

How categorisation shapes the attitude–behaviour gap in responsible consumption

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Scholars have documented that many consumers have positive attitudes towards responsible products but do not consistently buy these alternatives. In this paper we present a new perspective, based on categorisation theory, to examine the attitude–behaviour gap. Through a qualitative study, we identify two dimensions that influence consumers' categorisation of ethical products: (1) construing the decision as altruistic or self-interested and (2) perceiving the context of the behaviour as private or public. Using these dimensions to assess the consumption situation, consumers construe four types of responsible purchase that rest on different motivations. Analysing the categorisation process allows a more nuanced understanding of the potential reasons that underpin the attitude–behaviour gap. We show that the inconsistency between words and deeds has different explanations depending on the frame applied by consumers to the decision, and suggest that a deeper understanding of framing processes is necessary for the development of more effective marketing strategies.

Introduction

The market for responsible products, which comprises products and services that include pro-social features, is worth almost £50 billion in the UK alone (Harrison *et al.* 2005; Smithers 2011; Cervellon 2013). Scholars and practitioners researching this market, however, have found that many consumers who have positive attitudes towards responsible products do not translate their beliefs into consumption choices. This phenomenon

Received (in revised form): 12 March 2014

is often called the ‘attitude–behaviour gap’ (Carrigan & Attalla 2001; Chatzidakis *et al.* 2007).

With the development of research in this area scholars have proposed several interpretations of this phenomenon. No extant research, however, has considered the role of categorisation in consumers’ decisions to purchase more responsible alternatives. This is in contrast with increasing awareness, among academics and practitioners alike, of the importance of framing processes in consumer behaviour (Stanovich & West 2000; Loken 2006). This paper introduces a timely interpretation of the attitude–behaviour gap, which is based on categorisation theory. Starting from the observation that marketers cannot assume the purchase of responsible alternatives to be necessarily motivated by moral intentions (Moisander 2007), we offer an exploration of the different explicit framing processes adopted by consumers and a discussion of how these influence consumers’ choices. In different contexts, different attitudes become salient depending on the characteristics of the decision. Categorisation theory postulates that consumers actively create mental representations of marketing stimuli, and that these categories influence attitudes and behaviours (Loken 2006).

This approach offers additional insights as to why consumers claim to be interested in responsible products but do not always translate these attitudes into actual purchases. In this paper, we argue that categorisation is based on two dimensions: construing the decision as (1) altruistic or self-interested, and (2) private or public. We show how categorisation affects consumers’ motivation and contributes to the identification of different types of responsible consumption. Our contention is that the analysis of the attitude–behaviour gap needs to take into account a nuanced understanding of the categorisation processes described in this research. Potential mismatches between categorisation processes and marketing campaigns, we maintain, are partly responsible for the attitude–behaviour gap we currently observe.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we review existing literature on the attitude–behaviour gap. Subsequently we review the methodology of the qualitative study conducted. Then we present the findings of our research. Finally, we discuss the implications of our framework for research and practice.

Research background

It is well documented that, of the 30% of consumers who have positive attitudes towards responsible products, only around 3% translate their

attitudes into consumption choices (see Davies *et al.* 2012 for a review). Why are so many consumers failing to act on their expressed ethical concerns?

Existing research suggests two dominant interpretations of the empirical evidence. The first focuses on explaining the gap as the outcome of psychological or physical barriers that constrain consumer behaviour and limit the impact of attitudes on actual behaviour (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2007). According to this view, knowledge about the social advantages offered by responsible alternatives drives attitudes, intention and behaviour (De Pelsmacker & Janssens 2007). The gap is consequently due to factors that limit consumers' ability to be consistent with their own consumption beliefs (Carrington *et al.* 2010). Scholars that have adopted this approach also noted that information about responsible product features interact with other information usually available to consumers concerning (1) the product category (Luchs *et al.* 2010), (2) the relative functional performance of the product (Folkes & Kamins 1999), (3) and the potential match between the cause promoted by the company and the brand positioning (Du *et al.* 2007). These investigations concur to indicate that, depending on the circumstances, the mix of characteristics of the offer can facilitate or hinder the consistency between consumers' attitudes and behaviours. Consumers are also very different in terms of their responses to companies or products promoting responsible features (Mohr *et al.* 2001; Memery *et al.* 2012). The stronger the interest towards responsible products, the more likely it is that consumers will show a consistency between attitudes and behaviours. This is also reflected in the view that consumers' belief in their ability to affect a real change is an important variable in helping bridge the gap between attitudes and behaviours (Vermeir & Verbeke 2006).

The second perspective sees the attitude-behaviour gap as the consequence of the impact of social desirability bias in survey research (Davies *et al.* 2012). Despite what consumers might say in questionnaires, pro-social features are not valuable enough to motivate consumption choices (Auger *et al.* 2008). Ultimately, it is maintained, the idea of a morally minded consumer is a myth (Devinney *et al.* 2010) and attitudes in this area of research are not a reliable indicator of consumers' views because individuals are tempted to offer a positive image of themselves to researchers.

These two interpretations overlook the fact that attitudes are flexible beliefs influenced by internal and external circumstances (Schwarz 2007). Consumers can create their attitudes or adapt their pre-existing attitudes to different stimuli. The adoption of categorisation theory as a tool for the analysis of the attitude-behaviour gap allows us to uncover new insights on this phenomenon because it sheds light on how different frames can

activate different motivations. This paper is the first to investigate how the framing of the decision influences consumers' attitudes towards responsible products. It shows how consumers construe the same type of purchase in different ways and how this influences their attitudes towards responsible consumption. Ultimately we demonstrate the value of introducing categorisation theory and framing effects in research on the attitude–behaviour gap. In this context we suggest two specific categorisation processes that influence the nature of consumers' attitudes towards products promoting pro-social features.

Methodology

A qualitative approach is preferred for primary research because categorisation theory has never been applied before to the study of responsible consumption. Our goal is to construct new theory in this area, exploring how consumers frame responsible consumption decisions and how this process influences their motivation (Edmondson & McManus 2007). Considering the early stages of development of research on the attitude–behaviour gap, we aim at developing 'rich' descriptions (Stainback & Stainback 1988) of how consumers frame decisions around the purchase of responsible products. Our approach is consistent with grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998) because we aim to develop new theoretical propositions on the basis of empirical evidence. However, since our search for theoretical explanations sets out with the intent of exploring how a specific set of theories (i.e. theories of framing and categorisation) can explain a certain phenomenon of interest (i.e. the attitude–behaviour gap), our overall methodology merges the inductive analysis of grounded-theory with an abductive logic (Ong 2012; Timmermans & Tavory 2012). This approach is consistent with a pragmatic philosophical stance (Morgan 2007) that justifies the need for researchers in a given field of inquiry to move back and forth between the development and testing of theories, and to judge research primarily on the basis of the consequences it can generate. Consequently, our methodology is justified by the belief that such an approach will generate positive outcomes: it will produce insights able to advance our understanding of the phenomenon of interest.

Research design

The study comprises 30 in-depth interviews, each lasting approximately one hour. Each interview started with a discussion of a responsible purchasing

scenario. Three scenarios were developed and pretested through evaluation from four marketing academics, two PhD students in marketing, four qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey with 25 participants. The pretesting ensured that the vignettes did not manipulate consumers' views of responsible consumption, but simply presented the participants with an open consumption 'dilemma' where pro-social features need to be considered contextually with other factors. The scenarios describe three different purchase situations (chocolate, running shoes and a car) that offer consumers a responsible alternative. Scenarios allow us to compare systematically how consumers categorise the different situations (Grønhøj & Bech-Larsen 2010) and increase consumers' enjoyment of the process because participants do not need to remember past purchases, which can be demanding (Schoenberg & Ravdal 2000). An example of one scenario is presented in the Appendix.

Each participant evaluated only one scenario, mailed to them a few days before the interview. They were asked to collect eight to ten images that describe the thoughts and feelings they would have in the situation. Procedures based on the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) (Zaltman 1997) were used in the interview to investigate consumers' metaphorical thinking on responsible consumption and reveal how consumers categorise purchases of products promoting pro-social features (Zaltman 1997; Coulter 2006). Consumers were asked to present the images they had collected and discuss how the images related to the scenario. At the beginning of the interview, consumers would present their images, and talk about the thoughts and feelings associated with each image. This would be followed up by more questions aimed at exploring in depth the meaning of each image (Zaltman & Coulter 1995; Zaltman 1997). From this starting point, each interview would move into a discussion of several topics pertaining to consumer responsibility towards issues of social and environmental sustainability. This allowed us to triangulate the analysis of the scenarios with more information on the purchasing experiences of the consumers.

Through further probing, the associations between the images and the themes presented in the scenario were explored. For each image, consumers were asked a number of laddering questions and had the opportunity to describe how the image is associated with the scenario and responsible consumption in general.

The ZMET is an established projective research technique for exploring consumer motivations (Christensen & Olson 2002; Freestone & McGoldrick 2007), and presents a number of advantages when applied

to the study of responsible consumption. First, this context might require the discussion of issues difficult to verbalise for participants, and the use of images would facilitate the interview process. Second, the use of images helps identify potential impression management strategies that participants might adopt when discussing sensitive issues that involve questions of ethics or morality. Finally, images allow the identification of associations that would not normally be accessible through reliance solely on verbal communication. For these reasons, the ZMET has already been successfully applied to exploratory research into the motivations for responsible consumption choices.

Research participants

One of the goals of the study is to compare the categorisation process across consumers with different levels of interest in ethical issues associated with responsible consumption. Hence the study comprises interviews with consumers loyal to brands promoting pro-social features as well as consumers less committed to purchases of responsible products. This strategy is justified by the interest in identifying common patterns in consumers' interpretations of responsible purchases (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Miles & Huberman 1994). The Socially Responsible Purchase and Disposal (SRPD) scale (Webb *et al.* 2008) was used to assess participants' interest in consumption of pro-social products. In addition to the scale, the participants answered a few questions that allowed matching scenarios with their interests. Finally the design explores the categorisation process across participants that vary in terms of age and gender (Table 1). Recruitment was based on convenience sampling using personal and institutional networks – a procedure used in similar exploratory studies (e.g. Bray *et al.* 2011).

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed and coded. The open coding process identified the key dimensions that differentiate across consumers' perceptions of responsible purchases. We relied on constant comparison in order to identify similarities and differences across various instances of consumption (Fischer & Otnes 2006). We looked for specific cases that could refute the emerging patterns of interpretation (Spiggle 1994) and compared the emerging findings with the available literature to explore the coherence of the theoretical account with existing theory (Morgan 2007).

Table 1 Participants

Number	Gender	Age	Interview length	Involvement in responsible consumption (SRPD scale + interview data)	Scenario
1	Female	32	1 hr 07 min.	Low involvement	Chocolate
2	Female	42	1 hr 07 min.	Moderate involvement	Chocolate
3	Female	32	57 min.	Moderate involvement	Car
4	Female	32	1 hr 11 min.	Moderate involvement	Chocolate
5	Female	24	1 hr 00 min.	High involvement	Chocolate
6	Female	25	46 min.	High involvement	Running shoes
7	Female	45	1 hr 10 min.	High involvement	Chocolate
8	Female	42	1 hr 08 min.	Moderate involvement	Running shoes
9	Female	27	1 hr 05 min.	High involvement	Chocolate
10	Female	45	1 hr 12 min.	High involvement	Car
11	Female	32	1 hr 25 min.	High involvement	Car
12	Female	30	1 hr 31 min.	High involvement	Car
13	Female	29	1 hr 10 min.	Low involvement	Chocolate
14	Female	27	1 hr 11 min.	Moderate involvement	Running shoes
15	Female	25	1 hr 12 min.	High involvement	Chocolate
16	Female	60	1 hr 30 min.	High involvement	Chocolate
17	Female	30	59 min.	Moderate involvement	Running shoes
18	Male	29	1 hr 22 min.	High involvement	Running shoes
19	Male	33	1 hr 10 min.	Moderate involvement	Chocolate
20	Male	42	1 hr 00 min.	Moderate involvement	Car
21	Male	28	1 hr 10 min.	Low involvement	Car
22	Male	54	1 hr 00 min.	Moderate involvement	Running shoes
23	Male	32	1 hr 20 min.	Low involvement	Car
24	Male	44	1 hr 02 min.	Low involvement	Running shoes
25	Male	30	1 hr 11 min.	High involvement	Running shoes
26	Male	43	49 min.	Moderate involvement	Chocolate
27	Male	24	57 min.	Low involvement	Chocolate
28	Male	35	47 min.	Low involvement	Chocolate
29	Male	30	1 hr 07 min.	High involvement	Car
30	Male	25	57 min.	Low involvement	Running shoes

Findings: how consumers categorise purchases of responsible products

Our findings suggest that two key dimensions contribute to consumers' categorisation of purchases of responsible products: the relative importance of altruistic and self-interested goals, and the perception of the context of the behaviour as public or private.

Dimension one: the relative importance of altruistic and self-interested goals

The first key construal process concerns the altruistic or self-interested goals that consumers perceive as motivating the purchase. Our findings suggest that a different understanding of the goals influences consumers' motivation. When self-interested goals are salient, responsible alternatives are accepted if they contribute to personal benefits. When the choice is construed altruistically, purchase is motivated by the desire to help others affected by the transaction.

For consumers who hold pre-existing positive attitudes towards responsible consumption, personal values and empathy trigger an interpretation that focuses upon altruistic elements when considering low-priced fast-moving consumer goods such as chocolate.

This image came to my mind that was about deforestation and about destruction and the degradation of natural environment ... and obviously also the impact that it has on the orang-utan [...] I always think of this animal as being very human, very vulnerable [...]. So there is empathy with that creature [...] also [...] the community and the fact that they are damaged by these unethical farming practices [...] these crass farming methods are destroying their ways of life.
(Participant 5)

However, for the same group of participants, the interpretation changes when the purchase of a car is considered since this type of product brings to the fore financial implications and personal needs. Altruistic values are not relevant anymore because the decision is categorised as predominantly self-interested.

I am quite inclined when we buy a car to take into consideration the effect that it has on the environment obviously ... the CO₂ emissions have an impact and the rising sea levels and that type of thing. [...] But then it has to be a trade-off between what is best for the environment and something that is practical and affordable ... so all the other images are more about my family because they are all things that I would consider about buying a car, it is what you need a car for.
(Participant 11)

Different frames are adopted at different times by the same consumer. For one participant, moderately interested in responsible consumption, the emotional connection with the scenario's ethical issue made all the difference in evaluating a purchase decision. Early in the interview, she talks about the challenges that she faces as a consumer, but still frames the purchase experience as a problem of maximisation of personal self-interest.

[...] the cost of the chocolate would be something I would consider in my choice. If one was £1.50 and the other was £2.00, then I might go for the one at £2.00 but if the difference is too much [...] if the two products had the same price and the same taste and the only difference was that one is environmentally friendly, then I will probably buy it. [...] on the one hand I think I want to buy cheap, but obviously I realise that if anybody is working in bad conditions [...] so I thought about it the other day when I went to H&M and I bought three dresses and they were £9 ... so on one hand I was very happy because I managed to get three dresses for £9, but then I did think about it ... when I've paid ... how can they possibly be so cheap?! So this worries me ... that somewhere there is some three year old working in the night to make these things for me to wear. (*Participant 4*)

However, later on in the interview, she gives examples where the construal of the decision would change because of access to reliable information or an emotional reaction towards a specific ethical issue.

[...] any type of suffering and animal that has suffered [is a big concern to me]. [...] it is more emotive for me. [...] the creature has feelings and it would suffer whereas things like recycling and pollution I wouldn't necessarily associate them with suffering...although obviously they are connected but I wouldn't have that connection that I would have with the animal. [...] I like to buy from shops that have organic chickens because they're probably better looked after [...] they're much more expensive and so I used to buy a chicken once a week but now I do once every two weeks and that is a choice that I made because lots of people talked about the fact that chickens live in horrible conditions and the organic ones instead are able to roam freely and they are better looked after. (*Participant 4*)

Variations in the framing of the goals generate different motivations to the consumption experience. When participants construe a purchase as an opportunity to address challenges, the reason for complying is maintenance of self-esteem and respect of personal standards. Reflecting upon consumers that do not share their concerns, some participants attribute unethical consumption either to a lack of understanding of the problem or being 'out of touch'.

[...] people are still making choices without thinking of the consequences ... it means they haven't engaged with the impact, the wider impact of their choices; you know they are just thinking of the impact of the product on themselves [...] my colleague here is very surprised that I look for British products so I don't buy apples that don't come from the UK. [...] she thinks I am crazy because I deprive myself of apples during times of the year when they are not available in the UK. I think this view just shows how out of touch we are with global food growing seasons. (*Participant 12*)

A similar process applies also to participants less interested in responsible consumption. Once they frame the decision as more responsible, then failing to act on altruistic grounds sends a negative message about the individual.

‘[...] this should affect your choices. [...] if you know it and you don’t buy the product, then you are choosing not to be fair [...] it is there in your face, so if you decide not to do it, you are deciding not to be fair. [...] you would feel immoral. Because if something happens to somebody next door to you, you would probably take action, but just because it happens to somebody thousands of miles away, why shouldn’t you take action? [...] Basically it is hypocritical not acting while if it will happen to your local community, you will take action. (Participant 13)

It is important to note that the construal is neither purely egoistic nor purely altruistic but what is important is the relative saliency of opposing goals. This prioritisation influences motivation and behaviour (Gneezy *et al.* 2011), explaining why so-called ethical consumers do not always act in a way that is commensurate with their beliefs, and see consumption choices as a flexible practice (McEachern *et al.* 2010).

Dimension two: the private or public nature of the purchase

The second dimension influencing consumers’ construal of the decision pertains to the perception of the choice as private or public. The three scenarios we used in our interviews do not contain references to significant others. Yet, many consumers emphasise the importance of social influences. Some, who do not normally buy responsible products, claim that they would behave differently if they felt scrutinised by others.

I am being honest with you; it’s also a case of ‘name and shame’ as it were [...] like Bill Gates that when he wants people to contribute to his charity fund, rather than going to people and say ‘please, contribute’ or ‘you should contribute’ ... he says ‘I’m publicising the list of all the people who are earning this much and I am also listing who is contributing’ [...] so sometimes I would not be comfortable wearing let’s say a jacket with real fur in England, but I would be comfortable in Norway where people have to do it and it is common, so it depends ... it is not so much the environment but sometimes you need to be seen to be doing your bit. (Participant 28)

In other cases, especially for individuals who normally buy responsible alternatives, the presence of others reminds them of important moral commitments. The adherence to a group, and its values, offers an example to live up to, and reinforces the motivation to behave altruistically.

Whenever I'm making a decision about buying products at an ethical level ... I used to work for Oxfam, and something that always goes through my head is what would people at Oxfam think [*laughing*] ... I think that this sort of ... you know, that memory ... of their norms and the norms there ... that I adhered to when I was working there ... they are part of my conscience. (*Participant 5*)

Participants live the public dimension of consumption in radically different ways, depending upon the characteristics of the individual and the environmental circumstances. Sometimes, responsible consumption becomes an opportunity for status competition: buying responsible products looks good socially and sends a positive message to peers.

[...] you feel guilty about people's thoughts about you ... it's about what people may think ... If it was a really common thing or if it is something that there is a lot of press about and everybody is talking about it ... [...] there would be more pressure to make the right choice and you may think about what other people think [...] you don't want people to have the wrong perception of you [...] you don't want people's perceptions to be wrong [...] It's like peer pressure ... you follow the trend, it's like buying a brand ... You know what is popular; you do it because others do it. (*Participant 2*)

Participants more committed to responsible consumption often interpret purchases of products promoting pro-social features as contributing to the achievement of collective goals; a form of political action.

I mean people kind of joke about the wartime experience and how people at that time pulled together to get through the blitz and those kind of things, but I think that has been lost and we do need to try and get it back because we can all achieve a lot more if everybody works together rather than works against each other. [...] If we all buy these products, then it is going to have an impact and things will improve. (*Participant 11*)

What makes a purchase public? Those more engaged in responsible consumption do not need the physical presence of other people. They construe the purchase as public when conscious of what others would think of them. Their purchase decisions are embedded in a network of social relationships, so that a public element is always present to decisions involving responsible consumption.

[...] a lot of it is word of mouth as well ... People say something is good and I will listen to that ... And also people say this is a really good ethical company, I have had direct experience or I have been on a project when I went travelling and they really are helping ... I think word-of-mouth is really strong. [...] Greenpeace is one of my key websites for that and I read a lot of their information

... So, particularly, if something is discussed there, it will make a big difference.
(Participant 7)

The key element that differentiates public from private consumption is that individuals construe the purchase as part of a perceived social interaction relevant to their sense of self.

Discussion

This study shows that consumers can frame a responsible purchase in different ways. This account also illustrates how the framing affects motivation, allowing individuals to adapt their decision making to their ethical beliefs as well as to environmental cues (Stanovich & West 2000). The findings suggest two theoretical propositions that summarize the categorisation of responsible purchases:

P1: When evaluating products that include pro-social features, consumers frame the decision according to the relative importance of self-interested or altruistic goals. The framing of the decision as predominantly altruistic (self-interested) drives the pursuit of altruistic (self-interested) goals in the decision-making.

P2: When evaluating products that include pro-social features, consumers are influenced by the perception of the context as either public or private. The perception of a public context activates a concern for personal image and reputation, or offers the opportunity for self-expression and political action.

These propositions imply that consumers categorise pro-social goods through a specific process (Figure 1) driven by two dimensions. Consumers classify the purchase situation according to the relevance of self-interested versus altruistic goals. The identification of the ultimate target of the behaviour is the first cue used for this categorisation because it helps consumers understand whether self-interested goals or altruistic goals are predominant. Consumers also consider whether the choice is publicly relevant or connected to actual or imagined communities (Shaw 2007). Based on these two dimensions, consumers categorise the decision into one of four purchase categories. The flow presented in Figure 1 is a description of the logic, but the process does not necessarily imply differences in chronological processing. Consumers could interpret both dimensions

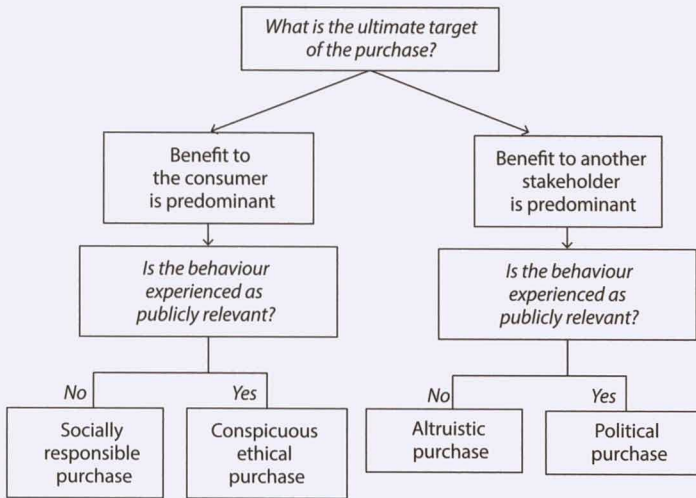


Figure 1 The process of interpretation and categorisation of responsible purchases

simultaneously or they might analyse them sequentially; this does not affect the categorisation result.

Classifying different behaviours is more helpful than classifying groups of consumers since a consumer can, at different times, experience different types of purchase. Moreover, consumers can construe the same product as a different type of consumption depending on the situation. However, we are not suggesting a deterministic approach; rather we are interested in presenting a pattern of appraisals that helps us understand how consumers can frame the purchase of responsible products since each of the four types identified in Figure 2 is based on different motivations.

The understanding of how people categorise responsible products advances research on the attitude–behaviour gap by modelling how consumers construe the purchasing situation and the role of framing effects. The gap is not simply caused by the fact that ‘consumers don’t walk their talk’ (e.g. Carrington *et al.* 2010), but that consumers construe different purchases differently. Current approaches to the attitude–behaviour gap assume that responsible consumption is motivated by ethical concerns, as in the case of an *altruistic purchase*. However this assumption is not tenable because a product’s ethical features will not always be construed as morally salient by consumers. Individuals can categorise ethical features in different ways and will not necessarily attribute an altruistic value to them. By advancing a more systematic understanding of the categorisation processes



		Construal of the context of the behaviour	
		Private	Public
Construal of the target of the decision	<p><i>Self-interest is predominant</i></p> 	<p><i>Socially responsible purchase</i></p> <p>Characteristics of the value offered by pro-social features (PFs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PFs represent predominantly an individual benefit of emotional or functional nature • PFs represent cues that reinforce the emotional or functional benefits of the product for the self • PFs weighted in the same way as other features of the offer and do not represent the primary reason for the purchase of the product 	<p><i>Conspicuous responsible purchase</i></p> <p>Characteristics of the value offered by pro-social features (PFs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PFs represent a way to signal status and enhance social self-concept • PFs represent cues that reinforce the social benefits and implies a form of status competition • PFs are relatively more important than other features of the offer and represent the primary reason for the purchase of the product
	 <p><i>Altruism is predominant</i></p>	<p><i>Altruistic purchase</i></p> <p>Characteristics of the value offered by pro-social features (PFs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PFs represent predominantly an ethical choice aimed at helping others and/or protecting the environment (vicarious benefit) • PFs represent cues that reinforce altruistic goals, activate an empathetic feeling and make personal benefits less salient • PFs are relatively more important than other features of the offer and represent the primary reason for the purchase of the product 	<p><i>Political purchase</i></p> <p>Characteristics of the value offered by pro-social features (PFs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PFs represent an ethical choice aimed at helping others and/or protecting the environment that is embedded in a pattern of social interactions and/or offers a possibility for political self-expression • PFs represent cues that reinforce altruistic goals and make personal benefits less salient and social reference to the values of the community more important • PFs are relatively more important than other features of the offer and represent the primary reason for the purchase of the product

Figure 2 A motivational typology of responsible purchases

adopted by consumers, this study offers a framework that can lead to more effective strategies to bridge the gap between attitudes and behaviours.

Different types of responsible purchase

We suggest that there are four types of responsible purchase, and each represents a category with specific influences on the motivation to buy responsible products.

Altruistic purchase

Participants interpret this category as an altruistic choice aimed at helping others or the environment. Consumers perceive the purchase as private, and a desire to be consistent to personal ethical beliefs is the main motivation for action.

Because there is so much choice [...] I would just go for that. [...] it is basic human empathy with the people and other communities ... sometimes other species ... I think that responsible people have to think globally, think of the impacts of their actions; not in a narrow, blinkered way. (*Participant 5*)

Much of the research exploring the attitude–behaviour gap focuses on this type of consumption. There is an assumption that consumers have positive attitudes based on ethical concerns and the gap is caused by the inability of transforming this moral commitment into action (Carrington *et al.* 2010). However, there are three additional frames that consumers can apply to responsible consumption.

Socially responsible purchase

Participants frame this type of purchase as a self-interested choice in a private situation. Consumers acknowledge their social responsibilities but still frame the decision as aimed at maximising personal utility. Here pro-social features are part of a bundle of attributes that consumers evaluate. The responsible alternative is selected if it maximises the perceived benefits.

I think I get swayed very much by the packaging, by the people on the packaging ... all smiling and happy [...] so I get the feeling that it is going to them [...] it's nice ... it is one of the few times I can perhaps feel responsible ... I have never had any issues with the performances of the product in the case of fair trade. If you think about tea, it tastes just as nice if not a little bit nicer than others [...] I don't feel that I have lost out by paying a bit more because the quality is very much the same if not sometimes better. The fair trade products, sometimes they are better, it depends, but they are certainly not worse. (*Participant 3*)

While the advantages that the purchase brings to the self will motivate a *socially responsible purchase*, an *altruistic purchase* is empathetic and born of a desire to help. This differentiation is consistent with research on other types of altruistic behaviour (e.g. Gneezy *et al.* 2011). Moreover only the latter category is truly 'moral': consumers would feel that they are breaking an ethical principle not buying the responsible product.

Conspicuous responsible purchase

The centrality of social reputation characterises this type of consumption. Consumers buy responsible products to acquire the associated social benefits. Although these benefits arise from the product being perceived as altruistic, the motivation is self-interested.

The feeling that you're doing the better thing and a lot of people are not doing the best thing [...] it helps certain consumptive aspirations and makes you feel more satisfied with what you're doing. [...] In the same way people can get attached to brands [...] this is the same but the brand is related to ethical considerations. [...] as you might want to buy your Calvin Klein because it makes you feel better ... in the same way this product would make you feel better because you're doing the ethical thing. (*Participant 18*)

In this type of consumption, the gap between attitudes and behaviours can be bridged by making the responsible alternative socially visible and distinctive (Griskevicius *et al.* 2010). In this case the translation of attitudes into actual behaviours does not depend on the integration of pre-existing attitudes into personal patterns of behaviour (Carrington *et al.* in press), but rests on the ability of marketers to make the product or service socially distinctive for the consumer.

Political purchase

When consumers experience the purchase as public, rooted in responsible beliefs and framed as an altruistic choice, they engage in *political purchase*, implying that they see themselves as part of a community that can be real or imagined (e.g. Shaw *et al.* 2006). Some consumers, through this sense of political engagement, develop a special attachment to their purchase decision that cannot be associated with other product attributes.

[...] this [image] would make me think of all the things that are empowering and [...] all the things that I agree with; that I like to strive for and I connect with [...] every time I choose a non-ethical option I guess it is kind of foolishly ... perhaps, a small step away from these ideals [...] it is like voting and every time you spend ... every time you spend is like voting for the world you want really. (*Participant 15*)

The motivation for action is completely different from *conspicuous responsible purchases*. Support for social causes motivates *political purchases*, and personal gain is secondary in terms of motivation. This type is also different from an *altruistic purchase* because the behaviour is

lived publicly and construed as part of a collective experience that can lead to political change. This purchase goes beyond altruism and includes the motivation to enact political principles and the desire to show membership of the consumer movement. While an *altruistic purchase* is about empathy and respect for personal moral principles, a *political purchase* is about supporting a political cause and a sense of consumer empowerment (Micheletti 2003). In this case the attitude–behaviour gap can be tackled relying primarily on the role of consumption choices as markers of social and political identity.

Managerial implications

The application of categorisation theory to the attitude–behaviour gap presents important implications for practitioners. Understanding how consumers frame their responsible consumption decisions is a prerequisite for the development of successful marketing strategies in this area. This insight is also important for market researchers who investigate responsible consumption trends. The current dominant approach of segmenting consumers according to their attitudes towards ethical issues (e.g. Ottman 2011; Memery *et al.* 2012) should be integrated with an analysis of the relevant categorisation processes. Our qualitative data show that, even for a segment of ‘deep greens’, responsible purchases can be construed in different ways. While traditional segmentations assume that ethical concern is the main source of motivation for this group of consumers, we observe that they can experience all the different types of purchase identified in Figure 2. Consumers who are less committed to responsible consumption are even more flexible in their use of various frames to understand different purchase situations. Marketers should explore whether the categorisation processes used by consumers are in line with the characteristics of the product that are being actively promoted by the company. For example, advertising electric cars as alternatives able to offer good value for money (*socially responsible purchase*) or as environmentally friendly choices (*altruistic purchase*) will not work if most consumers construe this product as a form of *conspicuous responsible purchase* (Griskevicius *et al.* 2010). In case such a misalignment exists, marketers should change their campaigns to ensure that they acknowledge the framing processes adopted by their target audience. Understanding how consumers frame responsible purchases will allow bridging the gap between the general positive attitudes that are often recorded towards responsible products and the purchase of these alternatives in the marketplace.

Future research and limitations

This study opens interesting avenues for future research. First, our framework has been developed from a small number of interviews focused on a few product categories. Further investigations could test our typology of responsible purchases to assess: (1) to what extent framing plays a dominant role in decision making; (2) whether some dimensions influence consumers' categorisations more than others. It is important to consider, however, that we already know from social-psychology research that framing plays an important role in decision making. Consequently, when applying categorisation theories to this new field of inquiry, it is important to ask 'how' they influence decisions and then allow further research to quantify the magnitude of this effect.

Second, more research is needed to understand exactly what environmental cues can trigger each of the construals presented in this paper. What exactly causes ethical concerns in a purchase situation? What cues can activate awareness of public consumption? Third, we need to develop a better understanding of the attitude-behaviour gap in relation to the framing processes that consumers can use. If, for example, some forms of categorisation favour consistency between stated attitudes and behaviours, the challenge for marketers is to facilitate the use of those framing processes by consumers.

One limitation of this article is that it identifies only explicit categorisation processes from consumers' own verbal accounts. Future research should extend the model presented here by looking at the role of implicit categorisation in responsible purchases, since individuals might not always be aware of the effects that framing has on their decisions. Moreover the characteristics of categorisation processes in different cultures and across different product categories should also be examined in future research.

Appendix: Example of one scenario (chocolate purchase)

You head to your local supermarket wishing to do your weekly shopping. One of the products you want to buy is chocolate. Although you know several brands, you are still not sure which one you want to buy and decide that you will probably pick one on the spot.

As you move down the aisle where all the chocolate brands are on display, you start to consider the alternatives. Several different brands of chocolate are on display able to satisfy a large variety of tastes and dietary requirements. In addition to the traditional milk chocolate bars, there are several other alternatives, such as dark and white chocolate. Different

types of nuts, caramel, vanilla and other ingredients are also often used to create a wide range of combinations. Packaging is usually very colourful and designed in order to attract consumers' attention.

Several chocolate brands use palm oil as one of their ingredients. The palm oil used is often sourced from specific regions (e.g. West Africa, Indonesia). The increased farming and reduction of rainforests in these areas are increasingly endangering the orang-utan (a type of big ape).

Assume you do not have complete information on which brands are using palm oil sourced from these regions. However, you spot a brand of organic chocolate that explicitly mentions that it avoids the use of palm oil due to its dubious environmental record. This new brand also claims to inspect all the suppliers of ingredients in order to ensure high ethical standards, and the company has been endorsed by an international organisation that promotes animal welfare.

You consider carefully all the alternatives as you prepare to choose one specific brand.

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