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# Ethical Unconcern Scale: Construction and Validation

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**Abstract:** Presents the development procedure of an Ethical Unconcern (EthU) scale. The procedure included literature search, brainstorming and discussion groups to generate the pool of the initial 99 items. A student survey was conducted to refine the measure. Item analysis and reliability assessment resulted in an initial scale of 25 items. A consumer survey was conducted in the urban area of Thessaloniki, Greece, in order to test the initial EthU scale. Item-to-total correlation and alpha-if-item deleted were applied in the consumer sample and the results indicated that all items obtained coefficients greater than 0.30. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) followed by the employment of PCA. Five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were found to explain 61.34% of the variance. Four items (two with a factor loading <0.50 and two cross-loaded) were eliminated; the remaining 21 items indicated  $\alpha = 0.923$  for EthU. The five factors were named Boycott/ Discursive, Fair-Trade, Scepticism, Powerlessness and Ineffectiveness. The AMOS SPSS was then used to conduct confirmatory factor analysis. Goodness-of-fit results indicated that the measurement model fit the data well ( $\chi^2=594.226$ ,  $p<0.000$ , CFI=0.926, NFI=0.899, TLI=0.910, RMSEA=0.066).

**Keywords:** Ethical Consumption; Ethical Unconcern; Measure Development

**JEL classification:** M310 Marketing

## 1. Introduction

Ethical consumption is a relatively new topic within the marketing academic community. Ethical consumption does not concern merely individual satisfaction of needs and wants, as it simultaneously aims at the overall social welfare (Crane, 2001). Ethical consumption may be positive (choose eco-friendly and fair products, prefer firms responsible and fair enough to the workers etc.) or negative (boycotting unethical products or firms) as suggested by Tallontire *et al.* (2001) and discursive (digital communication about consumption issues) as suggested by Michelletti *et al.* (2005). Focusing on the first type, it has to be mentioned that positive ethical consumption has not yet gained its place in the mainstream of the marketing research. There must be no doubt the economic crisis would not and does not assist any shift towards ethical consumption patterns in the European market. However, there is already a small academic stream addressing the challenge to understand this type of consumption by revealing any potential antecedents.

There have been some studies (e.g. Creyer & Ross, 1997; Mohr *et al.*, 2001; Fernandez-Kranz & Merino-Castello, 2005; Delistavrou & Tilikidou, 2012; Tilikidou, 2013), which indicated a number of consumers ready to prefer firms that are socially responsible towards the natural and the human environment. On the other hand, the actual market share for these products is much more limited than what the studies suggested (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000; Cowe & Williams, 2000; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Tilikidou, 2013). Cowe & Williams (2000) more than a decade ago underlined that although most surveys reveal that around 30% of the population is particularly motivated to buy ethical products, these products make up only fewer than 3% of their individual markets. This phenomenon has been named the “30:3 syndrome” in ethical consumption.

In the consumer research context there has always been a debate as to whether attitudes can be considered a valid predictor of an individual’s behaviour, as attitudes are often not translated into action (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Sheeran, 2002; Papaoikonomou *et al.*, 2011; Delistavrou & Tilikidou, 2014). This phenomenon is even more obvious when the behaviours under examination are socially desirable (Peattie, 1995, p. 154; Shrum *et al.*, 1995; Thørgensen & Ölander, 2003; Tilikidou, 2013). Therefore, the emergence of the attitude - behaviour gap was expected in the ethical consumer research (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Auger *et al.*, 2004; Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2007; Papaoikonomou *et al.*, 2011).

On the other hand, the assumption that attitudes are able, at least to an extent, to describe and/or predict behaviour cannot be taken for granted, as the attitude - behaviour link might provide important implications for the marketers of ethical products (Papaoikonomou *et al.*, 2011). In fact, explaining and/or eliminating the attitudes-behaviour gap might be considered as one of the most important challenges ethical consumption should face in the future. In the context of the ecologically related behaviour, in an effort to understand better the insights of this phenomenon, Tilikidou & Delistavrou (2005a) examined which negative attitudes might inhibit pro-environmental behaviours, instead of examining those attitudes that might influence behaviours positively.

Following this latter direction of research, this study aimed to construct a reliable and valid measure of ethical unconcern and examine, at least preliminarily, its inhibiting role on positive ethical consumption.

## **2. Review of the Literature**

The positive ethical consumption has been suggested as a rather broad concept, including buying, eco-friendly and fair products (Tallontire *et al.*, 2001), recycling, repair, reuse as well as donate, volunteer etc. (Tilikidou & Delistavrou, 2012). Of course the ecologically related consumer research has been gained most of the academic attention, so far.

With relevance to attitudes, much research has been directed on examining ethical consumer behaviour based on existing attitude-behaviour models (Shaw & Shiu, 2003; Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2007). In this sense, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) is one of the more testable frameworks that have been applied in ethical consumer behaviour (Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2007). According to TPB, attitudes is one of the three (attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control) antecedents of consumers’ behavioural intentions.

TPB has been applied in fair trade products buying; the constructs of ethical obligation and self identity were added to the original conceptual model as potentially measures of further explanation (Shaw & Shiu, 2003; Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2007). Papaoikonomou *et al.* (2011) commented that to an extent, these studies explain the existence of word/deed inconsistencies, i.e., the difference between what one says and what one actually does. For instance, consumers claim that price, availability and convenience are significant barriers to their intention to behave ethically (Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001).

Tilikidou *et al.* (2013) employed a semantic differential scale to examine attitudes towards green hotels, namely choices between two opposite perceptions, such as favourable-unfavourable, positive-negative etc. This approach was discussed as rather unsatisfactory, so the authors suggested that there is a need to develop more reliable and valid instruments to investigate ethical attitudes, measured on the typical Likert scale.

With reference to the ecologically related research, Tilikidou & Delistavrou (2005a) pointed out that most of the scales, which have been used to measure attitudes, had been designed to estimate positive “pro-environmental concern” scores (e.g. among others Bohlen *et al.*, 1993; Tilikidou, 2001, p. 64; Fotopoulos & Krystallis, 2002; Carrus *et al.*, 2008). It has been observed (Tilikidou & Delistavrou, 2005a) that the attitudinal scores have been always significantly higher than the behavioural scores and claimed that the social desirability effect must have been extremely remarkable in the attitudes measurement. Therefore, it might be argued that the examination of negative attitudes might hopefully be found more efficient in capturing more sincere beliefs; those beliefs that in overall express indifference, disinterest, recklessness about environmental issues. So far, the above mentioned authors developed the Environmental Unconcern scale (see: Tilikidou & Delistavrou, 2005a). The literature search indicated that there has not been an effort so far to construct and test an ethical unconcern scale.

### 3. Research Objectives

- to develop a reliable and valid measure of Ethical Unconcern
- to examine its impact on Positive Ethical Consumption

### 4. Methodology

The methodology of this study consisted of two stages: a) a measure development procedure to construct a scale of Ethical Unconcern (EthU) and b) an exploratory field research to test the impact of EthU on Positive Ethical Consumption (PEC).

#### 4.1. The measure development

Following the suggestions of Churchill (1979), Spector (1992) and Robinson *et al.* (1991) the measure development procedure incorporated the following steps: domain definition, literature search, focus group, brain storming, items generation, a preliminary survey to students, item analysis, reliability estimation and factor analysis (PCA).

**Domain definition:** Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, p. 6) wrote that attitudes are “*a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object*”. Hawkins *et al.* (1998, p. 396) suggested that “*attitude is an enduring organization of motivational, emotional, perceptual and cognitive process with respect to some aspect of our environment*”. For the requirements of this study we defined Ethical

Unconcern as “*negative feelings, thoughts, ideas and beliefs with respect to Ethical Consumption*”. An effort was made to ensure that the under construction measure would have incorporated attitudes towards all three types of Ethical Consumption, as well as items capturing all components of the domain definition.

**Literature search:** Previous research papers (qualitative and quantitative) on the topic of ethical attitudes were collected and the relevant scales and qualitative findings were reviewed. (John & Klein, 2001; Klein *et al.*, 2004; Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004; Shaw *et al.*, 2005; Fraj & Martinez, 2006; Freestone & McGoldrick, 2007; Tilikidou, 2007; Delistavrou & Tilikidou, 2009; among others)

**Brainstorming:** 9 students and 5 academics of the Marketing Department of the Thessaloniki TEI were gathered in two different discussion groups to suggest items that the under construction scale should contain.

**Discussion group:** A discussion group of 7 consumers was organised. The consumers were asked to discuss and express their thoughts, feelings, ideas about the three types of ethical consumption namely Positive, Negative and Discursive Ethical Consumption, through a semi-structured procedure. The procedure was videotaped. A thorough study of the records provided fruitful information as to each one of the above types of ethical consumption. Based on the information provided, the components of the under construction scale were decided to be the following 5: ethical concerns, ecological concerns, fair-trade concerns, attitudes towards boycotting and discursive actions.

**Item generation pool and pre-testing:** Editing and re-editing followed to gain the initial items generation pool. In an effort to cover all the components 99 items in total were generated and measured on a 7-point Likert scale. A students’ survey was then conducted in order to pre-test the initial measure of Ethical Unconcern. A cluster sample of 290 students of the TEI of Thessaloniki was used and the data were input in the analysis.

**Refinement of the scale:** Item analysis was conducted by the employment of the item-to-total correlation and alpha-if-item-deleted techniques. Item analysis indicated that 25 items obtained coefficients greater than 0.45 and the initial scale indicated Cronbach’ alpha of 0.903.

#### 4.2. The consumers’ survey

The Ethical Unconcern (EthU) scale was included in a structured questionnaire together with the scale of Positive Ethical Consumption (PEC) adopted from Delistavrou&Tilikidou (2012). The PEC consists of 19 items, measured on a 7- point frequency scale from 1= Never to 7=Always and in this study provided a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.905.

The sample size was set at 600 households of the urban area of Thessaloniki. The sampling method was a combination of the two stage area sampling and the systematic method (Tull& Hawkins 1993; p. 544; Zikmund 1991, p. 471) and resulted in 565 useable questionnaires.

## 5. RESULTS

### 5.1. Item analysis

Item-to-total correlation and alpha-if-item deleted were applied in the consumer sample and the results indicated that all items obtained coefficients greater than 0.30.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted with the employment of PCA to explore if there are any possible factors in the measure of EthU. Five factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1 were found to explain 61.34% of the variance. The factor loadings indicated 4 items (EthU05, EthU13, EthU14 and EthU25) that should be eliminated. Two of them (EthU05 and EthU25) did not indicate factor loadings above 0.50, while the other two (EthU13 and EthU14) were double loaded. The remaining 21 items in EThU provided Cronbach’s alpha of 0.923.

Table 1: Item analysis results

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Alpha if Item Deleted	Item-Total Cor.	Factor loadings				
						1	2	3	4	5
EthU1	The relevant to ethical consumption information require time and effort, which is difficult for me	4.02	1.664	0.936	0.357	0.045	0.086	0.035	0.750	0.083
EthU2	I do not believe that consumers are able to get united and fight against “unethical” business practices	3.45	1.748	0.934	0.527	0.214	0.066	0.014	0.616	0.439
EthU3	It is rather impossible for us to find products and services provided by firms that are responsible towards the natural and the human environment	3.78	1.778	0.935	0.470	0.152	0.183	0.136	0.698	0.052
EthU4	I do not think that we could stop buy products from business that have been accused about unethical practices	3.40	1.664	0.933	0.604	0.336	0.282	0.175	0.540	0.121
EthU5	I would never be able to judge if the products I buy cause trouble to somebody else	2.53	1.583	0.933	0.616	0.425	0.087	0.134	0.384	0.422
EthU6	I think that ethical consumption is just temporarily on fashion	3.35	1.807	0.932	0.635	0.308	0.068	0.607	0.335	0.237
EthU7	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	3.84	1.729	0.933	0.589	0.163	0.631	0.160	0.233	0.298
EthU8	It is useless to buy Fair Trade products if there are not many consumers doing the same	2.94	1.559	0.933	0.588	0.281	0.246	0.121	0.294	0.511
EthU9	I am exclusively interested in the economic problems of my own country; problems in the economically weaker countries are not my concern	3.73	1.787	0.933	0.600	0.173	0.761	0.121	0.179	0.263
EthU10	There are other problems that bother me more than environmental destruction	3.63	1.790	0.933	0.599	0.223	0.760	0.043	0.128	0.315
EthU11	I don’t believe that the environment would be protected if we used less water, electricity and oil	2.93	1.722	0.934	0.539	0.176	0.156	0.177	0.178	0.699

EthU12	I do not think we should sacrifice economic development just to protect the environment	3.23	1.635	0.933	0.580	0.201	0.276	0.234	0.074	0.670
EthU13	More money to the natural environment means less money to jobs	3.23	1.579	0.934	0.553	0.294	0.226	0.485	-0.104	0.429
EthU14	I am not willing to pay more in order to buy ecological products	3.78	1.694	0.934	0.531	0.243	0.653	0.426	0.109	-0.153
EthU15	Most ethical products are of lower quality	3.27	1.572	0.934	0.517	0.167	0.160	0.721	0.061	0.205
EthU16	I think that the so called ecological products is another advertisement trick	3.33	1.700	0.933	0.619	0.309	0.158	0.768	0.132	0.133
EthU17	If a boycotting is successful my participation is not necessary	3.04	1.620	0.932	0.652	0.574	0.173	0.222	0.116	0.356
EthU18	It is impossible for me to participate in a boycotting against my favorite brands	3.30	1.700	0.932	0.660	0.522	0.311	0.186	0.249	0.213
EthU19	Boycotting of products or firms is always useless	3.13	1.636	0.931	0.705	0.604	0.246	0.283	0.194	0.223
EthU20	I think that marches, demonstrations and other events against the so – called “unethical” business practices are all meaningless	3.20	1.698	0.933	0.616	0.743	0.092	0.196	0.029	0.196
EthU21	I would never be interested to get to know and evaluate activities of a firm in order to make a judgment about its ethics or to judge if it is :unethical” or not	2.89	1.611	0.932	0.696	0.730	0.228	0.123	0.232	0.140
EthU22	There is no personal responsibility of mine, as a consumer, about profiteering or labour rights removal	3.12	1.636	0.932	0.646	0.741	0.260	0.019	0.167	0.137
EthU23	Petition gathering have never been effective to any issue	3.34	1.686	0.933	0.599	0.726	-0.012	0.218	0.073	0.224
EthU24	Fair Trade claims are nothing more than advertisement tricks	3.38	1.638	0.932	0.655	0.660	0.128	0.417	0.131	0.055
EthU25	It is hard to search and find ecological products	3.27	1.764	0.934	0.522	0.486	0.280	0.268	0.323	-0.209

Taking a close look at the items entered in each factor, it was observed that the first factor includes eight items expressing consumers’ refusal to care about boycotting and discursive actions and it was named Boycott/Discursive. The second factor contains three items expressing consumers’ objections to fair-trade and it was named Fair-trade. The third factor included three items expressing the consumers’ reservations towards ethical products with regard to their quality, price and ethical claims and it was named Scepticism. The fourth factor includes four items expressing the consumers’ lack of empowerment with regards to their impact on business’ unethical practices and it was named Powerlessness. The fifth factor contains three items expressing the consumers’ sense of ineffectiveness regarding economic conservation and adoption of ethical choices and it was named Ineffectiveness.

The AMOS SPSS (Table 2) was then used to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Goodness-of-fit results indicated that the measurement model fit the data well ( $\chi^2=594.226$ ,  $p<0.000$ , CFI=0.926, NFI=0.899, TLI=0.910, RMSEA=0.066).

Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Results

	1 Boycotting/ Discursive	2 Fair Trade	3 Scepticism	4 Powerlessness	5 Ineffectiveness
EthU17	0.722				
EthU18	0.699				
EthU19	0.775				
EthU20	0.697				
EthU21	0.760				
EthU22	0.726				
EthU23	0.665				
EthU24	0.696				
EthU07		0.734			
EthU09		0.820			
EthU10		0.789			
EthU06			0.736		
EthU15			0.807		
EthU16			0.626		
EthU01				0.518	
EthU02				0.685	
EthU03				0.628	
EthU04				0.689	
EthU11					0.712
EthU12					0.715
EthU8					0.681
<b>Construct Reliability</b>	0.895	0.825	0.769	0.726	0.745

It is observed that the construct reliability of each factor is satisfactory enough (above 0.70).

## 5.2. Descriptives

The Ethical Unconcern (EthU) scale (range 21-147, Mean 70.30) indicated that consumers “Somewhat Disagree” to ethical unconcern, or in other words that they are at least somewhat concerned about ethical issues.

The Positive Ethical Consumption (PEC) scale (range 19-133, Mean 66.15), indicated “Rare” to “Occasional” engagement of consumers in PEC.

## 5.3. ANOVA One-way

The ANOVA One-way was applied to explore the mean differences in EthU across demographical categories. Statistically significant differences ( $p<0.05$ ) were found of Ethical Unconcern with gender (women less unconcerned than men), education (graduates less unconcerned than their counterparts).

#### 5.4. Pearson's Correlation

The Pearson's parametric correlation indicated statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) negative and weak relationships between EthU and PEC ( $r = -0.169$ ). With regards to each one of EthU factors, the results indicated the following: Scepticism and PEC ( $r = -0.179$ ), Fair-Trade and PEC ( $r = -0.162$ ), Ineffectiveness and PEC ( $r = -0.158$ ), Boycotting/Discursive and PEC ( $r = -0.125$ ) and ( $p < 0.05$ ) between Powerlessness and PEC ( $r = -0.083$ ).

#### Conclusions

The exploratory effort to construct a scale of Ethical Unconcern indicated (see Table 1) that consumers are inhibited to adopt ethical choices mostly by their perceptions that they need time and effort in order to obtain relevant information (EthU1). Finding and evaluating which firms are ethical seems to be equally difficult for the consumers (EthU3). Moreover, as the fourth factor indicates, consumers feel rather powerless towards unethical business practices (EthU2, EthU4). As expected, consumers were found highly concerned with the problems that economic crisis caused to their lives and thus less interested in what happens into the Third World, FairTrade movement etc. (EthU7, EthU9). In addition, as the second factor indicates, their own problems diminish their concerns about global environmental destruction (EthU10).

The fact that they seem less unconcerned -more concerned- about water, energy and oil conservation would not be safely interpreted as ethical attitudes; these attitudes may very well be driven by financial motives (EthU11). Also, as factor five indicated this issue is associated with consumers' perceptions regarding how ineffective fair-trade and economic growth reductions are (EthU8, EthU12).

However, Greeks should not be characterized as highly unconcerned about ethical issues as in overall all items provided Means, which can be interpreted as "somewhat disagree" to ethical unconcern. This means that Greeks in overall hold rather positive ethical attitudes, which however were not found at a very high level. These findings verify, to an extent, our initial assumption that social desirability effect is less evident when measuring negative than positive attitudes.

In conclusion in this study, an Ethical Unconcern scale was developed, including 21 items with an exemplary level of internal consistency. It provided five factors that reflected all aspects of negative perceptions, feelings and attitudes towards ethical issues in the consumption field. It has been previously claimed that ethical consumer behaviour is more complex and heterogeneous than may at first be apparent (Shaw & Clarke 1999; Cherrier 2007; Newholm & Shaw 2007). This preliminary study indicated that the same argument may be claimed about ethical attitudes as well.

Of course, there is much more to be further pursued in order to increase validation of this new scale and/or examine its impact on all types of ethical consumption namely positive (ethical preferences), negative and discursive (boycotting and digital action).

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