ORIGINAL PAPER

'Alternative Hedonism': Exploring the Role of Pleasure in Moral Markets

Robert Caruana[1] · Sarah Glozer[2] · Giana M. Eckhardt[3]

Abstract

'Fair trade', 'ethical' and 'sustainable' consumption emerged in response to rising concerns about the destructive effects of hedonic models of consumption that are typical of late capitalist societies. Advocates of these 'markets for virtue' sought to supplant the insatiable hedonic impulse with a morally restrained, self-disciplining disposition to consumption. With moral markets currently losing their appeal, we respond to the tendency to view hedonism as an inhibitor of moral market behaviour, and view it instead as a potential enabler. Drawing upon the concept of 'alternative hedonism' (Soper, J Consum Cult 7:205–229, 2007; Cult Stud 22(5):567–587, 2008; Ethics and morality in consumption: interdisciplinary perspectives, Routledge, London, 2016; A new hedonism: a post-consumerism vision, the next system project, 2017), we illustrate how consumers experience both morality and pleasure concurrently; show how they attempt to reconcile these aspects of the experience and elucidate the implications of doing so. Using the moral market for ethical tourism as an exemplar of 'alternative hedonism', we identify three 'self-managing strategies'—moderating, abiding and levelling—that re-structure the moral order of consumption in meaningful ways and with profound outcomes. In the context of anxieties about personal, social and ecological consequences of consumption, we show empirically how self-managing strategies reify a less contradictory framing of consumption by tapping into alternative cultural discourses on morality. We discuss the consequences of these strategies, highlighting how they may legitimise and sustain consumption via moral markets despite the reproduction of social inequality and ecological threats.

Keywords Alternative hedonism · Ethical consumption · Moral markets · Tourism

Introduction

Climate change, species extinction, deforestation, child labour, sexploitation and many other 'evils' represent a wholesale failure of Brundtland's sustainability project to address the status quo of overconsumption in, "consumer-driven industrial economies", (DesJardins 2015, p. 112). It was thought that increasing consumer awareness of the negative effects of overconsumption would translate into greater demands for fairer, cleaner and more sustainable products, or herald a radical reduction in the worst forms of hedonic consumption (Borgmann 2000). In many cases, this has failed to materialise, with consumers often unwilling to trade-off the benefits they seek for their ethical principles, at least when it comes to the cash register (Carrington et al. 2010). Many more consumers remain apathetic about the role of consumption in socio-environmental problems and, worryingly, are becoming disenchanted about the role of 'moral

✉ Robert Caruana
robert.caruana@nottingham.ac.uk

Sarah Glozer
s.glozer@bath.ac.uk

Giana M. Eckhardt
giana.eckhardt@rhul.ac.uk

[1] International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility, Nottingham University Business School, University of Nottingham, Jubilee Campus, Wollaton Road, Nottingham NG8 1BB, UK

[2] School of Management, University of Bath, Claverton Down, Bath, Avon BA2 7AY, UK

[3] School of Management, Royal Holloway University of London, Egham, Surrey TW20 0EX, UK

⚫ Springer

markets' as a vehicle for moral concerns (see Doherty et al. 2013).

This is not helped by the persistent setting of morality in opposition to pleasure in the extant consumer literature, where moral markets might be perceived to be 'successful' in suppressing hedonic impulses; placing moral principles over pleasure (Schor 1998; Wilk 2001). In fact, activating hedonic tendencies has been suggested as a vehicle to mainstreaming moral markets: "Ethical brands which focus on explicit altruistic ethical messaging at the expense of hedonistic messaging…. limit their appeal" (Davies and Gutsche 2016, p. 1326). Consumers' lived experiences in such contexts are contradictory; consumers carry with them *both* moral and hedonic tendencies that combine to structure their experiences in powerful ways. In this paper, we explore this alternative pathway, examining the prospects of 're-enchanting' consumer perspectives on moral market behaviour by theoretically mobilising interrelationships between morality and pleasure. We explore the potential of a new 'hedonist imaginary' (Soper 2008) in [re]activating moral market behaviour at a time of widespread disenchantment about the deleterious consequences of overconsumption. This requires a greater understanding of the ways in which pleasure and morality interact in consumption settings.

Much of the literature theorising morality and consumption has explicitly excluded hedonism from explanations of what they consider moral market behaviour:

> Existing models of consumer decision making are only partly satisfactory, since they tend to emphasize hedonic, self-interested outcomes, in contrast to the more societal-centred viewpoint of ethical consumers (Shaw and Shiu 2003, p. 1485).

However, there is also a fairly well-established literature within consumer research that illuminates more direct interconnections between morality and pleasure, where morality and pleasure are seen as productive, iterative features of consumer behaviour (Borgmann 2000; Geisler and Veresiu 2014; Hilton 2004). In light of these contrasting views, there have been calls to better explain the "tension[s] between self-restraint and hedonic excess", (Luedicke et al. 2010, p. 1018) and "selfishness and the collective good", (Henry 2010, p. 671), that seem to be recurrent themes in responsible forms of consumption.

In this paper, we set out to explore, interpret and critique a framework that draws from but recasts the moral markets literature, under the label of 'alternative hedonism' (Soper 2007, 2008, 2016, 2017). In the aforementioned context of consumer apathy about the disastrous consequences of consumption, Soper (2007) seeks to 'reenchant' consumers' views of moral market contexts. However, rather than denigrating pleasure, she seeks conversely to harness aspects of a hedonic orientation in order to mobilise more egalitarian ends. This view, central to our paper's agenda, posits morality and pleasure as complimentary allies in helping consumers address the socio-environmental concerns that are currently rendering them disenchanted with moral markets (Doherty et al. 2013). Further, as we are still yet to understand how 'alternative hedonism' is enacted by consumers, how tensions in moral/pleasurable consumption contexts are resolved and what the consequences may be for understanding moral markets, this paper attempts to describe and explain how interconnections between morality and pleasure play out in the lived experience of consumers.

Specifically, we explore 'alternative hedonism' through an interpretative analysis of consumer narratives in the moral marketplace for ethical tourism; a market niche that responds to disquiet about '[destinations] becoming overrun with tourists in an unsustainable way' (Collins 2018). In response to 'overtourism', 'responsible', 'sustainable' and 'ethical' tourist brokers now offer myriad ways for consumers to enjoy travel that is, 'more pleasant for you, less stressful for residents, puts less pressure on things like public transport, and may even save you quite a bit of money', (Responsibletravel.com, 2018); an overt structuring of morality *and* pleasure.

We make two primary contributions. First, we empirically identify what emerge as 'self-managing strategies' in accounts of alternative hedonism (Soper 2007, 2008, 2016). These strategies—'moderating', 'abiding' and 'levelling'—demonstrate *how* consumers experience pleasure by transcending "self-interested disaffection with consumerism" (Soper 2008, p. 567), and overtourism more specifically, that tap into conceptions of the 'good life'. Here, we provide valuable insights into how an 'alternative hedonist' orientation is re-enchanting moral market settings by legitimising the pursuit of pleasure (Campbell 1987; Szmigin and Carrigan 2005), at a time of great apathy about overconsuming (tourism). Second, by identifying the three forms of 'alternative hedonism' in the ethical tourism moral market, we shed light on the interpretive effects these reify. On the one hand, consumers do seem to successfully negotiate underlying moral tensions in the tourist experience as hoped, yet on the other, they mobilise this transcendence by reproducing a moral order based upon class distinctions, rather than ethical praxis. Interestingly, by drawing upon class-based discourses, consumers re-render moral responsibility as a matter of comparative personal moral purity, rather than some deontological obligation for instance (which is far harder to reconcile with their choice to consume!). This behaviour, indicative of neoliberal consumerism, is highly sustaining of moral markets (Carrington et al. 2016; Henry 2010; Luedicke et al. 2010; Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013) in its capacity to side-step many of the enduring contradictions of moral markets (i.e. 'we have limited prospects for being sustainable but numerous ones for being right!'). In

short, 'consumers' everyday ethical consumption practices ensure capitalism's survival rather than digging its grave, (Carrington et al. 2016, p. 23). We critique aspects of Soper's theory (2007, 2008, 2016, 2017) by unveiling how, for instance, social inequality might be unwittingly reproduced, and ecological threats exacerbated.

We now present our intersecting literatures on moral markets and alternative hedonism, before discussing our interpretive research design. We then offer our findings, a discussion and conclusions for theory and practice.

Moral Marketplaces

Our study focusses on the relationship between morality, consumption and pleasure which is related to, but theoretically distinct from, burgeoning debates about ethical and responsible consumption (Auger and Devinney 2007; Carrington et al. 2010; Shaw et al. 2016; Vittel 2016). Within the consumer literature on moral markets, it has been argued that consumption and morality are inextricably linked (Wilk 2001). In a normative vein, moralising *about* consumption has become a core pursuit of some consumer and marketing researchers seeking to promote a more sustainable consumer society (Borgmann 2000; Schor 1998). In promoting immediate gratification and self-interest over longer-term (societal) benefit, consumption is seen to attenuate materialism, with the excesses of consumer culture theorised as, "socially, ecologically and personally destructive", (Wilk 2001, p. 246). Moral critiques reside around various settings, in which traditional social values are displaced in favour of, "the superficial or inauthentic pleasures promoted by the commercial marketplace (Cross 2000)", (Luedicke et al. 2010, p. 1016). Therein, consumption is seen to propagate ecological devastation, as well as social ills such as alienation, injustice and inequality (Borgmann 2000; Schor 1998). Thus, those that moralise *about* consumption view morality and hedonism as diametrically opposed, with the former serving only as a disciplinary force in the subjugation of the latter. We argue that this view may obscure the potentially reinforcing interconnections between morality and pleasure in moral markets.

In a more descriptive vein, some have examined the ways in which consumers reconcile social, environmental and economic conflicts in their consumption experiences. This body of literature has sought to describe how consumers attempt to structure the moral order of their consumption in a range of settings. For instance, in low-income, trailer-park neighbourhoods, morality provides a cultural resource for legitimating status accumulation (Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013); for Hummer owners, it helps reframe 'evil' environmental destruction as the righteous defence of American patriotism and market freedom (Luedicke et al. 2010); for

actors within community-supported agriculture initiatives, morality is framed around consumer value and farmers' economic interest (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) and for credit card consumers, morality helps apportion debt responsibilities between individual and institutional actors (Henry 2010). While contextually and theoretically diverse, these empirical studies emphasise the malleable nature of morality in affirming and sustaining consumer practices that involve some kind of ethical responsibility.

Additionally, consumers appropriate cultural discourses into their consumption experiences and produce identity conflicts between 'right' and 'wrong', for instance, around the victims and villains in the war on music downloading and the blurring of boundaries between fantasy and reality through discourses of unhealthy/healthy weight loss practices (St. James, Handelman and Taylor 2011). As Luedicke et al. (2010) argue, such research has illuminated how consumers in moral markets are keen to draw identity-enhancing distinctions against mainstream consumers, for instance, 'downshifting' consumers who believe that they lead more socially responsible and spiritually rewarding lifestyles than those who conform to mainstream consumer norms (Nelson et al. 2007). Illuminating how individuals, for example, draw distinctions between themselves and others in a marginalised trailer-park neighbourhood, Saatcioglu and Ozanne (2013) draw upon the notion of moral habitus (Ignatow 2009), to suggest that moral identities are fluid and evolving through practices that involve explicit expression of social class. This study, then, elucidates the moral dimensions of identity, and how in turn, morality shapes consumption decisions, revealing micro-level insight into practices of moralisation.

While such moral identity work around reconciling tensions and drawing status distinctions might serve various goals (e.g. defining 'in-group' boundaries, Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), these different goals present a 'moralistic dichotomy between those who are proponents of a moral order and those who would defile or undermine these galvanizing normative values and ideals', (Luedicke et al. 2010, p. 1017). Accordingly, consumer researchers have advocated for new insight into the countervailing ideologies that are co-opted by consumers, particularly in moral contexts (Carrington et al. 2016; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). These authors suggest that it is the neoliberal mythology of shared responsibility that shapes moral markets and that further research is needed into what Luedicke et al. (2010) term the 'jeremiad of consumption'; "normative tension[s] between self-restraint and hedonic excess", (p. 1018) and "selfishness and the collective good", (Henry 2010, p. 671).

In sum, the moral marketplaces literature has partly restricted our understanding of pleasure to a narcissistic caricature (Freud 1984); a default mode of materialism and sensual self-obsession devoid of any moral meaning. We believe that this limits our understanding of the complexity

of consumer morality often equated with consuming less, living well and doing good (see Carrington et al. 2014). In this paper, we adopt a less axiomatic, more capacious conception of pleasure (Gabriel and Lang 2006), suited to moral market contexts. Consumers' management of their dis/pleasures, may be as equally meaningful to them as overt gestures of fun, freedom and pleasure. That is, while on vacation, pleasure can not only come from sensual bodily pleasures such as feeling the sun on one's face, but also via moral investments into riding one's bike rather than driving a car, an 'alternative' form of experiencing pleasure in the 'right way' Soper (2007).

Alternative Hedonism

Echoing concerns in business ethics, consumption and tourism (Bragues 2006; Crocker and Linden 1997; Freeman and Leidtka 1991; Jamal 2010; Syse and Mueller 2015), 'alternative hedonism' is a response to those concerned about the relationship between corporations and the 'good life' wherein consumption is simply seen as:

> …a means of further enhancing the global reach and command of corporate power at the expense of the health and well-being of both the planet and the majority of its inhabitants. (Soper 2017, p. 6)

Soper's (2017) thesis seeks an alternative pathway that rebalances corporate-led patterns of commodity fetishism, with an alternative, self-aware approach to consumption that reflexively places personal well-being alongside social justice and ecological sustainability. Alternative hedonism thus offers insight into debates on individual ethical agency. Where, for example, Crane, Knights and Starkey (2008) have argued for an 'ethics of the self' within business ethics research—i.e. where managers are reflexive of the organisational conditioning upon their individual ethical agency—so too can consumers effect greater moral agency within consumer-market relations. As we will see, this is exactly what alternative hedonism appears to offer.

A further appeal of alternative hedonism is its coupling of normative depictions of the 'good life'—i.e. how individuals should consume—with a descriptive, micro-cultural lens, i.e. in analysing consumer's everyday lived experiences. As distinct from normative debates that tend to place arbitrary top-down, aggregate limits upon 'right levels' (e.g. subsistence) of consumption, alternative hedonism allows for a 'bottom-up' description of the kinds of practices through which consumers try to pursue alternative pathways. This concept allows researchers more scope to empirically examine if, where, how and to what extent alternative hedonism operates in moral market settings. What then is 'alternative hedonism' and how does it operate? Here we define, situate,

unpack and problematise, the concept in order to lay the foundations for our empirical analysis.

To define alternative hedonism, Soper (2007, 2008) argues that consumers are now disenchanted with the supposed blessings of consumerism. Soper (2008) believes that we need to shift away from the affluent, Euro-American mode of consumption, which has become the default model for accessing the 'good life', towards new thinking on human pleasure and self-regarding gratifications of 'consuming differently' (p. 571). Amidst a trend in counter-consumerism, Soper (2008) carves out a view of altruistic concern for the global ecological and social consequences of consumers, but that which might be motivated by self-interest. Significantly, this deviates from the traditional view of morality and hedonism in a dichotomy and places them in more of a co-determining, mutually interactive relationship. Consequently, consumers may achieve personal fulfilment via 'alternative' routes more compatible with both socio-environmental concerns and personal pleasure. As indicated by Soper below, and contrary to narrow, hedonic models of consumption, people do not have to buy more, 'use up' or even consume at all, an object or service to derive some kind of pleasure. Meaningful acts of self-governance and moderation as well as specific proactive choices may provide legitimate pathways to pleasure in moral market settings:

> It is, for example, a decision to cycle or walk whenever possible in order not to add to the pollution, noise and congestion of car use. The hedonist aspect, however, of this shift in consumption practice does not reside exclusively in the desire to avoid or limit the un-pleasurable by-products of collective affluence, but also in the sensual pleasures of consuming differently (Levett 2003, pp. 60–61). There are intrinsic pleasures to be had in walking or cycling which the car driver will not be experiencing. (Soper 2008, p. 572)

Situating alternative hedonism within current debates in the broad moral markets literature, we can see how Soper's (2008) vision may provide new insight into two key areas of consumer research. First, we know that pleasure acts as a vehicle for consumer moral responsibility; indeed, pleasure may be derived from "having done one's bit to save the planet" (Schaefer and Crane 2005, p. 85). That is, rather than consider how consumers evaluate how they might *restrict* hedonic impulses (e.g. buying less) to sustain the planet's resources, through alternative hedonism we are able to examine how consumers *sustain the pleasure* they derive from consumption experiences through reconciling tensions between morality and pleasure. Alternative hedonism thus provides an important window into ethical decision-making contexts.

Secondly, we know that navigating moral complexity is difficult for consumers (Devinney et al. 2010; Geisler

and Veresiu 2014; Henry 2010; Luedicke et al. 2010) and recent scholarship has indicated that consumers are tasked with the 'impossible': 'to enjoy, provide, realize yourself, be authentic *but also* recycle, protect workers in China, prevent illegal arms trading, end the killing of animals, and so on, all in order to save capitalism from digging its own grave', (Carrington et al. 2016, p. 32). Therein, calls to 'downshift', 'voluntary simplify' and 'decelerate' affluent consumer lifestyles (Etzioni 1998; Husemann and Eckhardt 2018; Schor 1998), alongside other morally moderating behaviours such as 'ethical consumption' (Devinney et al. 2010), suggest that a dichotomy might exist between morality and pleasure; the emphasis of "hedonic, self-interested outcomes, in contrast to the more societal-centered viewpoint of ethical consumers", (Shaw and Shiu 2003, p. 1485). Alongside illuminating the process of ethical decision making, alternative hedonism would instead view pleasure and morality as two sides of the same coin, rather than diametric opposites (Shaw and Shiu 2003).

The defining characteristics of alternative hedonism fall broadly into two areas. First, alternative hedonism enables consumers to cope with the "self-interested disaffection with consumerism" (Soper 2008, p. 567) and derive and protect pleasure through 'self-policing' strategies (Soper 2008). Mindful of disaffections, cycling or walking, for example, are pleasurable alternatives to driving (e.g. health, community and spiritual benefits), while yielding of further pleasure through the knowledge that they are not contributing to the destruction of the ecosystem (and, thus, potential future pleasure). In short, self-policing strategies have a powerful moral appeal—as the *right kinds* of pleasure—while being pleasurable in themselves. For example, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) describe how consumers who use community-supported agriculture (CSA) to buy produce rather than a grocery store experience the inconveniences and choice restrictions as enchanting moral virtues.

Second, Soper (2007, p. 209) claims that, "there is an inclination to view ethical consumption as motivated at least in part by an interest in acquiring status and distinction". Here Soper (2007) hints that there may be other motivations for engaging in ethical consumption practices that might result in the right kind of pleasure. Thus, our research interest is in examining these nuances of alternative hedonism in moral markets; in particular, how alternative hedonism is enacted by consumers. Next, we discuss the methodological approach we take to investigating alternative hedonism within the ethical tourism moral marketplace.

The Study Context

We began our study by selecting a theoretically informed consumption setting where 'specific displeasures' appeared to be a central structuring aspect of the experience. This led us first to select tourism as an exemplary genre of consumer culture orientated towards 'escaping' personal displeasures associated, for example, with urbanity, commercialisation, labour practices (Caruana and Crane 2011), social dissolution and institutional self-restrictions (Belk and Costa 1995), as well as a mainstream 'tourist' identity (as part of 'anti-tourism') (Jacobsen 2000). These studies reflect a rising anxiety about the negative consequences of tourism, provoking the spread of 'ethical', 'sustainable', 'ecological', 'voluntourism' and other variants of 'morally responsible' tourism (Buckley 2012; Caruana et al. 2014; Goodwin and Francis 2003; Malone et al. 2014). This subsequently prompted us to consider that the 'ethical tourism' marketplace as a particular sub-genre of the tourism market where might we find palpable concerns with 'overtourism'. We then chose to focus on 'ethical tourism' as our moral market context, wherein cultural brokers overtly emphasise specific personal, social and environmental anxieties that tourism consumers may face:

> …overtourism occurs when there are too many visitors to a particular destination. 'Too many' is a subjective term, of course, but it is defined in each destination by local residents, hosts, business owners and tourists. When rent prices push out local tenants to make way for holiday rentals, that is overtourism. When narrow roads become jammed with tourist vehicles, that is overtourism. When wildlife is scared away, when tourists cannot view landmarks because of the crowds, when fragile environments become degraded—these are all signs of overtourism. (Responsibletravel.com, 2018).

This is not to say that this 'ethical' market captures all forms of moral market activity, and we acknowledge that alternative choices such as volunteer, poverty and slave tourism may involve quasi-moral aspects. Moreover, morality may equally be enacted over the category of tourism without using a market at all, such as in the case of 'staycations' which, by definition, remove consumption-based disaffections altogether. We chose the 'ethical' tourism moral market as it encapsulates a broad range of socio-environmental concerns that resonate theoretically with the potential sources of disaffection, as well as pleasure, outlined by Soper (2007).

At the micro-level, the idea of a 'new moral tourist' (Butcher 2003) is significant given the widely held view of tourism as a fundamentally hedonic consumption

experience, driven by fun, fantasy and other self-oriented pleasures (Goossens 2000). That is, tourists' fundamental disposition to 'get away from it all', is seductive precisely because it promises unencumbered license to pursue personal pleasure (Caruana and Crane 2011), devoid of the everyday constraints of moral responsibility, duty and other pious, self-sacrificing inclinations (Fennell 2006). Yet, it is still widely understood that the motivations of the people who are attracted to sustainable tourism, "do not radically differ from those who are seeking regular pleasure travel (i.e., tourism experiences that do not claim to be socially responsible)", (Mahrouse 2011, p. 376). Consequently, we did not treat this research setting as concrete evidence of a well-defined subculture of tourism in which a self-identifying group of ethical consumers 'exist' (Caruana et al. 2014). Additionally, empirical research has suggested that it is exactly these kinds of tourists that engage in more critical reflection around consumption activities (Hanna 2013).

Sampling Procedure

We engaged in purposive sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to locate our respondents, based upon their self-identification as ethical tourists. As a moral market setting, ethical *tourism* was chosen as an exemplar of heightened personal hedonic desires (i.e. for escape, fun, freedom) *and* socio-environmental concern (Urry 1990). This can be traced in the marketing discourse of key cultural brokers in this market segment that typically situate personal, experiential benefits alongside wider concerns:

> Authentic experiences are more *fun*… But what if, as well as *benefitting you* and without costing you extra, your holiday could also mean that fewer indigenous forests are chopped down, that slum children get more meals, and that wildlife is conserved? (Tribes 2015).

Potential informants were identified through links the first author developed with an ethical-tourism organisation and further informants were identified through snowballing sampling. Evidence that the informant had experienced a holiday booked through an 'ethical' tourism broker in the last 12 months was provided. We were also mindful of the relative affluence in our sample as ethical vacations tend to command a premium. For instance, respondents commonly professed that they were 'happy to pay more for *this kind* of holiday'. This resulted in a sample of 17 informants who displayed some of the key characteristics of disaffected affluent consumers. For example, as noted by Urry (1990, p. 44), while a rise in wealth may provide the pleasure of experiencing new exotic places, tourists are worried that if *they* can afford to visit paradise, soon enough 'it will be ruined',

presumably by less affluent tourists. We were reflexive of the relatively affluent level of our sample, that it broadly mirrored sociodemographics representative of other moral markets and also that holidays are a higher involvement good than many others. Yet, the advantages from a purposive sampling perspective were clear, i.e. that we had captured those searching for pleasure while at the same time trying to 'do the right thing'.

Interviewing Technique

All informants were interviewed face-to-face in the UK after their vacation. We specifically chose to focus on the post-rationalisation strategies of the consumers given that consumers often attempt to minimise feelings of remorse following consumption choices that contravene ethical consumption intentions (Carrington et al. 2016). Interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. All were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews were conducted in a range of locations from work, to home, to the lead author's university, based on the preferences of informants. The interviews followed an interpretivist, phenomenological tradition (Arsel and Thompson 2011; Malone et al. 2014) focusing on consumers' narrative accounts of their experiences of ethical tourism. The interviews began with general, open-ended questions about the respondents' backgrounds, interests and life-goals, before moving into the topic of 'holiday' and then more specifically onto 'ethical' holidays. Interviews typically began with questions such as 'when you think about an ethical holiday, what sort of things come to mind for you?' progressing to more focused questions such as 'what are the benefits of this kind of tourism?' and ultimately into more reflexive, probing questions such as 'what did you mean by that?' and 'how did you overcome that challenge?' This enabled the interviewer to solicit fairly candid narrative accounts of how informants blended morality with pleasure in relation to their 'overtourism' anxieties.

Coding and Analysis

Our analysis of these accounts proceeded in the interpretive, hermeneutic tradition discussed by Arnould and Fischer (1994), through a series of iterative movements between text and context, part and whole (Thompson 1997). All three co-authors engaged in this process, separately at first, to identify emergent themes and then subsequently together, interrogating observations across the transcripts. Our first stage of analysis followed an 'open-coding' (Silverman and Marvasti 2008) approach to the transcripts, wherein we initially identified around ten potential themes. Through careful reflection these were reduced to three key thematic areas (i.e.

moderating, abiding and levelling). This stage of coding was supported through an adapted, qualitative form of content analysis wherein clusters of similar words were identified, e.g. 'little', 'small-scale', 'too much', 'crammed in', 'quiet', 'much less', 'over the top'. This enabled the following, higher-order stage of interpretation wherein we observed associations between clusters of such words within more complex sentence structures; 'pristine beaches, small scale, not too much, which was better'. These were commonly presented via juxtapositions with other subjects, spaces and practices that/whom were contrastingly 'crammed in,' 'too much,' 'over the top,' 'diseased'.

It became clear that informants' accounts of their experiences commonly adopted a retrospective *narrative* form, in that their stories about specific displeasures triggered various self-assessments, evaluations and adjudications about how these displeasures were managed and overcome. As a linguistic device, narratives often work towards resolving specific issues, complexities or tensions (Ahuvia 2005). The *content* of these narrative forms commonly involved class-based moral language games akin to Hilton's (2004) notes on luxury morality, wherein moral superiority is cast against morally questionable self-indulgence of undisciplined others. This enabled us to interpret both the *process* and *consequences* of alternative hedonism. In the following sections, we interpretively develop these insights, illuminating the dimensions of three self-managing strategies which enable us to interrogate and critique alternative hedonism (Table 1).

Findings

Our findings demonstrate significant connections with and important deviations from Soper's (2007, 2008, 2016, 2017), alternative hedonism thesis. On one level, we observe three prominent narratives that constitute a moral ordering within this ethical tourism market setting, that echo the alternative hedonism discourse. Specific disaffections involving the destruction of ecosystems, the erosion of civic life and material wealth accumulation appeared to structure the way in which consumers articulated their experiences. This took the shape of three self-managing strategies: 'moderating', 'abiding' and 'levelling' being the respective antidotes to ecological destruction, cultural erosion and materiality.

On another level, the process of articulating these self-managing strategies deviated from Soper's (2007, 2008) conception in two main ways. One, in terms of pleasure, the narratives themselves are about removing perceived negative impediments to pleasure (e.g. authentic nature) rather than elaborating positively upon the pleasure itself. In this sense, for the most part, consumers experienced what we might see as the initial, activating aspect of alternative hedonism, that is, the identification and subsequent negotiation of specific kinds of disaffections. Two, respondents did not seem to access alternative hedonism via ethical praxis at all. Rather, they transformed the basis of the underlying moral order from practices based on a sense of what is ethically 'right' (e.g. staying at home, assigning rights and duties) into what is 'good' (being better that other, 'bad' tourists). Unexplored in previous research, we show *how* this transformation 'operates' by tapping into narratives on moral purity defined by, 'beliefs in dangerous contagion…and used in dialogue claims and counter-claims to status' (Douglas 2002, p. 4). In this section, we highlight the processes and consider the outcomes of this deviation.

Moderating

One of the key attributes of ethical tourism lies in its promise of providing access to what we might call 'pure nature'. Consumers expressed various anxieties about the imagined purity of nature in general, and tourism specifically, in the light of perceived overtourism. For example, benefit was sought through connection to nature and the wilderness, and as in the passages below, through being able to enjoy natural attributes for both personal and collective benefit:

> **Brett**: The main thing is appreciating it. It's being able to see and appreciate the nature and natural surroundings and being able to enjoy those...
> **Benjamin**: Well, it's getting the chance to go off the beaten track and to do a bit more than going to the Vegas type places. I like to… get the opportunity to go back to nature but mindful of the damage to the environment… it's almost a contribution to help preserve what we have so that my granddaughter can see it in it's almost natural state and probably her granddaughter, or grandchildren, will see it in its natural state, or as close to natural state as we can get.

A close reading of these accounts revealed two intersecting disaffections portrayed as potentially inhibiting access to the attribute of being 'at one' with nature. On a personal level, the presence of other tourists in these pristine spaces presented a wasteful 'cluttering' that threatened to erode the quality of the tourism experience and damage wildlife. This disaffection was manifest through complex moral associations of tourist spaces and subjects with unrestrained forms of excessive consumption:

> **Nilufar**: I just think if anything's going to be better for the kids, not the hustle and bustle, no traffic and fumes and no-, you know when you go to Blackpool on the sea, I wouldn't like the kids in the sea. Not a chance. Whereas if they were abroad in somewhere where responsible travellers go, they'll be like, let's get your snorkels on and let's go in the sea and see who

Table 1 Profile of Consumers

Pseudonym	Holiday details			Context of visit
	Travel partner	Destination	Reason for travel	
Annabelle	Husband and children	Edinburgh, UK	Time with family	'Again, with the kids and our lifestyle, I wouldn't be going for really outrageous places and completely remote. Something that isn't your bog standard package holiday'
April	Partner	Gambia, Africa	Volunteering	'It was a holiday but it was a working holiday …we were also going down to the beach at lunchtime, having a swim….'
Arthur	Wife	Arizona, USA	Cultural experience	'I have always wanted to go to the Grand Canyon. It has always appealed but I have never had a chance. I just thought, 'To hell with it. Let's go for it.' It was awesome'
Bella	Daughter	Azores, Portugal	Connecting with nature	'… The daughter you were just speaking to, Jenny, she's always wanted to go swimming with dolphins but I was aware that it was something not necessarily considered to be a good thing for the dolphins'
Benjamin	Partner	Brazil	Connecting with nature	'Do a bit more than going to the Vegas type places…[and] get the opportunity to go back to nature but mindful of the damage to the environment'
Brett	Wife and another couple	Wales, UK	Relaxation	'I'm in concrete jungles the whole time…. Just get away to somewhere different…'
Carl	Partner	Gambia, Africa	Volunteering	'…working together with people… volunteering is a good way to share skills and learning'
Debbie	Sister and daughter	Mexico	Relaxation	'I didn't want bars and clubs and stuff like that, because that's not-, it would be for me if I was on my own. I think as you get older, my holiday is to relax'
Denise	Group of friends	Turkey	Relaxation	'When we went with the girls, one of them had just come out of a long-term relationship and two of them had just separated from their husbands… It was just the right re-grouping of girls who need a bit of support…'
Faith	Boyfriend	Devon, UK	Relaxation	'Like walking, seeing different places, walking however long to get to wherever…It's like you're doing something good'
Gary	Wife and children	Indonesia	Time with family	'I like the fact that they give something back to the community, because as I keep saying, my wife's from that area, and I know what poverty's like over there'
Gemma	Partner	New York, USA	Sightseeing	'It was my boyfriend's decision, really. I'd always fancied it and he decided to take me'
Nilufar	Partner	Vilamoura, Portugal	Relaxation	'I don't like the hustle and bustle. I like more to be able to relax and, you know, see different things. You know the culture? I think a holiday needs somewhere relaxing, but also fun for the kids'
Paul	Children	Lake District, UK	Time with family	'I wanted something with a-, not so much a home feel, but somewhere I could teach them something, and explain about the environment'
Russ	Partner	Sussex, UK	Relaxation	'…It was just a case of, 'Want to get a weekend away, just you and me.' ….It was a weekend away in this little cottage. It was really nice, to be fair'
Selena	Group of friends with children	Cairo, Egypt	Cultural experience	'So it was more of, well yes, we're really into history. Pyramids, everyone wants to see them, even though I was totally disappointed when I got to see them'

Pseudonym	Holiday details			Context of visit
	Travel partner	Destination	Reason for travel	
Sylvia	Mother	Africa	Cultural experience	'I am quite an ethical person and I like to travel and to see different cultures'

can get their head under the water…. I wouldn't say no to anything there. Whereas I think they'd be getting something like a disease from Blackpool.

On a broader level, consumers were anxious about the environmental by-products of their own presence in these pristine spaces, and whether, and indeed, how this could be managed. Here, scaled-up mass tourism was presented as a problematic form of excessive, wasteful consumption of 'spaces', and associated experiences, commercialised in an environmentally insensitive manner. Benjamin, for instance, utilised a circus metaphor to suggest that (artificial) animal behaviours were naively applauded (and cheaply accessed) in mainstream tourism. In contrast, ethical tourism allowed unbridled access to experiencing animals in the wild, a seemingly more moral endeavour:

> **Benjamin**: As I said before, the dangers at the moment, it's like a circus. You go to a circus and you are imposing yourself on the animal and you are expecting an animal to perform for you. Again, you'll probably pick up my views on circuses, but I think it's better that you go to an environment and that the mammal, the animal, feels comfortable enough to approach you and not be threatened.

In response to the personal and more collective tensions associated with being 'at one' with nature, our data revealed a narrative strategy of *moderating*, coming closest to Soper's (2007, 2008) 'pleasurable acts of self-policing':

> **Paul**: Even though we're on holiday, you still have to be responsible… Minimising usage of petrol was part of it too, it's all part of the *fun* of trying to be environmentally conscious.

Through narratives of moderation, consumers were reflexive of how they minimised, if not excluded, the negative impacts of tourism through simplifying behaviours. Such mindful actions legitimise tourism experiences, providing continued access to ecological authenticity (the attribute most at stake) and sustain the quality of the environmental product of tourism in the long term. In addition to this, our respondents consistently articulated their movement towards small-scale, 'village-y' spaces located in remote, low-density (uncluttered) regions:

> **Faith**: It was fine. It wasn't that much. Where we stayed it was only small anyway. There *wasn't that many* rooms. It's not like a massive state of the art whatever. You can go to places where it's *just too much*.
>
> **Interviewer**: What's wrong with too much?
>
> **Faith**: It's like obviously you've got like *loads and loads of people*. It's a massive place that obviously you've got to heat, the electricity and there's just *loads of people* but you're not going to get loads of people every day of the year. It's just a waste.

Co-opting the discourse of 'moral clutter', these are effectively middle class 'put downs', in that cluttering ('too many/much') invokes aesthetical judgments of lower class culture and the associated idleness of wasteful forms of consumption (Hilton 2004). This is only part of the story though, and Faith's invocation of waste and excess provides an ideological foil (e.g. 'small is beautiful') to how she, and other ethical tourists, engage in moderate consumption alternatives:

> **Paul**: Once we got there, we didn't use the car. We took the bikes, the kids have got bikes, we've all got bikes. Wherever it was possible, we would use our bikes.
>
> **Gemma**: Obviously the flight over there might have not helped but I suppose we didn't use petrol and fuel.…..Because if I'd have got my flight over there and then took a taxi around all of Manhattan or whatever, then it's worse, isn't it? And the plane that I came over on was a really big plane with-, it was all full, so it's not like there was just me on the plane wasting all that fuel.

Consumers like Gemma contrasted need with want, practical necessity with unbridled desire. The resources that had to be used (i.e. flights) were used efficiently, and where there were moral options, the most modest form was taken (e.g. walking rather than taking a taxi).

In sum, 'moderating' allows consumers to not be the *wrong* kind of tourist. For example, by assuming the unobtrusive (singular) role of a walker or cyclist, they can enjoy the privileged exclusivity of close access to pristine, as-yet-untouched (by tourism) features of an 'uncluttered' natural environment. This also reifies some kind of quality assurance

to future consumers, in the sense that the spaces designated for the 'right kinds of tourists', will be carefully preserved for future consumption, in a way that overly cluttered, 'low-grade' tourism icons like 'Blackpool' or 'Benidorm' cannot. The ethical dilemma of whether to consume ecological tourism spaces, or not, is supplanted with a symbolic one, that of not being the 'wrong' kind of tourist.

Abiding

Focusing upon the attributes of cultural participation, ethical tourism offers consumers the opportunity to 'travel like a local' (responsibletravel.com). Typically, the benefits sought here involve getting 'backstage' access to local communities and cultures through the enjoyment of casting off the constraints of the 'tourist bubble' and becoming a quasi-local:
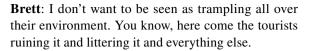
> **Paul**: I would say it was that I felt more a part of the community for that period of time. I was like an honorary member... It's almost being part of an extended family, because they're so friendly, they're locals, they're not people that have come from the city just for the holiday season to work. They're people that live and breathe this environment day in day out, they know all about it, it's a way of life for them, and so you become a part of that, for however long that you're there.
> **Bella**: It's a giving and a receiving. You build up friendships and it's a relationship.

The benefits of cultural participation are seen as largely threatened by the idea of the 'tourist bubble' that tourists are potentially harmful cultural outsiders that pursue pleasure in a manner that is largely detached from the moral rules, customs and codes of local communities (Bhattacharyya 1997). Manifest in terms such as 'enclaves' and 'designated tourist zones', the role of the tourist bubble is to provide shelter from unpleasant, unsafe or burdensome aspects of local reality (e.g. crime, pollution, poverty). Our respondents often showed disdain for those wishing to watch from afar, (inside the cosy bubble of a hotel, pool or tour bus). It seemed that, the 'wrong' kinds of tourists threatened to transform otherwise exotic cultures into undignified cultural silos, jeopardising certain pleasures:

> **April**: The impression the local gets would be of the lager swilling people that like to have a fling and whatever, and go home, which is pretty much what the Gambian holidays are about, aren't they?
> **Nilufar**: You don't want them to think, 'Oh God, the English are coming.' They're going to take over and make it like the riff raff.

> **Brett**: I don't want to be seen as trampling all over their environment. You know, here come the tourists ruining it and littering it and everything else.

Our data reveal that *abiding* strategies anticipate the shameful gaze of local people upon the tourist and the accompanying impediments to pleasure (e.g. access to culture). Being 'good' relates to 'abiding' by local cultural norms, rules and customs, such that access to local culture is granted to certain consumers, and denied to 'bad' tourists who cannot respect the rules. In the passage below, Arthur asserts the importance of observing boundaries between legitimate tourist spaces (general territory) and local spaces not 'open for consumption' (private territory):

> **Arthur**: Basically it is their territory…Speaking to them, they're trying to keep that area as natural as possible for their future generations as well, which again is responsible…I was talking to one guy and he said, 'You are in my home. You are now coming into my home, my land.

Within abiding, respondents actively sought admiration from local communities for their respectful behaviour. Rather than being viewed as ignorant to local customs—a source of hostility noted in previous research (Bhattacharyya 1997)—consumers' abiding strategies worked to transform responsibility for human entities into everyday matters of moral decency, civility and reciprocity. In the passage below, Denise articulates her worries about how being misdiagnosed as a shameful, morally impure 'English' tourist may lead to the local people shunning her. In doing so, we learn of Denise's self-policing (abiding) efforts as not only does she profess to know when and where it is appropriate to take pleasure in sunbathing topless, but her demonstrable respect for local customs leads to the self-affirmative pleasure in securing hard-fought local approval—'people were friendlier':

> **Denise**: I'd go on the beach and I'll be on the beach topless…but I wouldn't walk around. I wouldn't dare inflict it on other people. You respect people. No matter what, and that kind of location as well. They don't want to see boobs. -it was okay on the beach, because we wouldn't have done it if it wasn't. …Now, people were friendly, but more friendly when you went in. We were like, 'God, we didn't even know she was English. Fancy saying 'hello'.' She ignored us all week and we realised that she knew we weren't four slappers…It was really awful to acknowledge that that's why we'd [previously] been ignored.

Abiding demonstrates some characteristics of alternative hedonism and in particular criticisms about the disengaging and eroding effects of overconsumption upon our participation in civic life (Etzioni 1998). However, against

Soper's (2007) optimistic conception, our data show how moral status-claiming between a 'community' of tourists is the key vehicle for this. Specifically, one's own route to participating in civic life (e.g. immersed in local culture) is juxtaposed against a morally polluting, shameful 'other' (mainstream tourists). This morality play contributes to different outcomes in terms of addressing the disaffections of overtourism. On the one hand, it suggests that there are morally superior ways of conducting relationships with local people and interacting as a 'good' tourist in the local community. Yet on the other, it is *only* by being an ethical tourist that one can contribute to the maintenance of host–guest relations, and all the benefits it brings. In this sense, this class-based morality play reifies a palpable sense of social exclusivity—a 'violence of status-based distinction' (Bourdieu 1984/1979)—that would deny ostensibly poorer, read culturally inferior, consumers from engaging in the moral marketplace for tourism. Such an exclusive disposition towards tourism consumers runs counter to notions of the good life, civic engagement and participation for all.

Levelling

On many of their trips, our respondents are materially wealthier than locals. It was evident that structural socio-economic disparities were a significant source of disaffection for consumers. Specifically, 'high luxury' consumption was seen to promote the concentration of material wealth, inhibiting local people's social development, and, in some cases, maintaining their poverty. In the passage below, Gary captures this tension, discussing how the pursuit of luxury (selfish) holidays, blinds tourists to the toiling of subjugated others in the locality:

> **Gary**: I mean, we cruise a lot and I know that all the staff on the cruises, I know a couple of people that work on them myself, and they get paid peanuts. They get treated like shit. They live below deck under the water level in little rooms, and they get paid next to-, and you think, you're having this time of your life that costs a lot of bloody money.

On a personal level, such disparities undermined the possibility of consumers achieving genuine interactions with local people. April's reflexive passage below—reflecting on an earlier holiday experience—illuminates the distance between affluent tourist lifestyles and more primitive living arrangements in local communities. April reflexively questions her impact on the local community in relation to wealth, with affluence being positively related to happiness:

> **April**: There's also the question of what impact do you have on their lives. I was very aware of this when I went to Congo because they're very aware of you're

rich whilst you are-, or you are happy. There is this direct correlation between you are happy whilst you are slightly richer than somebody else and the fact that we could turn up and have all the stuff that we've got, is that unhelpful?

Even in supposedly 'ethical' consumption spaces (e.g. eco lodges), luxury was condemned as being 'over the top', providing wealth distinctions, and inhibiting an equilibrium between tourists and locals. Such accounts located others (e.g. luxury tourists) in a dystopian conception of the 'good life' that obscured self-awareness and thus ethical agency. Here egoistic excess concentrated wealth and maintained local poverty, increasing social distance:

> **April**: I just don't see how you can stay in a luxury eco lodge and make a connection with the place and its people. Proper ethical tourism allows visitors to engage deeply with local people on an eye-to-eye level.
> **Carl**: I just don't see how you can have that kind of person staying in luxury accommodation and still call it ethical tourism…Although it's amongst the other eco lodges, it's just like a very up-market hotel that you would expect to find in the main tourist zone, but on a much smaller scale.

The narrative of *levelling* represents a form of self-managing strategy that transcends wealth disparities between tourists and locals and attempts to articulate non-material pathways to enjoyment. This strategy comes closest to Soper's (2007, 2008) remodelling of 'the good life' under alternative hedonism. Specifically, respondents sought to level the playing field between host and guest (Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013) by inverting the equation of wealth and happiness. Respondents bemoaned the material, individualistic entrapments of modern life and celebrated the joy of simpler, higher-value lives based upon social relations and immateriality:

> **April**: That's one of the things, isn't it? People see people coming in with all this sort of flash stuff and we can go there and see the opposite and realize that a lot of happiness can be had just living a more simple life. Having a window into the African way of life in that village and realizing that, okay, it looks very poor but actually, it's very rich in a different way.
> **Arthur**: They were, not untouched, I mean untouched in terms of exposed to the full force of modern day living but the children were still quite-, I'm trying to think of the right word for it, it's not naive but they still live that simple lifestyle but with some good, strong family values and respect for the teaching staff.

Both April and Arthur juxtapose one version of 'the good life' (modern/Western) with another (simple/undeveloped), re-connecting happiness to 'the simple life'. This functions
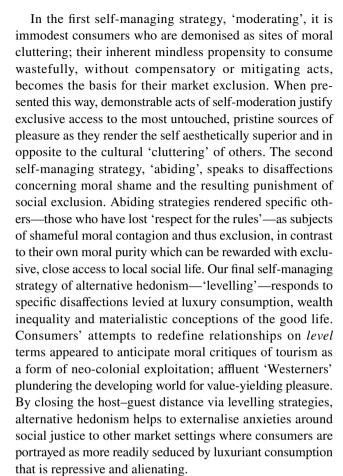
in two key ways. First, the narrative certainly speaks of the tourist's own self-transformation in their movement from a complex, material life to a simpler but happier life. Yet, secondly, this equation of simple equals happier is generalised to all stakeholders in the locality of the destination. In this context, local people are cast as content with less, where Westerners may be potentially depressed by more. This is the case in this final passage here, where tourists infer that comparative wealth does not necessarily lead to happiness but instead produces the hollowing out of basic family virtues; an attribute that local communities have in abundance:

> **Debbie**: I think our kids are absolutely ruined. I think they're so spoilt, and I think this is where that going back to basics needs to be done. Our children are so ignorant and quite rude to it all. I think it'd be a reality shock to some kids to say, 'They live in that and they haven't got any shoes.' Ours kids just take it for granted. 'We'll just get another pair.' Well no, because they don't live like that.

Alternative pathways to the good life often suggest that the pursuit of happiness via de-emphasising the material and promoting inclusive, egalitarian ends. We see this to some extent in levelling where attempts are made to invert the 'good life' equation of happiness as material wealth. However, these are aimed almost entirely at removing perceived impediments to pleasure (an eye-to-eye, immersive experience) and cast squarely in terms of inter-tourist status distinctions. In this framing, not only are the possible contributions of other tourists effectively written off, but it suggests that the 'right kinds' of tourists are benign and benevolent. One might argue in turn, that enclaves of mainstream tourists at least concentrate the effects of tourism in specific places and tourist infrastructures, whereas ethical tourists' have carte blanche to mix intimately within culturally sensitive spaces without concern for any negative effects on civic life. Framed entirely in terms of class distinctions, this may inhibit the kind of reflexivity that allows visitors to see the more subtle effects of tourism, even ethical forms.

Discussion

The contribution we make with this paper is twofold. First, we identify the *process* of alternative hedonism by elucidating its cultural form, which we observe being manifest in three self-managing strategies: moderating, abiding and levelling. While Soper (2007, 2008) has introduced the notion of alternative hedonism as a response to consumer disaffection through an 'alternative structure of pleasures and satisfactions to which they gesture', (Soper 2007, p. 221), it was not clear in the literature exactly *how* consumers could access this.

In the first self-managing strategy, 'moderating', it is immodest consumers who are demonised as sites of moral cluttering; their inherent mindless propensity to consume wastefully, without compensatory or mitigating acts, becomes the basis for their market exclusion. When presented this way, demonstrable acts of self-moderation justify exclusive access to the most untouched, pristine sources of pleasure as they render the self aesthetically superior and in opposite to the cultural 'cluttering' of others. The second self-managing strategy, 'abiding', speaks to disaffections concerning moral shame and the resulting punishment of social exclusion. Abiding strategies rendered specific others—those who have lost 'respect for the rules'—as subjects of shameful moral contagion and thus exclusion, in contrast to their own moral purity which can be rewarded with exclusive, close access to local social life. Our final self-managing strategy of alternative hedonism—'levelling'—responds to specific disaffections levied at luxury consumption, wealth inequality and materialistic conceptions of the good life. Consumers' attempts to redefine relationships on *level* terms appeared to anticipate moral critiques of tourism as a form of neo-colonial exploitation; affluent 'Westerners' plundering the developing world for value-yielding pleasure. By closing the host–guest distance via levelling strategies, alternative hedonism helps to externalise anxieties around social justice to other market settings where consumers are portrayed as more readily seduced by luxuriant consumption that is repressive and alienating.

The role that hedonism plays in rationalising ethical purchases has been a subject of interest in consumer literature for some time (e.g. Szmigin and Carrigan 2005) and the ethical tourism literature continues to unpack this in relation to emotional hedonic connections in motivating future ethical tourism choices (Malone et al. 2014). The retrospective trajectory taken by this study engages respondents at a stage where they have already assimilated various choice criteria, conflicting values and, crucially, have encountered varied and competing discourses. In doing so, we find that morality and hedonism are not experienced by consumers in a dialectic relationship (Borgmann 2000), but they in fact interact in a way that naturalises (Canniford and Shankar 2013) a nonconflicting, harmonious orientation towards both social and personal ends. Thus, consuming more gratification-yielding products and services may be interpreted as entirely compatible with concepts of social justice, community (Etzioni 1998) and environmental stewardship. In a vibrant moral marketplace, 'saving the planet' from 'overtourism' (overconsumption) needs to be simultaneously desirable, pleasurable and morally defensible, a view yet to be taken up in the burgeoning literature on moral marketplaces (e.g. Henry 2010; Luedicke et al. 2010; Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013).

However, we approach this pleasure–morality relationship in a different way, focusing on consumer

disaffections—factors that would otherwise inhibit pleasure—and illustrate how these structure aspects of the experience of moral markets (i.e. 'here is a market setting in which overtourism can be addressed'). While we do not know whether or how our consumers experienced this on an emotional level (Malone et al. 2014), we do begin to understand the processes involved in ameliorating the perceived impediments to experiencing pleasure within tourist moral market settings (Butcher 2003; Fennell 2006). For example, Mahrouse (2011) notes that the privileged position of 'Volunteer Tourists', in respect to poorer locals, was uncomfortably experienced. We extend this experiential interpretation by illustrating—in our theme of levelling—the role that such disaffections can play in shaping the actual meaning and processes of the tourism experience, in relation to pleasure and morality. In showing *how* this operated narratively, we are able to observe not only the sophisticated rebalancing and redistribution of "privilege" but the novel nexus of power relations it creates. We therefore offer an important piece to the emerging work on morality, hedonism and ethical behaviour by illuminating how consumers address disaffections that undermine pleasure. For example, Malone et al. (2014, p. 250) remark of one of their key respondents, "the emotive aspects of consumption are self-focused as Jackie aims to alleviate feelings of guilt by taking part in an exchange relationship". Notwithstanding the positive 'pleasurable acts of self-policing', that seem self-evidently 'fun' (Soper 2008), more attention could be paid to the absence of pain/displeasure (Hanna 2013; Mahrouse 2011), the contexts in which these augment and mobilise moral markets (e.g. 'overtourism') and the narrative accounts that shape consumer experiences therein.

Our second main contribution is to subject the theory of alternative hedonism (Soper 2007, 2008, 2016, 2017) to some critique by interpreting its potential effects in an empirical setting. The central tenet of alternative hedonism lays the possibility of a new political imaginary that is neither hedonistically repressive nor socially and/or ecologically destructive. While we broadly support these ideals, alternative hedonism may also, paradoxically, produce further disaffections of a personal, social and ecological nature. Primarily visible in our data are reproducing structures of inequality through status-claiming. For example, gaining pleasure from self-purifying morality plays derived through keeping the exotic pristine can ultimately serve to reproduce structures of inequality between tourists and natives. The centrality of status-claiming, albeit moralistic, can itself be a source of potential pleasure. Quite the opposite has been argued by social commentators such as Bourdieu (1984/1979), who consider class-based status distinctions as engendering social violence, anxiety, inadequacy and alienation in market settings. These are precisely the sources of displeasure that seem to articulate the contemporary

consumer disposition that Soper (2007, 2008) wants to move away from. Paradoxically, self-managing strategies such as 'levelling' may ostensibly 'heal' certain sets of (host–guest) inequalities while concealing other lines of inequality: those who cannot afford to travel and/or those who consume tourism outside of moral market settings.

This has mixed implications for both the concept of alternative hedonism and the validity of moral markets. On the one hand, the impetus with which Soper (2008) platforms consumer's search for an alternative pathway is very present and highly motivating; our consumers vociferously negotiate a range of perceived personal, social and ecological disaffections in the process of giving meaning to their experiences. This suggests that this moral marketplace is reasonably successful in channelling latent consumer concerns in a way that legitimises present and future tourism consumption. However, for Soper (2017), this was supposed to be manifest in ethically reflexive self-management practices 'disinclined to invoke a "them versus us" (p. 20) mentality'. Our data, in contrast, emphasise the underlying role of "us vs them" status distinctions as *the* structuring moral order in this setting. While this may not be what Soper envisioned, we argue that it may well culminate in an 'enchanted' view of moral markets, as it provides a less contradictory framing of consumption: in the context of anxieties about 'overtourism', we can never be 'right' (e.g. not flying) but we can be 'good', or at the very less, not 'bad'! And this framing is what is produced in this moral market setting. Rather than 'purifying' nature and culture (e.g. by staying at home), consumers purify, sanitise and inoculate the self, sanitising and inoculating (only the right kinds of) consumers, from guilt, tension and disaffection. Here we discuss the consequences of three self-managing strategies we uncover—moderating, abiding and levelling, highlighting how moral markets are sustained despite the reproduction of social inequality and ecological threats.

Implications and Future Research

Overall, this paper highlights how, through alternative hedonism (Soper 2007, 2008, 2016, 2017), moral discourses are co-opted to legitimate potential pleasures. There are several implications here. First, from a practical standpoint, our research speaks to the appeal of the mainstream, middle ground. That is, while there has been much discussion surrounding the large carbon footprint that accrues from flying (UNEP 2015), most tourists do not want to give up experiencing far-away destinations. Alternative hedonism, which takes the middle ground of providing these experiences to consumers (neither pure hedonism nor pure altruism), while at the same time delivering resources to engage in some form of 'moral mending', allows consumers to indulge in

a vacation devoid of guilt. As opposed to downshifting, simplifying, restricting and decelerating consumption (Etzioni 1998; Husemann and Eckhardt 2018; Schor 1998), through alternative hedonism we then gain access to Soper's (2008) notion of a 'hedonist imaginary' wherein consumers are enchanted and actively enjoy seeking more sustainable behaviours. Therefore, in contrast to brands that have actively promoted anti-consumption messages to promote greater reflexivity on overconsumption (e.g. Patagonia's infamous 'Don't but this jacket' campaign), on the basis of our findings, we might argue that ethical (and indeed mainstream) tourism brokers may attract a broader consumer base through focussing marketing strategies around the benefit of the 'middle ground'.

Second, our findings also suggest that part of what made consumption meaningful to tourists, was to work through (via distinct self- managing strategies), some of the problems of overtourism themselves. Thus, marketing practitioners should be mindful of latent consumer agency, allowing adequate opportunity for consumers to appropriate, deviate from and re-write 'marketing scripts' to enable co-determination of moral market behaviour/s.

Finally, for policy-makers and social entrepreneurs motivated to address concerns in the tourism industry there are two further points to make. First, it appears that in spite of creating an ethically augmented 'product' with codes of conduct for travellers, tourists continue to carry with them residual concerns. It may be helpful therefore to provide additional opportunities for an interactive dialogue between variously positioned stakeholders with diffuse interests (e.g. host/guest/community/NGOs). Second, our critical analysis suggested that as a result of some of the self-managing strategies, certain social or environmental issues may be unwittingly subverted, or indeed new concerns produced. This suggests that key agents in the ethical tourism industry need to be especially reflexive about the transformative potential of consumption, where the normalising terms 'moral' and/or 'ethical' may be (perhaps wrongly) experienced as unambiguously good, with potentially damaging outcomes remaining overlooked.

Ultimately, we hope that our research stimulates further investigation of alternative hedonism within tourism as well as wider consumption contexts. Within tourism, further unpacking the tensions tourists experience in relation to why and why not certain travel decisions may be undertaken could be an interesting endeavour, particularly through exploring evolving narratives in-situ, as could how certain experiences influence future purchase intention. Longitudinal and ethnographic observations may offer rich insights into consumer deliberative processes and how these are shaped over time. Beyond the context of tourism, we acknowledge that our findings might look different for different types of consumers and varying product and service

categories. We advocate further research in broader consumption contexts—such as food, transport and retailing—where varying degrees of purchase involvement, product tangibility and brand loyalty, for example, may shape how, where and to what ends consumers draw on alternative hedonism tropes (Carrington et al. 2016, p. 23).

Conclusion

The moral marketplaces literature has shown us that when consumers are presented with a marketplace choice between experiencing pleasure for themselves, or 'doing the right thing' for society or nature, they will inevitably choose the option that embodies more pleasure. In appreciation of this, Soper (2007, 2008, 2016, 2017) conceptualised a model of alternative hedonism, whereby consumers could access pleasure *from* 'doing the right thing', through experiencing an 'other' or additional form of pleasure. We undertook a critical investigation of whether and how this operates in the ethical tourism marketplace and found that consumers do access the 'good life' by removing impediments to pleasure. Through interpretive analysis of 17 consumer narratives, we found three self-managing strategies that were utilised to ultimately purify consumers from environmental or social critiques of tourism and distance themselves from 'others' through status-claiming. In doing so, they accessed the virtue of feeling superior to others who utilise the market in the 'wrong' way (taking mainstream vacations). Going beyond Soper (2007, 2008, 2016, 2017), we thus demonstrate that pleasure via alternative hedonism can only be accessed by certain consumers with access to cultural and economic capital. We argue that alternative hedonism may sustain moral marketplaces, but also contribute to reproducing structures of inequality. In unveiling such unintended consequences of alternative hedonism, we bring additional insight into the complexities of consumer behaviour in moral marketplaces.

References

Ahuvia, A. C. (2005). Beyond the extended self: Loved objects and consumers' identity narratives. *Journal of Consumer Research, 32*, 171–184.

Arnould, E. J., & Fischer, E. (1994). Hermeneutics and consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research, 21*, 55–70.

Arsel, Z., & Thompson, C. J. (2011). Demythologising consumption practices: How consumers protect their field-dependent identity

investments from devaluing marketplace myths. *Journal of Consumer Research, 37*(5), 791–806.

Auger, P., & Devinney, T. (2007). Do what consumers say matter? The misalignment of preferences with unconstrained ethical intentions. *Journal of Business Ethics, 76*(4), 361–383.

Belk, R. W., & Costa, J. (1995). International tourism: An assessment and overview. *Journal of Macromarketing, 15*(2), 33–49.

Bhattacharyya, D. P. (1997). Mediating India: An analysis of a guide-book. *Annals of Tourism Research, 24*, 371–389.

Borgmann, A. (2000). The moral complexion of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research, 26*(4), 418–422.

Bourdieu, P. (1984/1979). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste*. London: Routledge.

Bragues, G. (2006). Seek the good life, not money: The Aristotelian approach to business ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics, 67*(4), 341–357.

Buckley, R. (2012). Sustainable tourism: Research and reality. *Annals of Tourism Research, 39*(2), 528–546.

Butcher, J. (2003). *The moralization of tourism: Sun, sand–and saving the world?* London: Routledge.

Campbell, C. (1987). *The Romantic ethic and the spirit of modern consumerism*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Canniford, R., & Shankar, A. (2013). Purifying practices: How consumers assemble romantic experiences of nature. *Journal of Consumer Research, 39*(5), 1051–1069.

Carrington, M., Neville, B., & Whitwell, G. (2010). Why ethical consumers don't walk their talk: Towards a framework for understanding the gap between the ethical purchase intentions and actual buying behaviour of ethically minded consumers. *Journal of Business Ethics, 97*(1), 139–158.

Carrington, M. J., Neville, B. A., & Whitwell, G. J. (2014). Lost in translation: Exploring the ethical consumer intention–behaviour gap. *Journal of Business Research, 67*, 2759–2767.

Carrington, M. J., Zwick, D., & Neville, B. (2016). The ideology of the ethical consumption gap. *Marketing Theory, 16*(1), 21–38.

Caruana, R., & Crane, A. (2011). Getting away from it all: Exploring freedom in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research, 34*(4), 1495–1515.

Caruana, R., Glozer, S., Crane, A., & McCabe, S. (2014). Tourists accounts of responsible tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research, 46*, 115–129.

Collins (2018). *Overtourism definition*. Retrieved from https://www.collinsdictionary.com/submission/19794/Overtourism.

Crane, A., Knights, D., & Starkey, K. (2008). The conditions of our freedom: Foucault, organization and ethics. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 18*(3), 299–320.

Crocker, D. A., & Linden, T. (Eds.). (1997). *Ethics of consumption: The good life, justice, and global stewardship*. Rowan: Oxford.

Cross, G. (2000). *An all-consuming century: Why commercialism won in modern America*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Davies, I., & Gutsche, S. (2016). Consumer motivations for mainstream 'ethical' consumption. *European Journal of Marketing, 50*(7/8), 1326–1347.

DesJardins, J. (2015). Is it time to jump off the sustainability Band-wagon? *Business Ethics Quarterly, 26*(1), 117–135.

Devinney, T., Auger, P., & Eckhardt, G. (2010). *The myth of the ethical consumer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Doherty, B., Davies, I., & Tranchell, S. (2013). Where now for fair trade? *Business History, 55*(2), 161–189.

Douglas, M. (2002). *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. London: Routledge.

Etzioni, A. (1998). Voluntary simplicity: Characterization, select psychological implications & societal consequences. *Journal of Economic Psychology, 19*, 619–643.

Fennell, D. A. (2006). *Tourism ethics*. Clevedon: Channel View Publications.

Freeman, R. E., & Liedtka, J. (1991). Corporate social responsibility: A critical approach, *Business Horizons, 34*, 92–98.

Freud, S. (1984). *On Narcissism: An introduction*. In S. Freud (Ed.) *On metapsychology: The theory of psychoanalysis*, Vol 11, Harmondsworth: Pelican Freud Library.

Gabriel, Y., & Lang, T. (2006). *The unmanageable consumer*. London: Sage.

Geisler, M., & Veresiu, E. (2014). Creating the responsible consumer: Moralistic governance regimes and consumer subjectivity. *Journal of Consumer Research, 41*, 840–857

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Goodwin, H., & Francis, J. (2003). Ethical and responsible tourism: Consumer trends in the UK. *Journal of Vacation Marketing, 9*(3), 271–282.

Goossens, C. (2000). Tourism information and pleasure motivation. *Annals of Tourism Research, 27*(2), 301–321.

Handelman, St. J. Y., J. M. & Taylor, S. F. (2011). Magical thinking and consumer coping. *Journal of Consumer Research, 38*(4), 632–632.

Hanna, P. (2013). 'A break from 'reality': An investigation into the 'experiments with subjectivity' on offer within the promotion of sustainable tourism in the UK. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 13*(3), 366–386.

Henry, P. C. (2010). How Mainstream consumers think about consumer rights and responsibilities. *Journal of Consumer Research, 37*(4), 670–687.

Hilton, M. (2004). The legacy of luxury: Moralities of consumption since the 18th century. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 4*(1), 101–123.

Husemann, K., & Eckhardt, G. (2018). Consumer deceleration, *Journal of Consumer Research*, online first.

Ignatow, G. (2009). Culture and embodied cognition: Moral discourses in internet support groups for overeaters. *Social Forces, 88*(2), 643–670.

Jacobsen, J. K. S. (2000). Anti-tourist attitudes: Mediterranean charter tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 27(2), 284–300.

Jamal, B. T. (2010). Virtue ethics and sustainable tourism pedagogy: Phronesis, principles and practice. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 12*(6), 530–545.

Levett, R. (2003). *A better choice of choice: Quality of life, consumption and economic growth*. London: Fabian Society.

Luedicke, M. K., Thompson, C. J., & Giesler, M. (2010). Consumer identity work as moral protagonism: How myth and ideology animate a brand-mediated moral conflict. *Journal of Consumer Research, 36*(6), 1016–1032.

Mahrouse, G. (2011). Feel-good tourism: An ethical option for socially-conscious westerners? *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies, 10*(3), 372–391.

Malone, S., McCabe, S., & Smith, A. (2014). The role of hedonism in ethical tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research, 44*, 241–254.

Muniz, A. J., & O'Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research, 27*(4), 412–432.

Nelson, M., Rademacher, M., & Paek, H.-J. (2007). Downshifting consumer = upshifting citizen? An examination of a local freecycle community. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 611*(1), 141–156.

Saatcioglu, B., & Ozanne, J. L. (2013). A critical spatial approach to marketplace exclusion and inclusion. *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing, 32*, 32–37.

Schaefer, A., & Crane, A. (2005). Addressing sustainability and consumption. *Journal of Macromarketing, 25*(1), 76–92.

Schor, J. B. (1998). In defense of consumer critique: revisiting the consumption debates of the twentieth century. *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science, 611*, 16–30.

Shaw, D., McMaster, R., & Newholm, T. (2016). Care and commitment in ethical consumption: An exploration of the 'attitude-behaviour gap'. *Journal of Business Ethics, 136*(2), 151–265.

Shaw, D., & Shiu, E. (2003). Ethics in consumer choice: A multivariate modelling approach. *European Journal of Marketing, 37*(10), 1485–1498.

Silverman, D., & Marvasti, A. (2008). *Doing qualitative research: A comprehensive guide*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Soper, K. (2007). Re-thinking the 'good life': The citizenship dimension of consumer disaffection with consumerism. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 7*, 205–229.

Soper, K. (2008). Alternative hedonism, cultural theory and the role of aesthetic revisioning. *Cultural Studies, 22*(5), 567–587.

Soper, K. (2016). Towards a sustainable flourishing: Ethical consumption and the politics of prosperity. In D. Shaw, M. Carrington & A. Chatzidakis (2016), *Ethics and morality in consumption: interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 11–27). London: Routledge.

Soper, K. (2017). A new hedonism: A post-consumerism vision, the next system project. https://thenextsystem.org/learn/stories/new-hedonism-post-consumerism-vision.

Syse, K. L., & Mueller, M. L. (2015). *Sustainable consumption and the good life: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Szmigin, I., & Carrigan, M. (2005). Exploring the dimensions of ethical consumption. In K. M. Ekstrom & H. Brembeck (Eds.) *European advances in consumer research*, Vol. 7 (pp. 608–613). Goteborg: Association for Consumer Research.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2015). *Global partnership for sustainable tourism*. http://www.gpstourism.org/history.

Thompson, C. J. (1997). Interpreting consumers: A hermeneutical framework for deriving marketing insights from the texts of consumers' consumption stories. *Journal of Marketing Research, 34*, 438–455.

Thompson, C. J., & Coskuner-Balli, G. (2007). Countervailing market response to corporate co-optation and the ideological recruitment of consumption communities. *Journal of Consumer Research, 34*, 135–152.

Tribes (2015). Retrieved from http://www.tribes.co.uk/.

Urry, J. (1990). *The tourist gaze*. London: Sage.

Vittel, S. (2016). A case for consumer social responsibility (CnSR): Including a selected review of consumer ethics/social responsibility literature. *Journal of Business Ethics, 130*, 767–774.

Wilk, R. (2001). Consuming morality. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 1*(2), 245–260.