


# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UTILITARIAN AND HEDONIC CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

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*Consumption processes in modern societies are constantly gaining in importance. Noticing the growing significance of consumption, the idea of some consumer responsibility for the currently observed crises gains relevance. Despite the increasing number of publications on the subject of socially responsible consumption, however ethical side of socially responsible consumption is not receiving enough attention, the majority of publications are focused on environmental consumption. In addition, little attention is paid to analyze ethical side of socially responsible consumption from the individual side. Measurement of the relationship between the utilitarian and hedonic consumer behavior and socially responsible consumption may contribute to the knowledge of new characteristics, describing the socially responsible consumer. The paper suggest theoretical model, which helps to measure the relationship between utilitarian and hedonic consumer behavior and ethical side of socially responsible consumption. Utilitarian consumer behavior is measured with the constructs like monetary savings and convenience, as the hedonic behavior is described by using entertainment and exploration constructs. Performed literature analysis suggests, that hedonic consumer behavior has greater impact on socially responsible consumption than utilitarian consumer behavior.*

**The type of the article:** Theoretical article.

**Keywords:** socially responsible consumption, hedonic behavior, utilitarian behavior.

**JEL Classification:** M31, M39.

## 1. Introduction

It is generally observed that people see themselves as consumers in more and more spheres of their live. The definition of consumption often means to consume, waste, squander or destroy (Francois-Lecompte, Roberts, 2006). Directly or indirectly, the consumption of goods and services causes many urgent social and environmental problems. A number of present environmental problems can be linked to consumer lifestyles. More sustainable lifestyles cannot be reached without marking changes in consumer behavior, attitudes and values. The performed research results showed that consumers are becoming more conscious to include ethical principles in their purchase decisions (Roberts, 1995, 1996). Price, quality, value and convenience appear to be the most important buying criteria for a large segment of consumers and products with an environmental or social appeal have an added advantage if they meet other competitive requirements. As consumers are one of the main stakeholders group in the market, it is essential for marketers seeking to tap into this market to understand the concerns of the consumers as well as how the latter translate into new forms of consumer's behavior (Binniger, Robert, 2008). Therefore the study of socially responsible consumption (SRC) became of critical importance.

Despite the increasing number of publications on the subject of socially responsible consumption, however ethical side of socially responsible consumption is not receiving enough attention, the majority of publications are focused on environmental consumption. Foreign researcher identified different scales to measure socially responsible consumption in a broad sense, but existing models are not fundamental. In addition, little attention is paid to analyse ethical side of socially responsible consumption from the individual side, i.e. what motives, values, emotions

affect individuals to start consume ethically. Literature analysis on consumer behavior suggest, that consumer purchase goods and services and perform consumption behavior because of the two basic reasons: hedonic and utilitarian. Hence the analysis of the relationship between hedonic and utilitarian consumer behavior and ethical consumption is of crucial importance. The results of analysis will show, what better describes the ethical consumer behavior: emotions or rational thinking.

The following research methods are used in the article: the systematic and comparative analysis of scientific literature in the field of socially responsible consumption, utilitarian and hedonic consumer behavior. The purpose of this article is to establish theoretical model, which helps to measure the relationship between utilitarian and hedonic consumer behavior and ethical side of socially responsible consumption.

## 2. Concept of ethical consumption as a part of SRC

Theoretically, the concept of socially responsible consumption has changed over the years. Webster (1975) defined socially conscious consumer “as a consumer who takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or who attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change“ (p. 188). His definition stressed the idea, that socially conscious consumer have to be aware of social problems and active in the community and must believe in his or her power to make changes. Follows and Jobber (2000) indicated that socially responsible consumer evaluates the product use impact on society before he takes purchasing decision. This proposes that socially responsible consumption should reflect consumer values within the natural, environmental, social and economic aspects. Mohr *et al.* (2001) defined socially responsible consumer as a person basing his or her acquisition, usage and disposition of products on a desire to minimize or eliminate any harmful effects and maximize the long-run beneficial impact on society. Researchers divide socially responsible consumption in 2 main parts (see Figure 1): ethical and environmental consumption (responsibility) (Paek, Nelson, 2009; François-Lecompte, 2005).

The analysis of socially responsible consumption is based on both environmental and ethical consumption-dimensional assessment including consumers socio-demographic and characteristics of the values (Adams, Raisborough, 2010). Despite the increasing number of publications on the subject of socially responsible consumption however ethical side of socially responsible consumption is not receiving enough attention, the majority of publications are focused on environmental aspect of socially responsible consumption.

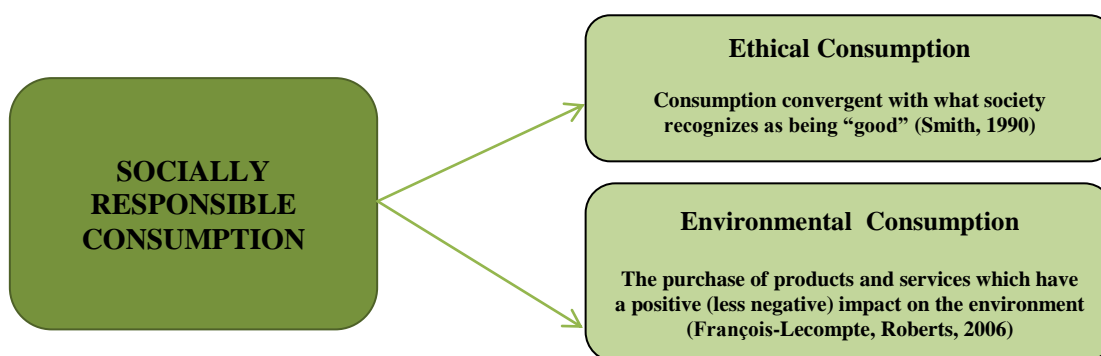


Figure 1. Concept of socially responsible consumption

Researchers have identified such key social issues related to ethical behavior: fair trade (DePelsmacker, Janssens, 2007; Nicholls, Opal, 2005), trade of organically grown and processed products (Tsakiridou *et al.*, 2008), work processes in developing countries (Joergens, 2006; Dickson, 1999). A lot of researchers examined the sociodemographics of ethical consumer (Carrigan, Attalla, 2001; Vitell *et al.*, 2001; Roberts, 1996). However only few research investigated consumer values and their influence on ethical behavior (Dickson, 1999; Roberts,

1996; Fritzsche, 1995). Moreover, comparatively little attention has been paid to the role that ethics plays in individual purchasing behavior (Nicholls & Lee, 2006). Among the limited investigation on individual ethical decision-making, two famous theoretical approaches are Hunt and Vitell's general theory of marketing ethics (Hunt & Vitell, 1986) and different models that are based on the behavioral theories of Ajzen and Fishbein (Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2006).

Crane and Matten (2004) suggest that the main essence of the concept of ethical consumption is "the conscious and deliberate decision to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values". Ethical consumers are likely to look after the developing world and largely that producers should get fair wages and improved working conditions as well as concerns about animal well-being, pollution and waste (Shaw & Clarke, 1998). Szmigin and Carrigan (2006) stressed, that ethical consumption is as large part of the active social process of consumption with its material and symbolic dimensions as any other form of consumption. This is the reason, why ethical consumption could not be seen (individually) in isolation, but should be accepted that ethical characteristics will be evaluated by consumers with others relevant to their choice decisions (Shaw & Clarke, 1998).

### 3. Hedonic versus utilitarian consumer behavior

A behavior of the consumer is a result of attitudes, motives and values and may evidence into purchase and consumption behavior. Literature analysis on consumer behavior suggest that consumer purchase goods and services and perform consumption behavior because of the two basic reasons (Teller *et al.*, 2008; Millan, Howard, 2007; Batra, Ahtola, 1990; Holbrook, Hirschman, 1982; Millar, Tesser, 1986):

- hedonic gratification (from sensory attributes);
- utilitarian reasons concerned (from functional and nonsensory attributes).

Both the utilitarian and hedonic aspects are bipolar by nature. Hedonic aspect includes unpleasant feelings as well as pleasant, as at the same time utilitarian aspect includes judgements about irrationality as well as rationality, functional and product-centric thinking (Rintamaki *et al.*, 2006; Ahtola, 1985). Hedonic value is associated with satisfaction of the senses enlarged by experiences of pleasure, entertainment, fantasy and fun (Holbrook, Hirschman, 1982; Babin *et al.*, 1994). Utilitarian value can be characterized as task-related needs fulfillment. Constructs like monetary savings and convenience contribute to utilitarian value, as hedonic value can be described by using entertainment and exploration constructs (Chandon *et al.*, 2000; Turley, Milliman, 2000; Rintamaki *et al.*, 2006). Monetary savings mitigate the pain of paying (Chandon *et al.*, 2000). Convenience can be defined as a ratio of inputs to outputs, time and effort being the relevant inputs (Seiders *et al.*, 2000; Rintamaki *et al.*, 2006). Exploration provides hedonic value, when customer evaluate the excitement of product and (or) information search (Chandon *et al.*, 2000, Rintamaki *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, hedonic value realized through entertainment is a reaction to aesthetic features (Rintamaki *et al.*, 2006).

The notion hedonism is traditionally associated with a negative connotation linked with instant gratification and egoistic, individualistic materialism and excessive selfish behavior (Gabriel & Lang, 1995, cited in Szmigin *et al.*, 2007). However, there are many and controversial opinions as to what it means to behave hedonic in today's society (Gabriel, Lang, 1995). Soper (2007, 2008) and Soper *et al.* (2009) also support this idea. They argue, that ethical consumption can, in itself, be a hedonistic pursuit. In this regard, hedonism is based on individual's motivation to strive for the 'good life'. The 'good life' refers to an individual's discontent with consumerism and materialism resulting in a tendency to choose alternative forms of consumption practices. Hence considering the term hedonism it is necessary to analyse two forms of hedonism: egoistic and ethical. Egoistic hedonism is based on the idea that the happiness or the pleasure of the individual is the ultimate good or moral standard (Sidgwick, 1981). Based of the above mentioned sentence, it can be concluded, that egoistic hedonist do not concern welfare of others. While ethical hedonists are concerned not only with their own well-being, but the welfare of others. The concept ethical

hedonism relates to the purchase and consumption of ethical goods as a pleasurable act. Hedonism can be a legitimate dimension of ethical consumption if it is accepted that doing the ‘right thing’ may be associated with feelings of self –respect which in turn give to the person feelings of pleasure (Szmigin, Carrigan, 2006). Wertebroch (2002) pointed out, that consumer preferences are often driven by the anticipated hedonic experience, so this may still be within parameters of moral dimensions and self-control. Consumers will even achieve hedonic benefits from manipulating the set of choices they face (Wertebroch, 2002). So an ethical choice may be more appealing when made in the presence of less ethical choices (Szmigin, Carrigan, 2006).

The analysis of scientific literature suggests that hedonic consumption causes a sense of guilt (Kivetz, Simonson, 2002; Strahilevitz, Myers, 1998, Belk *et al.*, 2003). Broadly guilt can be understood as a negative self-conscious emotion aroused when person’s conducts is at variance with person’s own standards (Baumeister *et al.*, 1995). Guilt can occur during purchase, in usage situations and even during disposition of the products (Dahl *et al.*, 2003). Generally guilt has been determined as moral emotion linked to the welfare of other people or of society as a whole (Eisenberg, 2000). Guilt is typically observed as involving concern for moral standards or harm done to others (Tangney, Dearing, 2002). In this respect, researchers have been suggesting importance of guilt emotion in ethically questionable consumer situations. Marks and Mayo (1991) remarked, that people may experience the sense of guilt when choosing unethical alternative. Considering guilt as an emotion, it suggested that consumers tend to eliminate their guilt by coping behavior (Dedeoglu, Kazancoglu, 2012).

Based on scientific literature review the author of this article states that both hedonic and utilitarian consumer behavior can be the antecedents of the ethical consumption. However, hedonic consumer behavior is analysed in this context much more wider and may be assumed as having greater impact on ethical consumption than utilitarian consumer behavior.

#### 4. Theoretical model of relationship between utilitarian and hedonic consumer behavior and ethical consumption

Foreign researcher identified different scales to measure socially responsible consumption in a broad sense, but existing models are not fundamental. In addition, little attention is paid to analyse ethical side of socially responsible consumption from the individual side, i.e. what motives affect individuals to start consume ethically. The author of this paper thinks that measurement of the relationship between utilitarian and hedonic consumer behavior and ethical consumption as a part of socially responsible consumption may contribute to the fulfilment of this gap. Having all these in mind and based on scientific literature review author of the article established a new theoretical model (see Figure 2).

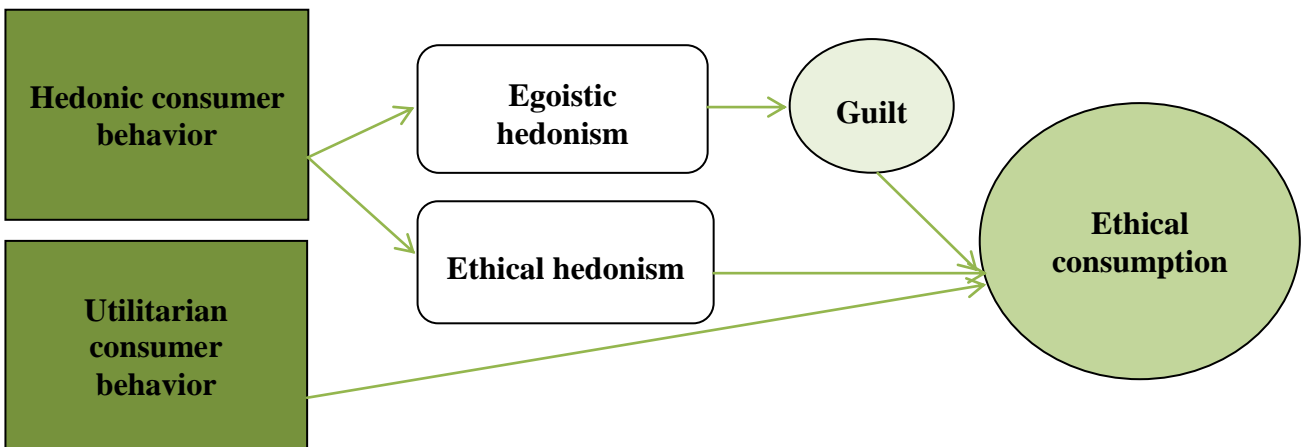


Figure 2. Theoretical model of relationship between utilitarian and hedonic consumer behavior and ethical consumption

The model (see Figure 2) suggest that hedonic and utilitarian consumer behavior may be antecedents of ethical consumption. Author of the article assumes that egoistic hedonic consumer behavior may lead to the purchase of ethical products because of the impact of negative self-conscious emotion, called guilt. While ethical hedonic and utilitarian consumer behavior may have direct impact on ethical consumption.

## 5. Discussion

Despite the increasing number of publications on the subject of socially responsible consumption, however ethical side of socially responsible consumption is not receiving enough attention, especially in terms of motives affecting individuals to start consume ethically.

To sum up, the author of the article presents theoretical model, which helps to measure the relationship between utilitarian and hedonic consumer behavior and ethical consumption. Performed literature analysis and authors' stated assumptions suggest that hedonic consumer behavior may has greater impact on ethical side of socially responsible consumption than utilitarian consumer behavior. Author of the article assumes that egoistic hedonic consumer behavior may lead to the purchase of ethical products because of the impact of negative self-conscious emotion, called guilt, while at the same time ethical hedonic consumer behavior may have direct impact on ethical consumption.

Limitations of this paper are due to the fact that only theoretical considerations were presented, empirical research on analysed topic was not performed. Potential research on relationship between utilitarian and hedonic consumer behavior and ethical consumption would provide both marketing scientists and specialists with in-depth understanding of new characteristics describing the socially responsible (ethical) consumer.

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