

# Insights on Ethical Consumption

## Engaging Public

Researching the views of consumers revealed there is no recipe of who is, or how to become, an ethical consumer. The business side has a somewhat clearer idea of who they think an ethical consumer is, and yes, it has to do with buying fair trade coffee and organic veg.

This study also provides evidence for the difficulty in becoming aware of the effect our consumption has on the people and the environment around us. Moreover, it is not easy - nor effective sometimes - to use our consumer power in order to pursue change. Thus, this study's findings invite individuals to consider using other mediums of public engagement, such as involvement in community groups or even politics, to complement their efforts to improve the world we live in.

Potential interested audience:

- Individuals willing to find out more about ethical consumerism from other consumers' experiences.
- Groups (such as campaign groups / community councils) who are using - or intending to use - consumer power as a tool to achieve their goals.

Ways to reach this specific audience include: Leaflets, executive summaries, events/talks, non-academic articles and publicly-accessed web-sites.

*Did you know?*  
The researcher has organised to disseminate the study's main findings to the general public. This will take place on the 22nd of June in Hillhead Library, Glasgow. Of course, you are welcome to attend - it's a free public event!

*Did you know?*  
Interviews with ethical consumers' highlighted fears that using consumer power as a tool to achieve change in society can prevent people from engaging with other forms of political and civic participation.  
"It takes people of the hook. Instead of actually going out there and getting their hands dirty and do stuff, they keep going buying a cup of coffee..." [Paul]

"Is being an ethical consumer all about buying organic veg and fair trade coffee?"

At least within the last ten years, the 'ethical' label in describing consumption has been extensively used by media, civil society and governmental institutions, businesses, as well as academia. Under this label the ethical consumer is the individual who purchases goods/services widely marketed as 'ethical' and/or who avoids (boycotts) 'unethically' framed corporations and products.

Despite the heavy use of this concept, there is little understanding to date on what may constitute 'ethical' in the context of consumption, what ethical consumption stands for, how it is experienced and who eventually is considered to be the ethical consumer (both by the general public and the business world).

This study explored this issue by collecting and analysing the relevant views of consumers and grocery retailers. This was done through a case study in Partick, Glasgow. Twenty self-identified ethical consumers were interviewed. The views of suppliers were also sought; ten managers of local grocery were interviewed and fifteen questionnaires were completed. A street survey was also conducted in order to gain the views of the general public, resulting in one-hundred and twelve completed questionnaires. The data collection phase started in May 2009 and ended in December 2009.

Ethical consumption is a contemporary social issue. As such, any research on this phenomenon deserves to transcend the boundaries of academic circles. Look around to see what findings from this study can be useful; for which audiences; and how this knowledge transfer can best be achieved!

*Did you know?*  
The term "ethical consumer" first appeared in 1994 when, during a marketing research on green consumers, it became clear that a wider spectrum of moral concerns influence consumer behaviour than just environmental ones (Newholm and Shaw, 2007).

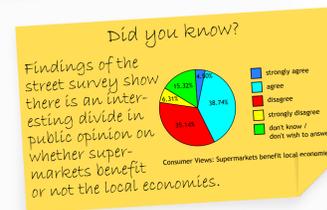
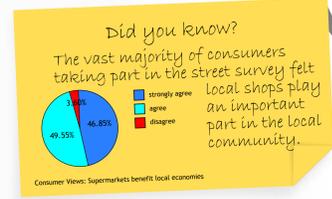
## Advancing Business

Business audience:

- Local and non-local retailers
- Trade bodies such as the Scottish Grocers' Federation, Scottish or British Retail Consortium.

Reaching the business world: Retailers who participated in this research will be emailed a report summarising main findings. Other ways of facilitating dissemination of these findings could include distributing executive summaries and organising talks.

Insights on how consumers experience ethical consumption can be useful for the commercial world and particularly businesses operating in Partick. Local business - especially those of a small scale who may lack capital for market research - might also benefit from some of the findings, and mainly those related to the street survey.



## Informing Policy

Availability of products and services is one of the main limitations for people practicing ethical consumption (the others being time, knowledge and financial capital). Findings from this research stress the crucial role of local/national policies in creating the structures that enable/disable individuals to use their consumer power strategically.

Interested bodies:

- Consumer Focus Scotland
- Glasgow City Council
- Local, national and international pressure groups/initiatives (such as Friends of the Earth, Scottish Fair Trade Forum)

Mediums to reach this audience: Executive summaries and/or invited talks.

## Want to learn more?

Contact the researcher  
**Ms Margarita Kominou**  
M.Kominou@sms.ed.ac.uk



Visit the study's blog:  
[ethicalconsumptionstudy.wordpress.com](http://ethicalconsumptionstudy.wordpress.com)

\* Special thanks to Andrew Wilson for feedback and help with the design.