The Fairtrade app has a barcode scanning function which recognises if a product is in its database and provides more details. When the product is not there it returns "Oops Fairtrade-labelled (zero)". It also apparently has an interactive map for Fairtrade cafés and other premises. The 'shopgun' app also apparently has some barcode-scanning functions.

The research does not ask users about their experience of the apps, or measure success or extent of use, though it does suggest that this may be a useful area for further study. It is more focussed on how the apps frame ethical questions and deal with complexity in information presentation.

The wider book reflects on how "contemporary consumer society is increasingly saturated by digital technology, and the devices that deliver this are increasingly transforming consumption patterns. Social media, smartphones, mobile apps and digital retailing merge with traditional consumption spheres, supported by digital devices which further encourage consumers to communicate and influence other consumers to consume."

Through a wide range of empirical studies scholars from sociology, marketing and ethnology examine the effects of new digital devices on practices of consumption and

marketing, through topics including big data, digital traces, streaming services, wearables, and social media's impact on ethical consumption.

*Digitalizing Consumption: How Devices Shape Consumer Culture, edited by Franck Cochoy, Johan Hagberg, Magdalena Petersson McIntyre, Niklas Sörum: Routledge 2017*

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### UK

#### Porritt describes consumerism as the enemy in the last of the successful seminars in the ESRC-backed project.

The 'Consumption Ethics: Interdisciplinary Meanings and Intersections' seminar held at Birkbeck College, London on the 14th of September marked the 11th and final seminar in the ESRC funded 'Ethics in Consumption: Interdisciplinary Perspectives' series. Over the last three years the series has successfully hosted a selection of prominent speakers from disciplines such as Geography, History, Marketing, Sociology and Theology. It has been the launch pad for a successful book, 'Ethics and Morality in Consumption', published in 2016, and pivotal in bringing together the academic network behind this journal. Through thematic events across the UK and the world, the seminar series has sought to connect a series of contemporary concerns in the social sciences around the interconnections between ethics, consumption and commercial practice.

##### *The last seminar...*

The 'Interdisciplinary Meanings and Intersections' seminar raised questions about how we define and talk about being 'ethical' in different ways. The day featured two guest speakers, Jonathon Porritt, an Environmentalist and Writer and Daniel Miller, Professor of Anthropology at UCL. The key note speakers were followed by a discussion panel that included a selection of prominent academics from the field.

During his thought-provoking talk entitled 'Consumerism is the principal enemy of ethical consumption', Jonathon Porritt dealt with the definitional difference(s) between consumption and (evil) consumerism. He posed that we are living in a world dominated by consumerism, an ideology, that dangerously places consumption at the heart of the modern economy. The talk questioned whether it

was possible to find a balance between our individual and collective needs – and asked the audience to consider how can we as consumers use our individual purchasing power to make our lives better, without making anyone else's considerably worse?

In a unique and inspiring talk, Professor Daniel Miller examined the proliferation of memes in social media as a form of consumption. He underlined the significance of social media as a source of consumption and argued that our online consumption activity, beyond buying things online, is a significant avenue for future research. The talk suggested that a meme could be a form of moral policing. Do the funny memes we all encounter everyday convey deeper moral/ethical meanings to those who flick past them on Instagram, Facebook and other online sources?

#### *The future...*

As this was the last event in the funded series, time at the end was spent reflecting on the last three years. People considered where the study of consumption ethics may go from here and the future of their newly forged working relationships. I sensed an overarching consensus from the attendees in the room that interdisciplinary, 'joined-up' thinking should (and will be) fundamental to their future work, in order to fully encapsulate the complexity and contextual nature of consumption ethics. I left feeling buoyed with positivity and excited to share our interest in such a fast-paced and forward-thinking research area.

#### **Eleanor Boyce (PhD Student at University of Manchester)**

Interviews with the speakers from the seminar, and other seminars held in the series, can be found at [www.gla.ac.uk/schools/business/research/researchevents/management/ethicsinconsumption/seminarsandevents/consumer/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/business/research/researchevents/management/ethicsinconsumption/seminarsandevents/consumer/)

## **Finland**

### **Finnish ethical consumer explored in study at University of Turku**

In April 2017, research by Iida Kukkonen entitled "Consolidation of the common good and a personal quest for virtue?" was published on the Turku University website.

This paper noted how interest in ethical consumption tends to be approached in academia through three separate

'frames' – the ethical consumer as a myth, the ethical consumer as a consumer-citizen and the ethical consumer as self-interested being.

The author undertook analysis of qualitative online data from Finland's largest forum (Suomi24), as well as analysis of quantitative data from the Finland 2014. Having excluded "boycotts and other types of consumer activism", she noted how the remaining "ethical and environmental consumer discourse was centred around the consumption of food, and meat in particular". Other economically and ecologically significant areas of consumption such as transport, energy and housing "were rarely discussed using ethical and ecological terminology considering their economic and ecological impact". She concluded that "commentators on Suomi24 do for the most part embrace the idea of ethical consumption, however such consumption is constructed as a highly individual practice". Data from the Finland 2014 survey confirmed that there are indeed socio-demographic differences between those who embrace ethical consumer attitudes and those who do not.

<http://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/133840?show=full>

## **Chile and Brazil**

### **Study challenges mainstream ideas of ethical consumption though the concepts of ethical living and care in Chile and Brazil**

On May 30th 2017, the British Journal of Sociology, reported on a study using data from 32 focus groups conducted in Chile and Brazil. The authors Tomas Ariztia, Nurjk Agloni, and Léna Pellandini-Simányi, explained how their research had revealed some limitations with "mainstream conceptualizations of 'ethical consumption' which equate the notion with conscious, individual, market-mediated choices motivated by ethical or political aims that transcend ordinary concerns". Also drawing on recent studies on the links between ordinary ethics and ethical consumption, they propose "a conceptualization of ethical consumption that does not centre on individual, market-mediated choices but understands it at the level of practical outcomes, which we refer to as different forms of 'ethical living'.

They develop these points through “describing one particular ordinary moral regime that seemed to be predominant in participants’ accounts of ethics and consumption in both Chile and Brazil: one that links consumption and ethics through care.” They show that the moral regime of care leads to ‘ethical outcomes’, such as energy saving or limiting overconsumption which result from following ordinary ethics.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-4446.12265/full#bjos12265-note-5202>

**Tomas Ariztia is on the editorial board of JCE.**

## UK

### With only 13% of UK companies meeting their obligations under Modern Day Slavery Act, academics discuss the possible role of consumers as agents for change.

The 10th seminar of the ESRC Ethics in Consumption: Interdisciplinary Perspectives series was held on 21 April 2017 at 11 Bedford Square in London. The theme of seminar explored the issue of the more than one million modern slaves working inside Europe and asked how we can, as affluent westernised consumers, remain blind to the plight of enslaved people when we are interacting with them in our everyday consumption lives. It also asked how this invisibility shrouding modern slaves in our communities could be removed? For many of the speakers the answers to these questions were complex and involved many different actors to form part of the solution.

The first speaker Aidan McQuade, Director of Anti Slavery International, argued against the idea that the consumer was solely responsible, or even able to solve, the issue of modern day slavery. Aidan postulated that power needed to be given to those who were most vulnerable to being enslaved, with this responsibility lying directly at the feet of governments to ensure “laws, policies and customs” acted to prevent slavery. In his view the role of consumers and companies was to hold governments to account to ensure that they promoted human rights.

Cindy Berman however, Head of Knowledge and Learning at the Ethical Trading Initiative, argued that new that industrial relation systems were needed to help provide mechanisms for grievances, as well as bringing actors within a supply chain to collaboratively address and prevent human and workers’ rights abuses.

Phil Bloomer, Executive Director of Business and Human Rights Resource Centre contended that there were companies “who try to do the right thing” and that recognition of best practices needed to be acknowledged. He said that no brand wanted to be connected with the issue of modern slavery, yet the recent enactment of the UK Modern Slavery Act - while seen as a major step forward in forcing companies to take responsibility on the issue - found only 13% of companies meeting their obligations under the act.

In the final session of the day we heard from Professor Rohit Varman, from Deakin University, who believed that the solution to modern slavery could not be found within the current corporate structure. He said “Companies may not use slaves but they create the conditions for slavery to prevail”. Contrary to others speaking at the seminar, he also believed that consumers were limited in what they could achieve and that the actual solution could only be found in addressing the issue of equality within societies.

The seminar highlighted that there are many different aspects to modern slavery and that some solutions were available, such as companies working to ensure workers within their own supply chains are not enslaved, or governments upholding their commitments to human rights. However as Professor Deakin points out there are many different facets of slavery which are unseen and it is those which are the hardest to tackle.

Interviews with the speakers from the seminar, and other seminars held in the series, can be found at [www.gla.ac.uk/schools/business/research/researchevents/management/ethicsinconsumption/seminarsandevents/consumer/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/business/research/researchevents/management/ethicsinconsumption/seminarsandevents/consumer/)

## Brazil

### Study shows how price promotions do not affect Brazilian consumers' decisions to 'punish' corrupt companies

In the journal *Consumer Behaviour Review* (2017 1 (1), 38-44), academics from the University of Sao Paulo, report on research looking at three variables:

- is a company ethical?
- is it corrupt?
- is there a price promotion?

KM Hamza, VKC Nogami, and J Andrade, (2017) explain how the purpose of this study was to verify if price promotion and company profile (ethical or corrupt) influenced purchase intentions. They conducted an experiment using 246 cases between subjects. Their findings showed how Brazilian consumers did not value the ethical behaviour of companies, but penalized corrupt behaviour. The price promotion stimulus was not effective, which meant that price promotion did not affect the willingness to pay. They concluded that the results suggested that companies in Brazil should behave ethically, if not for the reward they might get, at least to avoid "the punishment that consumers are willing to give them."

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Vitor\\_Nogami/publication/317401594\\_Reward\\_and\\_Punishment\\_from\\_Consumers\\_Towards\\_Ethical\\_and\\_Corrupt\\_Companies\\_a\\_Study\\_on\\_Price\\_Promotion\\_and\\_Purchase\\_Intention/links/59393c120f7e9b32b716ca2c/Reward-and-Punishment-from-Consumers-Towards-Ethical-and-Corrupt-Companies-a-Study-on-Price-Promotion-and-Purchase-Intention.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Vitor_Nogami/publication/317401594_Reward_and_Punishment_from_Consumers_Towards_Ethical_and_Corrupt_Companies_a_Study_on_Price_Promotion_and_Purchase_Intention/links/59393c120f7e9b32b716ca2c/Reward-and-Punishment-from-Consumers-Towards-Ethical-and-Corrupt-Companies-a-Study-on-Price-Promotion-and-Purchase-Intention.pdf)

## Korea

### Study shows that higher ethical standards within businesses lead to increased consumer loyalty.

In the July 2017 edition of the *Journal of Business Research*, two scholars from Korea and one from Hong Kong examine links between consumer perceptions of a company's ethicality and their loyalty as purchasers.

Eunil Park, Ki Joon Kim, and Sang Jib Kwon, report how the results of their structural equation modelling analysis (N=931) revealed that higher ethical standards within a company do lead to the perception amongst consumers that a company is committed to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This CSR commitment in turn induces greater satisfaction with and trust in the company. And this satisfaction with and trust in the company and its services leads to greater consumer loyalty.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.02.017>

## UK

### Research seeks to balance individual-focused accounts of ethical consumption with socio-centric approaches through study of food practices

In the *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* in June 2017, authors Yana Manyukhina, Nick Emmel, and Lucie Middlemiss, from the Sustainability Research Institute and Sociology Departments at the University of Leeds, engage with "two contrasting approaches to conceptualising and studying consumer behaviour that appear to dominate existing research on consumption".

They provide "a critical review of the dominant theoretical perspectives on consumption in general and ethical consumption in particular", highlighting their key assumptions and explaining how they preclude "a fuller understanding of the ways in which consumer practices are moulded and shaped". They present the findings from a qualitative analysis of consumers' ethical food practices to empirically demonstrate the role of human agency and social structure in creating and shaping ethical consumption. The paper aims to provide a consolidated account of consumer behaviour "which acknowledges and explains the complex ensemble of individual and systemic powers in which consumer practices are contained".

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jtsb.12139/full>