

An introduction to special issue: sustainability and ethical consumerism

We are pleased to present this special issue of *Management Decision*, the aim of which is to advance an in-depth understanding of the area of sustainability and ethical consumerism and to proffer new possibilities for future research. This topic has been drawing significant attention, more so in recent decades, as was evident in the large number of manuscripts that were submitted to this issue. We are delighted to introduce the ten articles in this special issue. Each of these papers furthers the understanding of sustainability and ethical consumerism and, together, they provide novel directions for future studies.

We first explicate the main concepts that form the basis of this special issue: sustainability and ethical consumerism. We then provide an overview of the articles in this issue, highlighting various topics pertaining to this research area.

Sustainability and ethical consumerism

The current expansion of contemporary capitalism manifests itself in the harm being occasioned to the environment and the promulgation of social and economic exploitation of the individual and society. Increasingly, the need to take ecological and human social aspects into consideration, when pursuing sustainable development objectives, is impinging on the awareness of more businesses (Slawinski and Bansal, 2015).

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987) has defined sustainable development as one “that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (p. 43). This fundamental definition of sustainable development offers a descriptor which clearly is indicative of the perceptions of cause and effect, signifying that today’s needs should not be fulfilled at the sacrifice of tomorrow’s generations. The sustainability debate is poly-faceted with multiple voices whose dynamic is a function of psychological acculturation and political expediency resulting in an increasing number of environmental regulations. This is despite the recognition and awareness of sustainability issues at global national and local levels and the existence of multiple legislative attempts at regulation. Self-regulation in industry has been attempted, although not always with complete success. Sustainability is also becoming a fundamental aspect of strategic decision making in contemporary businesses, guiding management in assessment risks which impinge upon the gamut of their business practices (Gupta *et al.*, 2014).

The emphasis on balancing financial, societal and environmental aspects of running a business has evoked a stream of relevant research which studies the relationships between industry and society. Over the past three decades, the research on sustainability has seen a growing trend in areas such as: sustainable innovation, supply chain management, marketing,

The Guest editors would like to express their gratitude to all the authors who submitted their manuscripts to this special issue. The guest editors also appreciate the efforts of the volunteer reviewers who provided their valuable comments on the manuscripts without whom this special issue would not have been possible, a big thanks to Professor Andy Adcroft and the editorial office for providing continued support. Both authors of this editorial contributed equally to the guest editing of the special issue.



information systems and accounting and finance (Huang and Rust, 2011), whilst corporate social responsibility effectively dominates much of business studies (Lee *et al.*, 2012).

At the same time, there has been an increase of consumer awareness of the impact of ethical behavior in the context of human welfare and environmental issues, and this has seen an exponential growth in research into ethical consumerism. As a result, ethical consumerism is no longer considered as a niche (Carrington *et al.*, 2014; Caruana *et al.*, 2016). Consumers have become aware that they can effect change by changing the products which they buy, and are changing their behavior accordingly.

From business management and consumer behavior viewpoints, we acknowledge the significant role that sustainability and ethical consumerism play in today's field of management theory and practice. This special issue covers many topics within sustainability and ethical consumerism, which sometimes share commonalities and are yet distinct.

Papers in this special issue

We called for empirical and conceptual submissions that offer valuable contributions which have significant theoretical and managerial implications and review pertinent issues in sustainability and ethical consumerism. The articles in this issue deal with a range of topics from philanthropic engagement, ethical investment in corporations, collaborative framework for balancing stakeholder power and social responsibilities to responsible consumer behavior, fair trade movement, mapping the sharing economy for sustainability, ethical product attributes, green purchase intention and the role of information in ethical consumption. The papers in this issue employ different methodologies (quantitative, qualitative and conceptual) and study different stakeholders (consumers, organizations).

The first three papers focus on the organizational perspective on sustainability. The opening paper "The effect of firm strategic orientation on corporate philanthropic engagement" (Abebe and Cha, 2018) focuses on the key role of corporate strategic orientations as drivers of an organization's philanthropic engagement. In particular, the authors examine the relationship between two broad corporate strategic orientations, namely, domain offense and domain abandonment strategies, with the level of philanthropic engagement exhibited by the organizations. For this purpose, data from 122 publicly traded US organizations from 2008 to 2013 were examined to determine the relationship between corporate strategic policies and philanthropic engagement. The authors found that there was a positive relationship between domain offense strategies and philanthropy, whilst the contrary was reported for domain abandonment strategies. As a result, the findings of this study propose an important link between domain offense strategies and corporate philanthropy.

The second study, titled "Perfectionist decision-making style and ethical investment willingness: a two-factor causal mediation model" by Lin *et al.* (2018), aims to examine the ethical investment willingness decision-making process of the investors in a CSR context. They found that the perfectionist decision-making style is a driver for perceived moral intensity, substitutability of financial returns and ethical investment willingness. Further, perceived moral intensity and substitutability of financial returns were found to be positively related to ethical investment willingness. Also, the authors found support for a two-factor causal mediation model, as perceived moral intensity is positively related to substitutability of financial returns.

The third study, titled "For the balance of stakeholders' power and responsibility: a collaborative framework for implementing social responsibility issues in construction projects" by Lin *et al.* (2018), focuses on developing and designing a collaborative framework for balancing stakeholder power and social responsibilities in construction projects. Adopting a multi-phase case study approach in a real estate project in China, the authors

substantiated the framework and found that stakeholder engagement is enhanced by implementing the framework, also leading to better communication and trust, and increased collaboration through a collective form of responsibility.

From a collaborative sustainable development view point, in the fourth paper, titled “Mapping the sharing economy for sustainability research,” Plewnia and Guenther (2018) develop a holistic framework of sharing economy including various business models and activities. In this conceptual paper, they propose four main dimensions characterizing sharing economy, namely, shared good or service, market structure, market orientation and industry sector.

The remaining papers deal with a range of topics within ethical consumption. The fifth paper, titled “Selecting decision-relevant ethical product attributes for grocery shopping” by Hasanzade *et al.* (2018), aims at understanding consumer preferences for the provision of relevant product production information (labor exploitation, animal welfare and environment) which could address underlying uncertainties and add impetus to address concerns about ecological matters. The authors determine three consumer segments: ethically motivated, price-oriented and price-quality-oriented consumers. They also argue that information about animal welfare is most important to the consumers in making decisions followed by information about human and labor rights and environmental protection.

The objective of the sixth study, titled “Sustainable consumption: insights from the protection motivation (PMT), deontic justice (DJT) and construal level (CLT) theories” by Ibrahim and Al-Ajlouni (2018), is the examination of the role of the deontic justice, protection motivation and construal level theories to understand green motivations and intentions. The authors, through an experimental survey, involving 471 participants, propose and test the influence of threat appraisal, coping appraisal and deontic justice dimensions on green purchase intention. The authors also study construal variable as a moderator in the relationship between these variables and green purchase intention.

In the seventh paper, titled “Fair trade and consumer social responsibility exploring consumer citizenship as a driver of social and environmental change,” Anderson (2018) explores the historical perspective of fair trade consumers. The influence of the ethical consumer as a motivator for change is examined in the context of fair trade, which has now expanded beyond the original north-south divide and now encompasses such emergent economies as India, South Africa and Brazil. Hence, the position of the consumer as an agent for change is of significance to this study, and the grouping of consumers into four subtypes is proposed for convenience. These subtypes are considered to be consumers whose concerns are moral action and simple living, living in the world as citizen consumers, solidarity with the marginalized producers and demand choice. The paper also examines the potential for and impact of globalizing the citizen-consumer and the effects on Fair Trade consumption.

The eighth paper, “Looking for info? Understanding ethical consumer information management using a diary approach” by Papaoikonomou *et al.* (2018), investigates the role of information in relation to ethical consumerism. The authors examine the information search and use of this information by ethical consumers, unpacking the related issues and examining how consumers address them. By employing a longitudinal qualitative design over 11 weeks, with interviews and diary records, they explained the importance of information search, use and timing of information. They found that consumers spend time and effort in information search and processing regarding a purchase decision. The authors also identify key issues in information management owing to which consumers often shift from maximizers to optimizers.

The ninth paper, “Moral avoidance for people and planet: anti-consumption drivers” by Sudbury-Riley and Kohlbacher (2018), examines the reasons for moral avoidance as a form of anti-consumption among older consumers, and proposes that concerns for the planet and human exploitation are the two main causes of moral avoidance. Using a quantitative survey of 457 UK consumers, results confirm the existence of two forms of anti-

consumption: ecological anti-consumption, related to the exploitation of the planet, and social anti-consumption, owing to exploitation of humans. The authors also found that ecological concerns and perceived consumer effectiveness are key predictors to both forms, while ethical ideology also influences anti-consumption.

The tenth article, "Ethical consumption and consumers' decision making: the role of moral intuition" by Zollo *et al.* (2018), examines the predictors of moral reasoning and cognitive processes which impinge upon adoption of an ethical posture by the consumer by employing the theory of planned behavior and the socio-intuitionist model. They also propose holistic, inferential and affective dimensions of intuition as the antecedents of environmental concerns which then impact ethical consumerism. It is argued that the only significant antecedent of this is inferential intuition. This, in turn, has born considerable influence on the dimensions of eco-friendly consumer behavior.

Overall, the articles included in this special issue provide meaningful insights in wide ranging topics in the broader literature of sustainability and ethical consumerism. The papers in this special issue help us understand the diverse and complex issues in this field of study. We hope that this issue will generate a momentum for new research ideas in management studies pertaining to sustainability and ethical consumerism.

Alvina Gillani

Department of Marketing and Retail Management, University of Surrey, Guildford, UK, and

Smirti Kutaula

Department of Management, Kingston University, Kingston-Upon-Thames, UK

References

- Caruana, R., Carrington, M.J. and Chatzidakis, A. (2016), "Beyond the attitude-behaviour gap: novel perspectives in consumer ethics: introduction to the thematic symposium", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 136 No. 2, pp. 215-218.
- Carrington, M.J., Neville, B.A. and Whitwell, G.J. (2014), "Lost in translation: exploring the ethical consumer intention-behavior gap", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 67 No. 1, pp. 2759-2767.
- Gupta, S., Rudd, J. and Lee, N. (2014), "Business sustainability through successful integration of marketing and operations", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 43 No. 1, pp. 3-5.
- Huang, M.H. and Rust, R.T. (2011), "Sustainability and consumption", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 40-54.
- Lee, E.M., Park, S.Y., Rapert, M.I. and Newman, C.L. (2012), "Does perceived consumer fit matter in corporate social responsibility issues?", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 65 No. 11, pp. 1558-1564.
- Slawinski, N. and Bansal, P. (2015), "Short on time: intertemporal tensions in business sustainability", *Organization Science*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 531-549.
- WCED (1987), *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.