



STUDENT ATTITUDE TO ETHICAL CONSUMPTION AS NEW ECOLOGICAL PRACTICE

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The aim of this article is to analyze the attitude of students to ethical consumption as a new environmental practice; to explore current research on ethical consumption.

Methodology: The leading methods for the study of this problem are the methods of questioning and testing, allowing to make a qualitative analysis of the students' attitude to the new environmental practice – ethical consumption and contributing to a more detailed identification of such issues as: knowledge of students about ethical consumption; students' attitude to separate waste disposal; students' attitude to the use of environmental packaging products; identification of students' practices of secondary consumption.

Results: The article deals with the theoretical and methodological foundations of the analysis of students' attitudes to ethical consumption as a new environmental practice. It is established that the level of students' awareness of ethical consumption is low. The proportion of informed students among social and humanities specialties is twice more than high as students of technical specialties. It is revealed that more than a third of respondents do not know about the production of environmentally friendly goods. Almost all students are aware of the separate disposal of garbage and believe that it is necessary to install the appropriate bins. More than half of students are ready to sort garbage in the presence of such containers, and the readiness of humanitarians is 1.5 times higher than that of students of technical specialties. The main reasons why respondents would not buy goods in eco-friendly packaging are the lack of funds and the lack of sense for students. The majority of students believe the practice of secondary consumption to be popular one.

Applications of this study: The data obtained in the work can be used in environmental psychology, social psychology, pedagogy, the psychology of education, age psychology, sociology, as well as for further theoretical development of this issue.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The originality of this article lies in the analysis of the social phenomenon of ethical consumption, which implies that only purchase and consumption of those goods, the production of which does not cause great harm to the environment, those goods in the production of which are not infringed the rights of the worker and moreover child labor is not used, and most importantly the recycling of waste after consumption of the product will not harm nature is ethical one.

Keywords: *students, environmental practices, ethical behavior.*

INTRODUCTION

The current terms of sustainable development are characterized by a global concept, where the space of differentiation for responsible products and services is updated and expanded, determining the economic viability of their products for a wide pool of players. In addition, both small and medium-sized companies are influenced by responsible consumption that has also created new global market niches for them, including natural food, organic cosmetics, responsible tourism, and many others. The dynamics of these niches' growth, as a rule, several times ahead of the growth rate of existing markets (up to 20-25% against 3-4% per year), and thus opens many opportunities for the construction and development of companies. The global nature of such niches is determined by the existence of a category of responsible consumers — both in developed and in developing countries ([Cherdymova et al., 2018](#); [Alisov and Cherdymova, 2018](#)).

Ethical consumption is a concept widely known in Europe and almost unknown to the people of Russia, even to an advanced audience. The idea of ethical consumption is that the choice of goods and services is influenced by the moral preferences of the consumer and the information available to him/her about the moral behavior of the seller's company (the impact of the company on the environment, society, attitude to workers, contributing to the progress, etc.) [Dunlap, R. E., Van Liere, K. D., Mertig, A. G., & Jones, R. E. \(2000\).](#)

Consumption is not a passive state of absorption and appropriation, it is a kind of attitude not only to things, but also to everything connected with acquisition and consumption, not the things themselves are consumed, namely attitudes - nominated and absent, included and excluded at the same time ([Cherdymova et al., 2019](#); [Osman et al., 2018](#)).

The social mechanism of new practices' formation is a stable system of social actors' interactions of different types and levels (individuals, organizations, and groups), which is regulated, on the one hand, by the basic institutions of society (the rules of the game), and on the other - the interests and capabilities of players ([Zelezny, L. C., Chua, P. P., & Aldrich, C. \(2000\)](#)).

Ethical consumption is a social phenomenon that is the response of consumers to serious environmental and social problems. The most important thing that interests buyers is the origin, composition of the purchased products, as well as the social responsibility of the producing company, transportation, and disposal of waste, etc. It is considered ethical to buy and consume only those goods, the production of which does not cause great harm to the environment, those goods in the production of which the rights of the workers are not infringed and the child labor is not used, and most importantly the disposal of waste after consumption of the product will not harm nature ([De Young, R. \(2000\)](#)).

Ethical consumption refers to the purchase and use of commodities and goods in the light of the *moral factor*, that is, the conditions of production and the consequences of these goods' use. This is a kind of reaction of civil society to the threatening state of the environment and the development of business practices that are harmful to nature and people ([Kozar, J. M., & Hiller Connell, K. Y. \(2013\)](#)).

Ethical consumption includes boycotting the products of companies that use dirty technologies, conduct animal testing, violate the working conditions of workers, and use the sweatshop system, child or slave labor. It is considered ethical to support producers who do not harm nature and people; to participate in separate waste collection, energy saving, greening, ecotourism, more often to walk and use public transport.

Ethical consumption also includes voluntary abandonment of excessive consumption, support for an annual day when nothing is bought, simplification of consumer standards, a movement to free oneself from the pressures of labor and consumption, and a freer and more natural life ([Szmigin, I., Carrigan, M., & McEachern, M. G. \(2009\)](#)).

Ethical consumption practices are formed primarily in developed countries with strong civil institutions. Nevertheless, gradually this process extends to developing States ([Vitell, S. J., & Muncy, J. \(2005\)](#)).

Ethical consumption as an innovative practice of civil society can increase:

- Negotiating power of civil society in interactions with higher-resource parties - business and government;
- Business responsibility for the sustainable development of society and the well-being of individual social groups;
- Level of solidarity of citizens with *unfamiliar others*, the measure of civil responsibility ([Singh, S., Vrontis, D., & Thrassou, A. \(2011\)](#));
- The level of independence and initiative of Autonomous citizens as entities of civil society, participants of spontaneous civil activity and self-organization.

Since the inception of the movement for responsible consumption increased awareness of the society and has forced the business to form conscious social and environmental policy. However, excessive consumption continues to destroy ecosystems, and the purchase of green goods instead of conventional ones does not solve the problem of preserving the environment ([Cherdymova et al., 2018](#); [Shayakhmetova & Chaklikova, 2018](#)).

Nevertheless, the majority of Russian citizens do not take any active actions to protect the environment. Some steps for this at least once a year are made by about 13%, and about 2% at least once in 2014 gave hazardous waste for recycling (batteries, energy-saving light bulbs), although about 15% of the population knows that such a possibility exists ([Zollo, L., Yoon, S., Rialti, R., & Ciappei, C. \(2018\)](#)).

What do consumers want from the power ([Uusitalo, O., & Oksanen, R. \(2004\)](#))?

- The main information, including the observance of ethical standards by producers, the Russians receive from the TV. Conscious consumers complement it with Newspapers and the Internet. Moreover, on the internet they not just browsing the news, but increasingly discussing them and developing ways of action, including protest;
- However, it is not so easy to assess the real conscientiousness of producers only 23% of ethical buyers and 19% of boycotting buyers have enough information;
- it is no accident that education is one of the main requests to the authorities, even from traditional consumers: 39% are waiting for wide information about the consequences of irresponsible attitude to nature, 30% want to see more social advertising of ethical business in Russia, one in five lacks information about foreign experience of ethical consumption ([Niinimäki, K. \(2010\)](#));

- Among the advanced ones, least of all the participants of non-market practices need new knowledge. At the same time, garbage collection and disposal activities are the main things that for all Russian consumers is *requested* from the authorities. From 58% to 64% (depending on the group) indicate the importance of containers for separate waste collection in the yards, 48-59% - the need to increase the collection points of recyclables and household waste, 42-58% - to support the development of business on waste/garbage recycling for reuse [McNeill, L., & Moore, R. \(2015\)](#).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methods of the study

The method of questionnaire survey was used in the research. This method is a universal method, as it allows solving the following [problems Paço, A., & Lavrador, T. \(2017\)](#):

Tasks:

- To find out if students know what ethical consumption is [Witkowski, T. H., & Reddy, S. \(2010\)](#);
- To learn how students are informed about different ethical consumption practices;
- To identify students' attitudes to separate waste disposal;
- To analyze students' attitudes to the use of environmental packaging of products;
- To find out whether students or their relatives and friends practice ecological cultivation of fruits and vegetables in their own gardens;
- To study if the students are involved in the practices of secondary consumption.

The Program of the Study

The research program consists of two parts: methodological and procedural.

The methodological part of the program includes the following elements [Mostafa, M. M. \(2007\)](#):

- 1) Description of the research problem;
- 2) Description of the study purpose;
- 3) Setting research objectives;
- 4) Description of the study subject;
- 5) Description of the study object;
- 6) The study strategy choice;
- 7) Theoretical and empirical interpretation of the study basic concepts;

In accordance with this, an empirical sociological research program *Student attitude to ethical consumption* is built.

RESULTS

The first step in our research was to find out whether students knew what ethical consumption was.

Table 1: Distribution of answers to the question: "do you know what ethical consumption is? », in percentage

variant of answer	In total	Students of social and humanities directions	The students of technical directions
Yes	28,0	38,0	18,0
I know something	23,0	26,0	20,0
I don't know	49,0	36,0	62,0
In total	100,0	100,0	100,0

28% of respondents know what ethical consumption is, almost half of respondents are not familiar with this term (49%) and 23% of students have heard something about it.

The students of humanities specialties (38%) more than the students of technical specialties (18%) aware of what is ethical consumption. In addition, respondents of humanities specialties (26%) answered they *something heard* more than respondents of technical specialties (20%). Not familiar with the concept of ethical consumption twice as many respondents- "techies" (62%) than respondents-"humanitarians" (36%). Based on the data obtained, we conclude that students of humanities specialties are better aware of what ethical consumption is.

Next, we studied whether students are aware of the production of environmentally friendly products.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents' answers to the question: "do You Know about the production of environmentally friendly cosmetics and household chemicals? », in percentage

variant of answer	In total	Students of social and humanities directions	The students of technical directions
Yes	62,0	46,0	78,0
No	38,0	54,0	22,0
In total	100,0	100,0	100,0

Respondents who know about the production of environmentally friendly products make up 62 % of the respondents. 38 % of respondents do not know that there is a production of environmentally friendly cosmetics and household chemicals.

Respondents of technical specialties are more aware of the production of environmentally friendly goods (78%); most likely, it was influenced by the specifics of their education. 46 % of the surveyed students of Humanities know about the production of such goods. Do not know about the production of environmentally friendly products in the majority of the respondents of Humanities 54%.

The next task was to find out whether students know about separate waste disposal.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents' answers to the question: "do You Know about separate waste disposal?», in percentage

variant of answer	In total	Students of social and humanities directions	The students of technical directions
Yes	96,0	94,0	98,0
No	4,0	6,0	2,0
In total	100,0	100,0	100,0

Almost all respondents know about separate waste disposal (96%) and only 4 % do not know that there is separate waste disposal. Moreover, the same number of respondents believe that it is necessary to install such urns with the division into plastic, paper, and glass.

Less than half of the respondents (43%) said that they never leave garbage after themselves, about a quarter (26%) said if they left garbage, it was the remains of a burned fire and about a third (31%) honestly said that sometimes they left garbage. More often respondents of technical specialties 38% never left garbage, among humanitarians answered that never left garbage 16%. Sometimes 36% students of humanities and 24% students of technical specialties left garbage. 48% of humanitarians and 38% of techies left the remains of the campfire after outdoor recreation. Less than half of the respondents (43%) said that they never left garbage after themselves, about a quarter (26%) if they left garbage, it was the remains of a burned fire and about a third (31%) honestly said that sometimes they left garbage. Never left garbage more often respondents of technical specialties 38%, among the students of humanities specialties answered that never left garbage 16%. Sometimes 36% students of humanities specialties and 24% of technical students left garbage. 48% students of humanities specialties and 38% of technical specialties left the remains of the campfire after outdoor recreation. The majority of respondents also reacted positively to the replacement of packages with paper ones: 71% said that it was important and more environmentally friendly. According to the specialties of the respondents, the answers were as follows: 64 % - students of humanities specialties and 78 % - students of technical specialties. Only 18% of students of humanitarian directions believe it is useless [Mamat, M. N., & Mokhtar, F. \(2012\)](#).

When using environmentally friendly packaging, the cost of the final product increases, we asked the respondents whether they are willing to overpay for environmentally friendly packaging. As a result, we received that 59% of respondents are not ready for it. 41% of respondents expressed a desire and willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly packaging. Students of humanities specialties shared in half in the answers to this question. Among the respondents of technical specialties two times more than those who are not going to pay more for environmentally friendly packaging. The reason for this is largely the lack of material resources (64.0%), which is more pronounced among students of technical training. More than a third of respondents (36%) simply do not see sense in this.

Most respondents are involved in secondary consumption in the forms of buying and selling things *from hand* (35% and 41 %, respectively). 12% participate in the exchange of things and give things free of charge 9% of respondents and only 3% never participated in the secondary consumption of goods.

As for the reasons for secondary consumption, exactly half (50%) of the respondents noted material savings as a motive for secondary consumption. The second most popular answer is *the ability to fix or modernize something* (30%), which indicates rational thinking and creativity. The next most popular answers were those related to ecology and collecting (10% each). Let us clarify that answering the question about the motives of secondary consumption, the Respondent could choose several answers.

According to respondents, the difficult economic situation in the country, which has developed in recent years, has not had a significant impact on the volume of turnover of used goods. More than half of the respondents (54%) did not notice

changes in the volume of secondary consumption, while more than a quarter (28%) report an increase, and 18% report a decrease in secondary consumer practices due to the crisis. Among the respondents of different specialties, there are no significant differences in the answers that the turnover of goods has changed; among the technical specialties - 32% of students note it, and among the specialties of humanities note changes in the turnover - 24 % of students, but they note that they began to consume more [Shaw, D., & Clarke, I. \(1999\)](#).

DISCUSSIONS

The main issues of consumption's ethics that should be developed by Russian scientists are the following:

- Influence of morality on consumer behavior;
- Can the consumer impact on business ethics and brand;
- The impact of culture and religion on consumers' perception of ethical behavior;
- Idealism and naivety of the modern Russian consumer (consumer credulity to *promises* of the brand and attempts to construct own identity by means of consumption of certain correct brands' products);
- The socio-ethical regulation of their own needs of consumers, the rejection of over-consumption and conspicuous consumption;
- Consumers' perception of the degree of products and brands ethics (for example, the perception of foods with GMOs and E-supplements as unethical, because they are harmful to health);
- Social responsibility of the consumer (e.g. whether the consumer is willing to give up the product if its production/ consumption or disposal harms the environment);
- How, under the influence of what external factors, the process of making the ethically correct decision by the consumer takes place;
- The *dark side* of consumer behavior: why consumers sometimes behave unethically (for example, when they use *pirated* copies of CDs to listen to music and watch movies; when in shopping centers they steal or spoil goods, for example, tear their packaging);
- Techniques to neutralize guilt and responsibility: how consumers *justify* their unethical behavior and consumer selfishness;
- Relationship or discrepancy between ethical principles and personal consumer behavior;
- Influence of situational factors on unethical consumer behavior;
- How ethical are demonstrative behavior and consumer snobbery;
- Moral attitude to money;
- Building ethical types of Russian consumers.

Thus, the study of these main problem areas and dilemmas of consumer ethics can explain the reasons for the ethics or egoism of consumer behavior, enrich the doctrine of morality in General and business ethics in particular with new knowledge. In practical terms, the development of the theoretical space of consumption ethics can be a theoretical basis for the creation of a code of the consumer's ethical behavior, which will help to reduce the level of consumer selfishness and solve global economic and environmental problems.

In modern society, consumer behavior can be considered as a certain form of social, and in recent years, and civic activity; people's civic activity is increased in real consumer choice and freedom.

Some consumer practices, in addition to meeting certain needs of the individual, demonstrate his/her social status (or claims), construct the environment, and form both personal and social aspects of identity. Their development *requires from the nonprofessional not only certain material prosperity but also a proper level of personal development*.

At the same time, the motivation to master innovative everyday practices, demonstrative innovative consumption is associated with investing in one's own human and cultural capital. When looking for different social groups, we pay attention to activities, not to modern values and principles, since the latter can be shared by people with differential daily behavior.

CONCLUSION

The study allows us to draw the following conclusions: the level of students' awareness of ethical consumption was low, only 28% know what it is, another 23% have heard something. The proportion of informed students of social and humanities specialties is twice as high as students of technical specialties. More than a third of respondents (38%) do not

know about the production of environmentally friendly products, students of Humanities (54%) among them 2.5 times more than students of technical specialties (22%).

Almost all students (96%) know about separate waste disposal and believe that it is necessary to install the appropriate urns. However, only 68% of respondents are ready to sort garbage in the presence of such containers, and the readiness of *humanitarians* (82%) is 1.5 times higher than of *techies* (54%).

The main reasons why respondents would not buy products in eco-friendly packaging are the lack of funds (64%) and the lack of sense in this (36%). Almost all respondents participate in secondary consumption practices, such as buying things *from hand* (42%), selling things (35%), exchanging things (12%), transferring things to other people for free (9%). As for the reasons for secondary consumption, exactly half (50%) of respondents named material savings as the main reason for secondary consumption. The second most popular answer is *the ability to fix/upgrade something* (30%). Among the goods most often involved in secondary consumption, respondents mainly noted clothes and shoes, the next most popular were cars, auto parts, accessories, as well as among students popular are sale and purchase of books and textbooks.

During the evaluation of the popularity of secondary consumption practices among students, it was found that 60% of students considered secondary consumption practices popular, 40% considered them popular among some students.

The application of ethical consumption practices by students is at a very early stage, they accept not all practices, and they are ready to follow them. This state of Affairs suggests that in general, these practices are even less in demand in society since the most active and *advanced* part of the youth is not in a hurry to follow them. This indicates, on the one hand, the need for a special state policy, which includes both education among the population about the importance of ethical consumption, and specific measures to ensure the implementation of these practices (for example, separate garbage collection). On the other hand, this attitude to ethical consumption is a kind of indicator of civil society's development in this country and confirms its low level.

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