

Understanding Ethical Consumption: Types and Antecedents

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Summary

Ethical consumption incorporates a variety of consumer practices, which have been fragmentarily investigated, so far. This research study introduces the overall concept of Ethical Consumption (EC) with the concurrent investigation of its three types, namely Positive, Negative and Discursive Ethical Consumption (PEC, NEC, DEC). The demographic, attitudinal and psychographic antecedents of each type were examined. The results of a survey conducted in Thessaloniki urban area, Greece with a stratified sample of 420 consumers are presented. The results revealed that Greeks do not frequently engage in any of the three types. The analyses of the results indicated the demographic, attitudinal and psychographic antecedents of the EC types and enlightened the insights and inter-relations in the overall domain.

PEC is endorsed by middle aged, highly educated women, who receive relatively high family incomes. Consumers, who are less indifferent to ethical consumption issues, less sceptical about ethical products,

more willing and capable of exercising their political interests and influencing the political system, are more likely to get engaged in PEC. NEC is endorsed by highly educated consumers, who feel more politically powerful, less ethically indifferent and hold higher post-materialist values than their counterparts. DEC is endorsed by young, post-graduate professionals. Consumers, who are less indifferent to ethical consumption issues, less sceptical about ethical products, less materialists and feel more politically powerful, are more likely to get engaged in DEC.

Key words: Ethical Consumption, Positive Buying, Boycotting, Discursive Activities, Ethical Unconcern, Policy Control, Materialism/Post-materialism.

JEL Classification: M31 Marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

Whether the marketing concept is a proper philosophy in the age of environmental deterioration, resource shortages, explosive population growth, world famine, poverty and neglected social services has been extensively questioned. (Kilbourne, 1995; Peattie, 1995, p. 8; Carrington *et al.*, 2012). The late 2010s economic crisis - the most severe post-

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Second World War one - and its impact should be added to the context of our era. Kotler (1991, p. 25) would definitely argue that it is now the time to adopt the "societal marketing concept", i.e. to target the markets aiming at preservation or enhancement of both consumer and public well-being. Gradually, various narrower concepts have been included in the societal marketing concept, such as "humanistic marketing", "ecological marketing" etc., until the area has been broadened to encompass the whole concept of ethical consumption. Within the marketing academic community, the field of **ethical consumption** is commonly referred to as the type of consumer behaviour that is influenced by ethical criteria (Crane, 2001). The concept involves caring not only about the individual, but about the others too, about fairness and the general welfare of the society (Harrison *et al.*, 2005, pp. 16-17).

The review of the relevant literature has revealed that ethical consumption has been rather neglected, so far, by the academic marketing research. Although, it has been suggested that ethical consumption includes three types, namely positive, negative and consumer action (Tallontire *et al.*, 2001) or discursive (the latter term re-named by Micheletti *et al.*, 2005) the very few attempts to examine them in general (e.g. Cowe and Williams, 2000; Baek, 2010; Delistavrou and Tilikidou, 2012) have been exploratory in nature. Nonetheless, it cannot be ignored that over time there have been some excellent research efforts regarding mostly the ecologically related aspect of ethical consumption (e.g. Shrum *et al.*, 1995; Roberts, 1996; Schlegelmilch *et al.*, 1996). To a limited extent, there have been some research efforts regarding separate parts of the several forms and types that have been gradually encompassed in the broader domain of ethical consumption, such as fair trade or boycotting (e.g. McDonagh, 2002;

de Ferran and Grunert, 2007; Shaw *et al.*, 2007; Micheletti *et al.*, 2005).

The **aim** of this study is to investigate simultaneously the three types of ethical consumption, to determine the level of its enhancement among Greek consumers, and reveal the antecedents of each type; further, to understand better the insights and inter-relations in the overall concept of ethical consumption.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical consumption has been examined under various alternative terms from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Harrison *et al.* (2005, pp. 1-2) suggested that ethical behaviour should be viewed as an alternative consumption pattern in comparison to traditional or conventional consumption. Norris (2007, p. 639) described such consumer behaviour as a "cause-oriented" form of political action, different from traditional activities like voting or engaging with political parties. Yet, purchasing consumption practices also differ from demonstrating or campaigning, as they connect a prime economic activity – consumption – with public virtue (Micheletti, 2003). Thus, political consumer activism might be viewed as not political in a narrow sense, but as a form of «lifestyle» politics (Beck, 2000) targeting both public (political) and private (economic) actors (Norris, 2007).

In reference to methodological perspectives that have guided the research so far, there have been some studies, in which merely a qualitative research method had been followed, while in some other studies a large scale quantitative survey was conducted.

The qualitative research revealed a variety of influential factors, some of which **affect positively** the involvement in making ethical choices, such as: equality, hedonism, protection of oneself and the environment

(de Ferran and Grunert, 2007), ethical obligation (Bray *et al.*, 2011), commitment to do good (Adams and Raisborough, 2010). Most of the studies provided insights with relevance to factors that **inhibit actual ethical behaviours**, such as: lack of information (Bray *et al.*, 2011; Carrigan *et al.*, 2014), limited availability (Shaw and Clarke, 1999), inconvenience and time (Carrigan and Attalla 2001; Szmigin *et al.*, 2009; Young *et al.*, 2010; Papaoikonomou *et al.*, 2011a), price (Shaw and Clarke, 1999; Carrigan and Attalla 2001; Papaoikonomou *et al.*, 2011a), quality (Bray *et al.*, 2011; Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000), among others.

With regards to the quantitative studies, **positive ethical consumption** attracted most of the researchers' attention while its most favorite part, namely research into the **ecological consumer behaviours**, has remarkably increased, mainly since the nineties (see: Pickett *et al.*, 1993; Shrum *et al.*, 1995; Roberts, 1996; Schlegelmilch *et al.*, 1996; Tilikidou, 2001; Lee, 2008; Carrus *et al.*, 2008; Long and Murrey, 2013; Pagiaslis and Krystallis, 2014). Academic research on **fair trade** increased during the first years of the new millennium (see: Lureiro and Lotade, 2005; de Ferran and Grunert, 2007; Rode *et al.*, 2008; Andorfer, 2013).

A considerable broad variety of potentially **influential factors** has been put under investigation by either sociologists, psychologists and/or marketers, focusing on either consumer motivation or obstacles to act ethically in consumption-driven behaviours. Examination of **demographics** has been included in almost every research effort but there are broad discrepancies in the overall findings, even with regards to ecological consumer behaviours (Shrum *et al.* 1995; Tilikidou, 2013). **Attitudinal variables**, used in previous research efforts, have been focusing on the specific behaviour investigated, e.g. attitudes towards

ecological behaviours (Schlegelmilch *et al.*, 1996; Follows and Jobber, 2000; Tilikidou and Delistavrou, 2005; Lee, 2008) or attitudes towards fair trade products (Tanner and Kast, 2003; Delistavrou and Tilikidou, 2009; Andorfer, 2013); attitudes customarily are found to be moderately related to the respective behaviours. **Psychographics** captured the attention of some researchers (Stern *et al.*, 1995; Delistavrou and Tilikidou, 2012; Copeland, 2014) but no solid evidence exists in the literature as to the psychographic antecedents of ethically driven consumer behaviours. The whole picture of the existing knowledge highlights the significant area that has to be further investigated with regards to the aggregated concept of positive ethical consumption, its aspects and correlates.

Boycotting has been included in large European or World surveys conducted in the field of values (E.S.S., 2002 and 2010; W.V.S., 2008). Participation in a boycott campaign appears as a single item in the investigation of other, mainly positive, ethical behaviours (see: Roberts, 1996; Cow and Williams, 2000; Pepper *et al.*, 2009). Very few scholars (e.g. Klein *et al.* 2004; Shaw *et al.*, 2007; Farah and Newman, 2010) attempted to focus on the investigation of this specific consumer behaviour, its insights and antecedents. There have been some claims in the literature that consumers' participation in boycotting will increase in the future (Friedman, 1999; Farah and Newman, 2010) partly due to the growing social outrage that the ongoing severe economic crisis brought about.

The third type of ethical consumption, the **discursive type** is the most neglected behaviour in the literature (Micheletti *et al.*, 2005). The very few in number relevant papers (see: Stern *et al.*, 1995; Blake, 2001; Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2003; Delistavrou and Tilikidou, 2012) highlight the need to investigate this

behaviour in more depth. The discursive activities may not be directly connected to financial transactions, as they usually concern violation of business ethics and 'unethical' business practices. In fact, DEC is undertaken by ethical consumers, who initially aim to share information about business practices against their moral values using mainly computer and network innovations (Berry and McEachern, 2005). In practice, the content of DEC eventually encompassed rather radical consumer activities, such as protests, marches, employment of digital media to share messages etc. The ultimate scope of discursive behaviour is to press companies, organisations and governments to change their "unethical" practices (Michelletti *et al*, 2005).

The above presented literature review indicates that there are considerable **voids** in our knowledge with regards to ethical consumption. As mentioned in the introduction, concurrent examination of the three types of ethical consumption seems to be left out from the literature. Our knowledge with reference to the insights of ethical consumption types and their antecedents is definitely inconclusive. There is lack of a specific attitudinal measure relevant to ethical behaviours. Last but not least, there are certain geographical discrepancies in the body of the relevant knowledge. More specifically, in Greece the studies that have been conducted so far regarding ethical consumption are definitely scant.

3. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ETHICAL CONSUMPTION

Understanding consumer behaviour has never been an easy, purely rational path to follow that would smoothly lead to the ultimate picture of what people think and do in the marketplace. A broad range of theories exist, each and every one of them being admittedly imperfect (Jackson, 2005,

pp. 16-17), especially in cases such as ethical consumption, which has never been in the mainstream of the marketing research and effort.

In this study, an effort was made to design a theoretical framework to guide the research that would hopefully accomplish the aim of the study. Literature search and qualitative techniques (in-depth interviews and discussion groups) were utilized in order to understand as deeply as possible the concepts and the set of behaviours that should be included in each one of the three types of ethical consumption. Moreover, the design of the theoretical framework was based on the assumption that there are certain demographic, attitudinal and psychographic antecedents of the three types of Ethical Consumption, which were deemed to be inter-related (Figure 1).

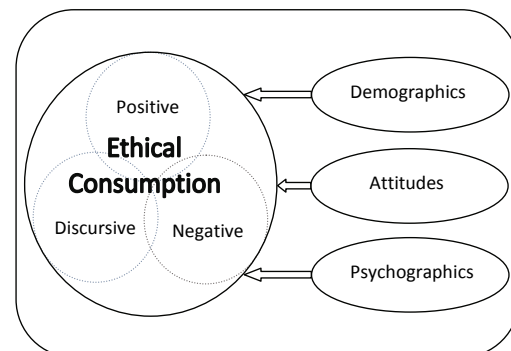


Fig. 1. Theoretical Framework of Ethical Consumption

3.1. Ethical Consumption and its Types

From a marketing point of view the first type of ethical consumption, namely **Positive Ethical Consumption (PEC)** is the most important one. In an attempt to encompass as many positive ethical consumer choices as possible, for the requirements of this project, the following definition of PEC was deemed: "*purchasing of ethical products delivered at an S/M (e.g. ecological products, organics, fair trade products, local traditional products) and the post-purchasing activities*

in favour of the environment (e.g. recycling, reuse and repair of used products delivered in a super market)".

The second type of ethical consumption - **Negative Ethical Consumption (NEC)** is mostly well known as boycotting. As mentioned above there has been scant effort to define and examine the various aspects and insights of boycotting (Farah and Newman, 2010) as a distinct type of the overall ethical consumption concept. Therefore, NEC was defined as *"the consumers' engagement in boycotts against 'unethical' products delivered in an S/M i.e. produced by companies, which have been demonstrably accused of unethical business strategies"*.

The **Discursive Ethical Consumption (DEC)** is the most recent type of consumer action and scantily investigated so far (Michelletti *et al.*, 2005). DEC was defined as *"all activities that aim at the formulation of the public opinion through social debate either in favour of ethical or against 'unethical' products/services or firms"*.

3.2. The Antecedents of Ethical Consumption

In ethical consumption research, there has always been a debate whether **attitudes** could 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.*, 2011b). The usual attitudes-behaviour "gap" found in those studies has been named "30:3 syndrome" by Cowe and Williams (2000) to describe the phenomenon that 30% of the consumers declare concerns about ethical issues in their consumption behaviour but ethical products hardly account for more than 3% of the relevant market.

Ajzen (1982) suggested that if aggregate behaviours are investigated the

compatibility with a measure of attitudes should be ensured. In an effort to take into consideration the principle of compatibility, it was deemed that there is a need for an attitudinal measure towards all three types of Ethical Consumption to serve the requirements of this study. Further, as ethical behaviours are obviously socially desirable, it was decided to follow previous suggestions (Tilikidou and Delistavrou, 2005, 2014) that the examination of negative attitudes might have been found more efficient in capturing more sincere beliefs, in cases of expected overvaluations in the respondents' self-reports. Overall, those beliefs express indifference, disinterest, recklessness about ethical issues. Therefore, it was deemed that a reliable and valid measure of negative attitudes towards the aggregated concept of Ethical Consumption, i.e. incorporating issues generated from all three types of the concept, might be found considerably productive. Ethical Unconcern was deemed to be one of the three main antecedents of Ethical Consumption.

Consequently, Ethical Unconcern was defined as *"negative feelings, thoughts, ideas and beliefs with respect to the three types (Positive, Negative, Discursive) of Ethical Consumption"*.

With regards to **psychographics**, it is noted that they have been suggested to include values, personality variables, traits etc. They are expected to provide deeper, more internal information about persons than attitudes do (Engel *et al.*, 1990, p. 701). Helping marketers in understanding consumers' motivation in adopting or rejecting specific behavioural patterns, they have long ago served the development of creative, communication strategies (Shrum *et al.*, 1994).

With reference to the societally-oriented consumer behaviours, there have been claims in the literature that moral values will be a significant driving force of the

buying and/or not-buying behaviours among consumers in the western societies in the near future (de Ferran and Grunert, 2007). There have also been some strong arguments that politically oriented values might be proved more appropriate than self-directed values for the examination of ethical consumer behaviour (Pepper *et al.*, 2009), which, as mentioned above, is driven by both political and economic factors (Norris, 2007).

The politically and socially oriented values, which were deemed to be the most appropriate for the requirements of this theoretical framework, were the socio-political control and the materialist/post-materialist values with reference to the government goals.

Socio-political control refers to the perceived capability of the individuals to affect the social and political macro-systems (Robinson *et al.*, 1991, p. 419). Involvement in community organizations and activities has been found to relate to socio-political control (Zimmerman and Zahniser, 1991). In Greece, socio-political control has been previously found to affect consumers' pro-environmental behaviours (Tilikidou and Delistavrou, 2005, 2008, 2014; Tilikidou, 2013). Therefore, in this study, it was hypothesized that consumers' activities aiming to reverse environmental degradation and social injustice, as any other ethical choices, might be positively influenced by feelings of political empowerment and willingness to take action in order to affect the social and political environment. In other words, consumers, who hold higher socio-political control position are expected to get engaged more often in Positive, Negative and Discursive Ethical Consumption behaviours.

Materialism/Post-materialism has been suggested by the sociologist Ronald Inglehart, who, drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1970), understands materialism as a focus on

"lower order" needs for material comfort and physical safety and post-materialism, on the opposite, as a focus on the "higher order" needs for self-expression, affiliation, aesthetic satisfaction and quality of life (Inglehart, 1990, pp. 66–68).

Inglehart (1971) foresaw a transformation in the basic value priorities of young generations as a result of changing conditions in the western industrialized societies; this transformation referred to a shift from materialist to post-materialist values. Based on the concept of scarcity Inglehart (1977) claimed that material acquisition and sustenance are linked with survival and people facing such problems give priority to materialist goals; on the contrary people living under conditions of prosperity give priority to post-materialist goals of self-expression, belonging and aesthetic satisfaction. Post-materialist values reflect people's subjective sense of security and not their objective economic state and this subjective sense of security is formed by the society's social welfare in combination with the individual's level of income (Inglehart, 2008).

The prevalence of post-materialist values does not mean that materialistic concerns disappear, as the means of securing prosperity and economic development are always important political issues (Inglehart, 2008). In fact, researchers have empirically demonstrated that Materialism/Post-materialism may in fact be multidimensional, and that it is possible to endorse both types of values simultaneously (Bean and Papadakis, 1994; Braithwaite *et al.*, 1996; Pepper *et al.*, 2009).

Greece, just after the post-World War II economic growth that lasted for some decades, has been currently facing a severe economic crisis. Greeks' both objective economic state and subjective sense of security has dramatically decreased over the recent past years. Thus, it was hypothesized

that Greeks simultaneously prioritize both materialist and post-materialist values. Consumers, who hold lower materialist values and/or higher post-materialist values level are expected to get engaged more often in Positive, Negative and Discursive Ethical Consumption behaviours.

In general, the theoretical framework of this study implies that ethical consumer behaviour is expected to be negatively influenced by ethical unconcern and materialist values while it is expected to be positively influenced by policy control and post-materialist values.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Based on the above theoretical framework the following research objectives were set:

- To examine simultaneously the engagement level of Greeks in Positive, Negative and Discursive Ethical Consumption during the last year
- To investigate the influences of demographics on Positive, Negative and Discursive Ethical Consumption
- To examine the relationships between Positive, Negative and Discursive Ethical Consumption and the originally developed measure of Ethical Unconcern
- To examine the relationships between each ethical consumption type (Positive, Negative and Discursive) and a) the Policy Control scale plus b) the Materialism/Post-materialism scales
- To understand better the inter-relationships and insights in the overall construct of Ethical Consumption

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Variables Measurement

The following three behavioural scales were used: **Positive Ethical Consumption (PEC)**, which consists of 15 items, **Negative Ethical Consumption (NEC)**, with 9 items

and **Discursive Ethical Consumption (DEC)** with 12 items. All behavioural items were measured on a 7-point frequency scale from 1=None (Never) to 7=All the time (Always). These variables were adopted from Delistavrou and Tilikidou (2012) after some necessary updating and amendments in the phrasing of the items.

As to attitudes, a long measures development procedure was implemented that followed suggestions by Churchill (1979) and (1995, pp. 543-545), Robinson *et al.* (1991, pp. 5-14), Spector (1992, pp. 19-46) and Hair *et al.* (2010) in order to construct a new measure of specific, negative attitudes towards all types of ethical consumption. The final measure of **Ethical Unconcern** included 19 items in two sub-measures of Ethical Unconcern, namely **Ethical Indifference** (with 11 items) and **Ethical Scepticism** (with 8 items) measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1=Strongly disagree to 7=Strongly agree.

In the area of demographics, **Gender, Age, Education, Income and Occupation** were selected to be examined. The scales by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (H.S.A), which are customarily used in the Household Budget Surveys (2014), were adopted.

With regards to psychographics, two sets of scales were included in the inventory: the **Policy Control** sub-scale of the **Socio-political Control** measure, adopted by Zimmerman and Zahniser (1991) consisting of 9 items and measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1=Strongly disagree to 7=Strongly agree; and the **Materialism/Post-materialism** social values scales, adopted from Inglehart (1977) consisting of 6 items each and measured on a 7-point importance scale from 1=Very unimportant to 7=Very important, following Bean and Papadakis (1994) and Pepper *et al.* (2009).

In an effort to exclude social desirability effects in the examination of Ethical

Consumption, Spector (1992, p. 36) was followed and the sub-scale of **Communal Impression Management (CIM)** was adopted from Blasberg *et al.* (2014). CIM comprises of 10 items, all measured on a True-False scale.

5.2. Sampling

A survey was conducted in the urban area of Thessaloniki. Thessaloniki is the second biggest city in Greece and its urban area can be considered to be representative of the whole country in cases of household surveys (H.S.A., 2014, p. 12). The **population** of the survey was defined to be the total number of households in the selected geographical area, which comes to 308,834 households (N) according to the 2011 national census. The **sampling unit** of this study is an adult member of each household residing in the Thessaloniki urban area. A **probability sample** of an appropriate size was used. The **sampling method** was a combination of the **two-stage area sampling** method together with the **stratified** method (Tull and Hawkins, 1993, p. 550; Zikmund, 1991, p. 471). According to relevant textbooks, among others, this method belongs to the complex random sampling methods which all guarantee representative samples if properly and carefully implemented. The Hellenic Statistical Authority calculation of the sample size in the biannually conducted Household Budget Surveys is based on the formula of $1.42/1000$ (H.S.A., 2014 p. 12). Using this formula, the **sample size** of this study ($308,834 \times 1.42/1000$) should be 438 households. In total 440 personal interviews were conducted and they provided 420 usable questionnaires.

Each block was pre-evaluated in terms of the number of households. The number of households in 100 blocks came up to 4,811 households. The selection of the specific sampling units was implemented

by stratified sampling. It was decided that Gender and Age distributions would serve as stratifying variables. The 2011 census statistics (H.S.A., 2015) were used to design the strata size based on the Gender and Age distributions of the overall Greek population in an effort to support the more accurate and valid generalization of the results.

The data collection method was **personal interviews** and the survey instrument was a **structured questionnaire**. Respondents were approached through personal interviews at their homes. A marketing academic researcher acted as the field manager. The interviews were conducted by trained senior marketing students in teams of two during April and May 2016.

6. RESULTS

Cronbach's alpha values for the behavioural and the attitudinal variables were 'exemplary' according to Robinson *et al.* (1991). The overall Means of the scales indicated that Greeks 'Sometimes' engage in Positive Ethical Consumption (PEC) and Negative Ethical Consumption (NEC) while they just 'A few times' undertake the Discursive Ethical Consumption (DEC) activities. The most frequently adopted behaviours in PEC concern purchasing of energy efficient bulbs, also the 3 Rs (reuse-repair-recycle) and local food preferences; in NEC avoidance of purchasing products from a company that is involved in safety and hygiene scandals or supports hostility to our country interests; and in DEC the most favourite behaviour concerns discussions with friends and acquaintances about the 'ethical/ unethical' practices applied in the production (Table 1).

The results regarding Ethical Unconcern (EthU) indicated that Greek consumers 'Slightly disagree' with the overall scale, which means that they hold marginally positive relative attitudes. The sub-scale of Ethical Indifference (EI) indicated that

the respondents expressed moderate level of EI, which indicates that they are neither indifferent nor interested in ethical consumption issues. The sub-scale of Ethical Scepticism (ES) indicated that the respondents hold a low level of ES, i.e. they are not sceptical about ethical consumption issues (Table 2).

The scale of Policy Control indicated that the respondents hold a moderate level of perceived control over the political and the social systems. Both Materialism and Post-materialism scales indicated that Greeks consider 'important' both materialist and post-materialist goals for the Greek state.

With regards to the influence of demographics on the Positive Ethical Consumption (PEC) the One-way ANOVA resulted in statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) differences in the Means of PEC across Age (higher Mean was obtained by consumers of 45-54 years of age), Education (consumers holding a university or a post-graduate degree) and Income (consumers earning more than 15,000 Euros). Statistically significant ($p < 0.10$) differences were also found in the Means of PEC across Gender (women). Occupation did not provide statistically significant results.

With regards to Negative Ethical Consumption (NEC) one-way ANOVA indicated statistically significant ($p < 0.10$) differences in the Means of NEC only across Education (higher Mean was obtained by consumers holding a post-graduate degree).

With regards to Discursive Ethical Consumption (DEC) one-way ANOVA indicated statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) differences in the Means of DEC across Age (higher Mean obtained by consumers of 25-34 years of age), Education (consumers holding a post-graduate degree) and Occupation (professionals).

Pearson's parametric correlation was employed to examine the significance, the direction and the strength between pairs of

variables. Correlations were controlled for the effect of socially desirable responding by including the CIM scale as control variable.

Correlations indicated statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), negative and moderate (of impressive strength though) relationships between Ethical Indifference and PEC ($r = -0.430$), NEC ($r = -0.433$) and DEC ($r = -0.529$). Statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) negative and weak relationships were found between Ethical Scepticism and PEC ($r = -0.256$) and DEC ($r = -0.261$) while no relationship was found between Ethical Scepticism and NEC.

Statistically significant ($p < 0.005$), positive and weak relationships were found between Policy Control and PEC (0.257), as well as DEC (0.237); an even weaker ($p < 0.01$) relationship was found with NEC (0.135).

A statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), negative but weak relationship was found between Materialism and DEC ($r = -0.197$) while a statistically significant, positive but weak relationship was found between Post-materialism and NEC ($r = 0.140$, $p < 0.05$).

Statistically significant relationships, positive and moderate were found ($p < 0.005$) between PEC and NEC ($r = 0.416$), PEC and DEC ($r = 0.439$) and between NEC and DEC ($r = 0.441$).

Multiple regression analyses were then applied in order to examine the ability of the combination of Ethical Unconcern, Policy Control, Materialism and Post-materialism to predict each of the three types of Ethical Consumption.

Regression analysis of Positive Ethical Consumption (PEC) versus Ethical Indifference, Ethical Scepticism and Policy Control revealed that the interaction between Ethical Indifference and Policy Control can predict PEC. The coefficient of determination, adjusted R^2 is 0.207 meaning that 20.7% of the variance of the respondents' Positive Ethical Consumption

is explained by the interactive effect of Ethical Indifference and Policy Control. The resulting equation is:

$$\text{PEC} = 54.941 - 0.410 \text{ Ethical Indifference} + 0.105 \text{ Policy Control}$$

The regression analysis of Negative Ethical Consumption (NEC) versus Ethical Indifference, Policy Control and Post-materialism revealed that only Ethical Indifference can predict NEC. The coefficient of determination, adjusted R^2 is 0.203 meaning that 20.3% of the variance of the respondents' Negative Ethical Consumption is explained by their Ethical Indifference. The resulting equation is:

$$\text{NEC} = 52.775 - 0.453 \text{ Ethical Indifference}$$

The regression analysis of Discursive Ethical Consumption (DEC) versus Ethical Indifference, Ethical Scepticism, Policy Control and Materialism revealed that Ethical Indifference, Materialism and Ethical Scepticism can predict DEC. The coefficient of determination, adjusted R^2 is 0.328 meaning that 32.8% of the variance of the respondents' Discursive Ethical Consumption is explained by the interactive effect of Ethical Indifference, Materialism and Ethical Scepticism. The resulting equation is:

$$\text{DEC} = 48.945 - 0.610 \text{ Ethical Indifference} - 0.138 \text{ Materialism} + 0.110 \text{ Ethical Scepticism}$$

7. DISCUSSION

Findings revealing that the level of ethical consumption is at a somehow low degree of engagement are in line with those made by Delistavrou and Tilikidou (2012) in the same geographical area. They are also consistent with recent secondary data, which for example, indicated that Greek consumers in comparison to other European consumers spend less money on organics (FiBL, 2016,

p. 224).

With regards to **Positive Ethical Consumption**, the items that obtained the highest, by far, Means concern the purchase of **energy efficient bulbs** and **recycling**. It is to be noted that, some years ago, these behaviours used to be a novelty representing sensitiveness towards energy conservation and environmental protection. However, what used to be a novelty has become a mainstream behaviour or a habit as it has been previously argued by Durning (1992) about affluent countries, Shurm *et al.* (1994) about U.S.A. and Jackson (2005, p. 66) about U.K. Nevertheless, it is to be pointed out that Greece has a long way ahead if it is to meet the goals set by E.U. For example, the overall waste volume increased by 17% in 2013 (from 2004) while Greeks recycled 5% more waste in 2013 than in 2004 and reached 16% in the generated overall amount of waste, which is far from the target to recycle 50% of household and other similar waste by 2020 (Eurostat, 2016). The findings about **repair** and **reuse** of already used products or their containers indicate that somehow conservative or passive ethical behaviours are more frequently adopted. Hence, we cannot be sure whether some of these behaviours are adopted by conscious ethical consumers or by people, who are used to adopt these activities for the sake of saving money or just out of habit. The results about **local food** consumption are quite far from those of the whole world (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2011). This is a rather disappointing finding for a country like Greece with so many small family farms. As previously argued (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2011) consumers may believe in the importance of purchasing local foods, but are just not completely willing to give up their favourite brands or convenience. Another reason

could be that they do not see themselves as important enough or politically strong enough - as the results regarding policy control imply - to make an environmental or ethical impact. Nevertheless, the numbers found could still represent a large enough and growing portion of consumers implying that they should take notice of this potential trend.

It is to be added nonetheless that the reluctance of consumers to adopt more frequently the actual purchasing behaviours has indicated once more that radical behavioural changes are quite a difficult evolution to happen. This conclusion is in line with previous comments made by many authors, such as Shrum *et al.* (1994), Carrigan and Attalla (2001), Jackson (2005, p. 66), Peattie and Crane (2006), Pepper *et al.* (2009), Papaoikonomou *et al.* (2011a), Tilikidou (2013), among others.

Findings also indicated that the less frequently adopted behaviour concerns the fair-trade products. This is attributed to the fact that in Thessaloniki the fair-trade specialty store stopped business in 2009. Nowadays, there is a very limited product range in a few, S/Ms. Findings about fair trade cannot be generalized as to the whole country because in Athens there has been an Altromercato specialty store since 2006 onwards.

With regards to **Negative Ethical Consumption** some limited evidence was found that safety and hygiene scandals engendered boycotting; this finding could be understood as temporary avoidance of a certain brand, if there was a relevant announcement in the news. These are rather circumstantial or spontaneous actions, quite different from a boycotting campaign, organized by a certain social institution. A limitation of the NEC scale is the absence of an item about companies, usually multinationals, big businesses, that are responsible for mass layoffs of workers,

which has, unfortunately, been a common issue in Greece these days.

As to **Discursive Ethical Consumption**, the choice to employ a thorough multi-item measure to examine this type of behaviour was rather unsuccessful as a very limited portion of Greeks had ever taken part in such activities. The findings are in contrast to the predictions made previously (Delistavrou and Tilikidou, 2012) that Greeks were expected to considerably enhance discursive activities in the future.

With reference to the **antecedents** of behaviour the demographical analysis in this study clearly illustrates that those, who enhance each one of the EC types, are better **educated** than their counterparts. These findings are in line with those by Tilikidou (2001), Nielson (2010), Koos (2012), Delistavrou and Tilikidou (2012) and Carfagna *et al.* (2014).

With regard to **gender**, the finding that women are those to get more frequently engaged in PEC is in line with previous findings by Roberts (1996), Diamantopoulos *et al.* (2003), Delistavrou and Tilikidou (2012), Andorfer (2013) and Carfagna *et al.* (2014).

With relevance to **age**, those who enhance PEC were found to be middle-aged in line with Roberts (1996), Cowe and Williams (2000), Tilikidou and Delistavrou (2001), Fotopoulos and Krystallis (2002) and De Pelsmacker *et al.* (2006). However, those who enhance DEC were found to be young in contrast to Delistavrou and Tilikidou (2012), who found that middle-aged consumers were more active in this type of behaviour.

With relevance to **income**, those who enhance PEC were found to hold somehow better incomes than their counterparts. This finding is in line with Nielson (2010); Copeland (2014) and Carfagna *et al.* (2014), among others. It is to be noted that in this study higher incomes in Greece were found

to be those above 15,000 Euros while in an exploratory study by Delistavrou and Tilikidou (2012), in the same geographical area, higher incomes were declared in the category of 40-50,000 Euros. Of course, this inconsistency is a result of the catastrophic effects of the economic crisis and the reductions in the incomes of the working classes that have been imposed by the EU and the IMF in collaboration with the Greek Governments. The results of this study can also be considered as verifying previous theoretical claims made by Harrison *et al.* (2005, pp. 3-5) that the fulfilment of higher order needs does not mean that not-that-rich people could not and should not act ethically when buying.

In terms of *attitudes*, comparisons with previous research results are limited as no relevant scale was found in previous publications. In this study, the assumption that negative attitudes were expected to provide better evidence of correlation was verified as the first sub-scale of *Ethical Unconcern*, namely *Ethical Indifference* provided by far stronger evidence of correlation to each of the three behavioural variables than the other independent variables. A closer look at the Means of the items in the Ethical Indifference and the Ethical Scepticism scales indicates that consumers' level of reluctance to adopt ethical consumption should be mostly attributed to *financial* (prices, incomes, unemployment) as well as *practical* (convenience, availability) issues than issues of *quality* or *status* of the ethical products. These findings represent a subtle but important shift in the consumers' tendencies as in the same geographical area consumers have been many times found to be affected not just by financial issues but by quality and efficiency of ethical (e.g. ecological products) alternatives (Tilikidou, 2001, p. 182; Tilikidou, 2008, p. 254)

It is to be noted that the results of this study that regard the influence of policy

control and materialist/post-materialist values were not found as fruitful as they were expected to be. With reference to *Policy Control*, it is to be noted that Greeks' feelings of empowerment towards politics has been considerably lowered in comparison to the past. Indeed, the great majority of Greeks disagree with the statement "my voice counts" to the country (73%) or to the EU (84%) in comparison to the relevant percentage (57%) in 2004 (Eurobarometer, 2016). The main issue is that weak relationships were indicated between Policy Control and all three ethical behaviours. This result, although in line with previous results by Neilson (2010), Koos (2012) and Copeland (2014), is in contrast to previous relevant results in Greece as locus of control about politics had indicated moderate, though of considerable strength, positive relationships with pro-environmental behaviours (Tilikidou and Delistavrou, 2008, 2014). The decrease in the ability of political empowerment to affect positively ethical behaviours may be to an extent attributed to the selected measure as its level of internal consistency was not found to be extremely satisfactory. Nevertheless, the main issue connects probably with the negative feelings of disappointment and anger throughout the Greek society towards politics and politicians as a result of the anti-popular financial policies during the years of the economic crisis (Sarris, 2015).

The assumption that both materialist and post-materialist goals can be present in a society was verified. *Materialism* was found insignificant with PEC and NEC. These results about ethical buying are in contrast to previous findings, e.g. by Scepers and Nellisen, (1989), Cowe and Williams (2000), Blake (2001) and Pepper *et al.* (2009); they are consistent though with those by Pepper *et al.* (2009) about frugal purchasing. Materialism was found to have weak and negative impact on discursive ethical

consumption. This is a slight indication that materialists would not get the trouble to adopt discursive ethically driven activities. **Post-materialism** was found insignificant with positive buying and discursive activities while it was found to impact positively and weakly on boycotting. This can be an indication that those, who hold values concerning more self-expression than safety are - at least to a small extent - motivated to enhance boycotting. This finding is in line with that of Copeland (2014) who also found a positive impact of post-materialism on boycotting.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

While this project provides interesting results, it also contains certain limitations. To begin with, the results are based only on a sample selected in one city and thus **generalisation** applicable to the whole country cannot be implied. There have been difficulties in **measurement accuracy**, although an effort was made to control the results for social desirability. For example, the respondents stated to have been engaged more frequently in boycotting than in the other two behaviours (positive and discursive); however, it is notable that only two boycott calls were running during the period of the field research. Moreover, respondents reported that they have boycotted business accused of using child labour but no relevant boycotts had been called in the Greek market during the year preceding the survey year. In overall, the failure to isolate and exclude the socially desirable responses from the scales' measurement might be attributed to the unsuccessful selection of the specific scale of CIM. Further, the scale of NEC should be carefully re-designed to include items that 'apply' in the specific context, e.g. to include just the boycott calls running in the specific market at the survey time.

With regards to the DEC scale, recurrent qualitative techniques are required to reveal the activities that are taking place in the specific country (not in other countries) at present time. This must be an ongoing procedure as digital actions are constantly expanding, especially among young people.

Further, additional qualitative techniques are also suggested with regards to the newly developed scale of Ethical Unconcern. Ajzen and Fishbein's (1977) suggestions about the level of specificity between behaviour and attitudes may be followed more thoroughly. A promising idea might be to develop separate attitudinal measures for the positive, negative and discursive ethical consumptions hoping to obtain even better evidence of correlation between each behavioural variable and the relevant attitudinal scale.

9. CONCLUSIONS

It may be concluded that this study makes contribution to the existing knowledge in ethical consumer research. The theoretical framework introduced the overall concept of **Ethical Consumption (EC)** with the concurrent investigation of its three types, namely **Positive, Negative and Discursive Ethical Consumption (PEC, NEC, DEC)** in combination with selected potential antecedents. The three behavioural variables of the theoretical framework were found to be positively and moderately correlated to one another, a finding that verified the concurrent examination of the three types of ethical consumption and facilitated a deeper understanding of the overall domain.

Among demographics, the only common characteristic that was found to affect positively all three types was the education level while the antecedent, which definitely provided the stronger negative influence on each one of the behavioural variables is the indifference towards ethical consumption issues.

More specifically, the results indicated that middle aged, highly educated women, who receive relatively high family incomes, who are mostly less indifferent about ethical issues, less sceptical about ethical choices and feel somehow more politically empowered are more likely to enhance PEC. Taking into consideration the content of the attitudinal items, it can be concluded that consumers, who are more concerned about the best value-for-money choice, inconvenience and time as well as personal or national financial problems and job losses than environmental protection or poverty in the Third World, are more strongly discouraged to get engaged in PEC; consumers who have doubts about the quality and the elegance of ethical products are also, though to a lesser extent, discouraged to undertake positive ethical consumption activities. It can also be concluded that consumers, who feel willing to and capable of exercising their political interests and affect the political system, are more likely to get engaged in PEC. Positive Ethical Consumption can be predicted by the study of changes in consumers' Ethical Indifference and Policy Control in interaction.

With reference to NEC the results indicated that NEC is enhanced by highly educated consumers, who mostly feel less ethically indifferent, somehow more politically powerful and more post-materialists than their counterparts. Taking into consideration the content of the relevant attitudinal items, it is concluded that consumers, who hold higher concerns about the best value-for-money choice, inconvenience and time as well as financial personal or national problems and job losses and rather lower concerns about environmental protection or poverty in the Third World, are less likely to participate in boycotts. Boycotting can be predicted by the study of changes in consumer Ethical Indifference.

With reference to DEC the results indicate that young, post-graduate professionals, who

feel less ethically indifferent and sceptical, more politically powerful and less materialists are more likely to enhance DEC. Taking into consideration the content of the relevant attitudinal items it is observed that those consumers who are mostly discouraged to get engaged in DEC are more concerned about inconvenience and time as well as financial personal or national problems and job losses than environmental protection or poverty in the Third World; to a lesser extent they hold doubts about the quality and the elegance of ethical products the line with fusspot. Consumers who are less engaged in DEC are those who think that materialist goals (strong defence forces, order in nation, etc.) are more important priorities for the Greek state. Finally, it can be concluded that Discursive Ethical Consumption can be predicted by the study of changes in consumer Ethical Unconcern (Ethical Indifference and Ethical Scepticism) and Materialism in interaction.

10 IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study might be useful for businesses, national and international authorities, organisations involved in environmental protection, human, working and animal rights, citizenship etc. Both public and private stakeholders should firstly aim to minimize people's indifference about ethical consumption issues by the optimum utilization of creative communication techniques. Secondly, they should aim to minimize people's materialist values and increase their political control perceptions and post-materialist values.

European and national authorities could try and set regulations about certification of the 'ethical' products by the establishment of an 'Ethical Label', which would spotlight the 'ethical' attributes and could justify an ethical image. Ethical products should be primarily inexpensive and easy to locate during a regular shopping trip, secondly

be of high quality and sophisticated enough. Companies interested in building an 'ethical' profile and/or marketing 'ethical' products should find their target group in well educated, middle aged women, earning higher income than their counterparts without being exceptionally rich people, who are negatively affected mostly by their attitudes to the best value-for-money choice and convenience in shopping. The communicative strategies of business should make consumers feel that when they buy ethical products they do not sacrifice money or time and effort while they act upon their concerns and political values. Messages should be built on the idea that the price premium, which is sometimes embedded in an 'ethical' product and the effort to search for it, if there is any, are worthwhile as any 'ethical' product produces multiple positive outcomes or extra value added in favour of environment protection, poverty confrontation and fairer working conditions and human rights.

Business marketing audits should include screening procedures to locate possible issues that might cause accusations against their practices, which in turn might cause boycotts against their products and/or services or digital activism. Companies, which aim to avoid or stop a boycott besides abolishing its 'unethical' practices, should market products that can guarantee the best value-for-money, easy-to-find, environmentally friendly and socially responsible choice among competition.

Communicative strategies of social groups and organisations dealing with ethical consumption should creatively develop messages that mostly aim to minimize citizens' ethical indifference and encourage them to be interested in participating in their discursive campaigns. These messages should also promote drop in consumer scepticism and materialist values while

reassure respect and endorse consumers' sense of political empowerment.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Descriptives of Positive, Negative and Discursive Ethical Consumption

Positive Ethical Consumption						
Scale range		Mean	Std. Dev.	Alpha	Item	
15 – 105		44.42	15.58	0.876	Mean	SD
P1	Buy organic wine				2.18	1.44
P2	Buy organic fruit and vegetable				2.58	1.60
P3	Buy organic honey				3.15	2.02
P4	Buy organic pasta				1.88	1.40
P5	Buy organic olive oil				3.15	2.10
P6	Buy organic milk				2.27	1.69
P7	Buy organic legumes				2.02	1.54
P8	Buy organic eggs				3.10	2.09
P9	Buy local traditional food				3.40	1.66
P10	Buy products from underdeveloped countries delivered via Fair Trade (e.g. sugar, cocoa)				1.47	0.91
P11	Choose to buy products from business, which perform socially responsible activities, too				2.34	1.41
P12	Buy energy efficient bulbs				4.91	1.86
P13	Recycle the recyclable packaging				4.69	1.90
P14	Use the food containers instead of throwing them to the rubbish				3.75	1.91
P15	Repair or maintain used products instead of replacing them with new ones (clothes, furniture, electrical equipment, linen etc.)				3.55	1.83
Negative Ethical Consumption						
Scale range		Mean	Std. Dev.	Alpha	Item	
9 - 63		31.42	16.92	0.957	Mean	SD
N1	Seriously damage the environment				3.39	2.04
N2	Be involved in financial scandals				3.08	2.05
N3	Be involved in safety and hygiene scandals				3.92	2.14
N4	Use child labour				3.61	2.32
N5	Be involved in extremely cruel behaviour towards animals				3.46	2.29
N6	Be involved in extremely cruel behaviour towards workers				3.56	2.22
N7	Financially support governments, which are involved in wars				3.15	2.14
N8	Support, hostile to our country, interests				3.66	2.20
N9	Make profit in an extremely promiscuous way				3.59	2.19
Discursive Ethical Consumption						
Scale range		Mean	Std. Dev.	Alpha	Item	
12 - 84		22.41	10.82	0.915	Mean	SD
D1	Discussion with friends and acquaintances about the 'ethical/ unethical' practices applied in the production				3.06	1.62
D2	Participation in petition gathering				1.88	1.29
D3	Spread of messages (emails, SMSs)				1.93	1.41
D4	Group-discussions at social media and forums regarding ethical consumerism				2.02	1.51
D5	Participation in protest events				1.81	1.13
D6	Establishing and organizing protest groups				1.29	0.70
D7	Wearing T-shirts, badges, accessories etc. with printed messages, against "unethical" business practices				1.60	1.13
D8	Being member of organizations, unions or clubs engaged in ethical consumption actions				1.57	1.06
D9	Reading and writing in blogs				2.08	1.43
D10	Be present at speeches, discussions or meetings				1.96	1.35
D11	Use corporate platforms (automated customer service functions, chat sites, e-commerce sites) as arena for ethical consumerism				1.59	1.06
D12	Antibranding demonstrations				1.61	1.09

Table 2. Descriptives of Ethical Unconcern (Ethical Indifference & Scepticism)

Ethical Indifference						
<i>Scale range</i>		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Alpha</i>	<i>Item</i>	
11 - 77		39.19	14.06	0.910	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
EU1	Personally I cannot afford to pay from my pocket for the environmental protection				3.67	1.73
EU2	I am concerned solely with the financial problems of my own country and not with the problems of the financial weaker countries				3.59	1.94
EU3	For me, it is difficult to participate in demonstrations against business, even anonymously through the internet				3.85	1.98
EU4	There are other problems that concern me more than environmental destruction				3.65	1.90
EU5	When I go shopping in an S/M, I am considering the best value for money choice. I am not thinking if a product is "ethical" or "unethical"				4.40	1.86
EU6	I do not think, we should sacrifice economic development just to protect the environment				2.99	1.60
EU7	More money to the natural environment means less money to jobs				2.85	1.50
EU8	For me, it is highly inconvenient to look for "ethical" products at specialty stores				4.15	1.76
EU9	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				3.41	1.78
EU10	It is useless to buy Fair Trade products if there are not many consumers doing the same				2.86	1.46
EU11	Searching information about the "ethical/unethical" business practices consumes too much of my time				3.77	1.76
Ethical Scepticism						
<i>Scale range</i>		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Alpha</i>	<i>Item</i>	
8 - 56		21.44	8.70	0.869	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
EU12	I believe that many ecological products are of lower quality in comparison to the regular ones				2.11	1.30
EU13	I am against boycotting big business because it leads to loss of jobs				3.45	1.66
EU14	I do not believe that the recycling benefits come back to the society				2.54	1.57
EU15	I think that the so called ecological products is another advertisement trick				2.68	1.52
EU16	Boycotting of products or firms is always useless				2.79	1.54
EU17	I think that ethical consumption is just temporarily on fashion				2.82	1.59
EU18	I believe that, the so called "ethical" products are not as good as the regular ones				2.58	1.41
EU19	Most of the organics and eco-labelled products are inelegant				2.48	1.42