

JCE – Stumbling into the light

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Welcome to the third issue of JCE. Our first issue was themed around classic texts in ethical consumption. Our second, a special issue on gender, was a triumphant thirteen articles long, and seemed to reflect a pent-up demand to speak on the subject. This third issue is the first we have tried with no theme at all – just an attempt to capture some of what is going on in ethical consumption generally. Although it is short, it is the first whose contents are making a general statement about the space we are trying to occupy, and this remains an open question.

In this issue

Our first article uses ethical consumption ideas as a lens to focus on the history of ivory consumption – from Roman furniture to the modern day illegal trade in artifacts from an endangered species. Our second article looks at the difficulties of measuring ethical consumption using traditional marketing and economic ideas and tools.

We have a great review of a new book from the USA situating the recent political consumption campaigns against Trump in the country's long history of consumer activism. And we have an extract from another book focussed on business ethics but which also identifies and discusses how changing consumer desires are driving new ideas around purpose in global business.

Our news section, as well as looking at some conferences and calls for papers, keeps us up to date with ethical consumer research around the world. We learn about studies from China, Romania, India and Saudi Arabia as well as about a mobile phone app project in Spain.

Finally we have a 'practitioner paper' from Heather Webb at Ethical Consumer on the state of reporting by companies on modern slavery in their supply chains, and what this means for consumers.

A valuable perspective

So although the formal reviewed articles are sparse this time, there is something about the combination of themes here that gives a glimpse of what the JCE might be able to achieve. Where else could you find political consumption, sustainable consumption, business ethics and practitioner campaigning discussed in the same place? There is unlikely to be anyone coming to this issue who does not learn at least a couple of new things.

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There are already some excellent journals on sustainable consumption, consumer behaviour and business ethics – as well as an increasing number of special issues in this area – but none are trying to carve out a space with the particular perspective that the notion of consumer ethics brings.

Whether this perspective is significant enough to generate real cross-fertilisation of ideas and insight in the long term remains to be seen. It has certainly developed traction and a life of its own outside academia in more general discourse.

Resource issues

The limited size of this journal is also a product of its currently slightly under-resourced state. It is being produced as a side project within the Ethical Consumer Research Association machine and, as such, is at the mercy of whatever other demands are blowing through the organisation at the time. We had hoped to identify some independent funding for it by about now and may also have underestimated the work required to persuade contributors of its value at this early stage. We are keeping up with telling the wider audience reading Ethical Consumer magazine about the articles appearing in each Journal issue though.

And future issues

None of this is insolvable. Our next two issues will be special issues. The first, due in October, will be on Food and the ethical consumer and will be edited by Professor Carrigan, now at Keele University. In 2019 (Vol 3 Issue 1) we are planning a special issue edited by Professor William Young, linked to a conference at Leeds University on Sustainable Consumption in September. More details about the call for papers appear in the news section on page 49.

The next general un-themed issue (Vol 3 Issue 2) is not due until the second half of 2019, and we have plans to prepare better for it and to generate some more resources. Now that we are learning more about how long this type of publishing takes, we are not reticent about talking about dates already. April 30th 2019 will be the deadline for first drafts for the unthemed issue. Do get in touch to discuss ideas or ask questions for the next step in our exciting journey.

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