Chapter 104

Broadening the Scope of Ethical Consumer Behaviour: A Study on Five Precepts of Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

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

INTRODUCTION

Ethical consumer behaviour is a burgeoning social movement (Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2012) and a topic that has received increased attention in recent decades. Market research data in UK suggest that ethical food and drink market represents 8% of the total food and drink market (Cooperative Bank, 2009) and 89% of UK consumers report they have ethical issues of concern (Lazzarini &
The study conceptualises the importance of religious motives (or beliefs) in ethical consumer behaviour and empirically explore whether and how religious beliefs influence consumer ethical decision making by captivating the Five precepts framework in Buddhism. The study contributes towards consumer research by highlighting the importance of religious beliefs in shaping ethical behaviour that have the ability to precede CSR provoked ethical behaviours put forward by organisation in the current marketing environment.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Ethical Consumption and Decision-Making

Consumption is an essential everyday process; ‘to live is to consume’ (Borgmann, 2000: 418) and today consumers are thought to play an active and skilled role in the consumption process (Barnett et al., 2004). Existing marketing literature has predominantly used the term ‘ethical consumer’ to describe those who consider the environment, human and/or animal welfare as important, and as a consequence, evaluate their consumption lifestyles to take these issues into consideration (Strong, 1997; Harrison et al., 2005; Barnett et al., 2005).

Social science research on consumption has discovered that ordinary consumption is inundated with moral, rhetoric and ethical concern where much of the moralising is localised around family and friends, but can be seen as part of people’s self-image and their integrity (Harrison, Newholm, & Shaw, 2005). Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Valverde (2011) conceptualised ethical behaviour in consumers around two main streams of research: consumer ethics and ethical consumer behavior (Chatzidakis & Mitussis, 2007). Consumer ethics focus on how consumers perceive and react to potentially unethical purchase situations or behaviours such as counterfeiting, using an expired...