

A Moral Competency Approach to Ethical Consumption

INTRODUCTION

Ethical consumption is the practice of purchasing goods and services produced in a way that minimizes social and/or environmental damage. It involves avoiding unnecessary purchases and purposefully choosing not to buy products that cause harm. Ethical consumers buy less, and, when they do make a purchase, they consider the implications of their choices *before* they buy.¹ Peñaloza and Price (2003) describe ethical consumers as people who make a conscious effort to reject marketing, using beliefs and values to guide their product choices. Similar to Miller (1998), we do not cast consumption as being moral or immoral. Rather, we view it as a medium for conveying moral identity, as expressed in consumer decision-making.

Being a consumer naturally involves dealing with uncertainty and multiple options, which can readily lead to confusion. As a result, there is often a gap between consumers' espoused values and their behavioral actions (Bray, Johns, & Kilborn, 2011). Even those who say they care about ethical issues rarely seek out information to guide their product choices. Shoppers are frequently inconsistent, lacking a stable, rational, or logical rubric to discern utility in their decision-making efforts (Irwin, 2015). Dholakia (2000) explains that people with low levels of ownership for ethical consumption are likely to practice self-deception. People often mislead themselves into thinking that their ethical principles are being supported in their product choice-actions, when they actually are not (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). Our concern is that people who regard themselves as ethical consumers are largely unaware of their potential to be hypocritical. This disparity is heightened when the element of temptation is present.

To be ethically congruent, people need to be more aware of their efforts in how they maintain

¹ See <http://www.ethicalconsumer.org>.

their preestablished desire to be an ethical consumer. Leveraging a strength-based approach to advance ethical behavior (Sekerka, Comer, & Godwin, 2014), we address the call for research to understand consumers' volitional self-resistance strategies (Dholakia, 2000). We outline a pragmatic route to ethical consumption by applying specific moral competencies to the decision-making path. We target a decision "not to buy" a product as a means to ethical consumption, engaging in moral restraint as the outcome goal. While research in consumer behavior reflects the importance of self-control (Baumeister, 2002), the value of moral restraint has gone unnoticed (Maitland, 1997). To advance these concerns, we asked: *How do ethical consumers foster and support a desire not to buy in the face of a product temptation?*

Perhaps counter-intuitively, our research question is not addressed by learning how to manage responses to "pre-suasion" and persuasion (Cialdini, 2016, 2001). Rather, we broach this inquiry by describing skills that help consumers manage their competing desires, learning to direct their attentions away from short-term gratification and toward achieving longer-term ideals via moral restraint. In so doing, we extend the research on self-regulation in consumption, explicating a responsible process that can foster ongoing adult moral development. Assuming a person wants to be an ethical consumer, we show how moral restraint enables an ability to rally against the socio-emotional forces that compel a person to buy. Product decisions are, in fact, ethical challenges, discrete ethical issues that need to be recognized and managed. Therefore, we leverage ethical decision-making theory (Rest, 1986; Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007), outlining a path where moral restraint becomes the targeted outcome goal, emphasizing a sustained desire to be ethical when facing a temptation to buy an unnecessary purchase. Propositional statements are presented, outlining how moral competencies associated with moral strength (Sekerka, 2012), can bolster a consumer's desire to be ethically congruent with their moral identity.

ETHICAL CONSUMPTION

Research has addressed a variety of approaches to ethical consumption, including: 1) non- or anti-consumption (Cherrier, 2009); 2) consumer culture resistance (Peñaloza & Price, 2003; Zavestoski, 2002); 3) consumer boycotts (Herrman, 1993; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004); 4) counter-cultural movements (Victoria, 2002); 5) emancipated consumption (Holt, 2002); and 6) conscious consumption (Szmigin, Carrigan, & McEachern, 2008). This work evokes an understanding of what it means to be ethical in a “throw-away” society (Cooper, 2005). However, the perceived value of ethical consumption in the West remains limited (Siegle, 2006), despite the fact that it can lead to unhealthy buying behaviors (Natarajan & Goff, 1991). Buying products that lack environmental sustainability and socially responsible practices tacitly endorses their ongoing presence in the market. The resulting dysfunctionality (Plutchik & van Praag, 1995) required intervention strategies to mitigate long-term harmful consequences (Biitz & Austin, 1993). But when the culture continually reaffirms self-interest, media hype amplifies narcissistic vulnerabilities, prompting immediate gratification and excess.

Consumption is, in and of itself, a value. Many people take pride in their ability to acquire material goods. Consuming is continually reified and affirmed as producers endeavor to create new norms that cultivate perceptions of need (e.g., Apple customers waiting in line overnight for a new release). In the United States (U.S.), the national identity rests firmly on a “quintessential consumer culture” (Berger, 2000, p. 28). The use of big data drives ads designed to fit individuals’ unique profiles, making temptation an integrated feature of everyday life (Stallworth, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Americans spend \$1.2 trillion annually on nonessential items (e.g., jewelry, alcohol, gambling, and candy).²

² See <http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2011/04/23/number-of-the-week-americans-buy-more-stuff-they-dont-need/>.

Corporations stimulate the idea that robust consumer spending creates prosperity and economic success. The U.S. Gross Domestic Product has become dependent upon personal spending to establish the nation's economic health (70% in 2014).³ Consumer cultures attribute idealized images of affluent lifestyles to positive outcomes like “success, happiness, and rewarding interpersonal relationships” (Garðarsdóttir & Dittmar, 2012, p. 472). People come to assess one another based on what they possess or can afford to buy (Berger, 2000). Most troubling is the belief that a person can buy their character via the ownership of things, rather than by engaging in behaviors that establish it.

Advertisers are experts at latching on to psychological weakness, tempting consumers with a sense of entitlement to have whatever they want. Slogans like McDonalds' “You deserve a break today,” TempurPedic's “You deserve a better night's sleep,” or Restasis' “You deserve brighter eyes,” let consumers invoke entitlement rationales to buy out of a sense of deservedness (Kivetz & Simonson, 2002). In its ad for sporting equipment, retailer Golfsmith asks shoppers, “When you get a bonus check, do you have to think hard between a new set of clubs and setting it aside for your child's college fund? Yeah, you would do anything for golf.” While humorous, this ad tempts customers to fulfill their selfish desires over longer-term goals.

Beyond these appeals, marketers use visuals, sound, light, and smell to entice consumers into believing that they will not only look and feel better, but will actually *be better* when products are consumed. Some appeals strive to increase temporal demand, prompting impatience by selling imminent opportunity, reminding shoppers that the product is “yours for the asking,” “buy now,” “for a limited time only,” or “it's only a phone call away” (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991). With temptations omnipresent in a consumer culture, moral awareness during a purchase

³ See http://useconomy.about.com/od/grossdomesticproduct/f/GDP_Components.htm.

decision can easily become obscured.

When a person is tempted, it is easier to over-consume. People are frequently motivated by unregulated desires that result in a failure of self-control (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994; Bagozzi, Moore, & Leone, 2004). Temptation in consumption is a desire or impulse prompted by an external influence to buy something that is unnecessary and/or to make an unwise or unethical purchase. Temptation necessitates psychological costs, particularly when exercising willpower or limiting a vice (e.g., Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002; Baumeister, 2002). A paradoxical effect associated with temptation is that it provides a conscious internal alert to impose moral awareness, yet often actually leads to decreased self-control. Hodgson (1989) explains that repressing temptation requires moral restraint, an ability to bring forward the reasons for *not* acting on an impulsive desire. He adds that the “quality and clarity of our expectations determines the quality and persistence of our actions” (p. 252). To rally against consumer temptation, we identify moral restraint as a targeted moral outcome goal.

MORAL RESTRAINT

Moral restraint is the ethical imposition of constrained voluntary action.⁴ It is not externally imposed through directions, orders, or commands. Rather, it refers to a form of self-control imposed by a desire to ensure that values based upon the needs of others (exercising a consideration toward sentient beings and/or the natural environment) are exercised in daily life. Acts of moral restraint stem from personal and cultural beliefs, norms, and mores exercised individually and collectively. Applied to ethical consumption, moral restraint often governs a decision not to buy a product or service that does not fulfill a genuine need, whilst considering the potential impacts of one’s consumer choices. A market economy is driven by a culture of

⁴ See <http://definitions.uslegal.com/m/moral-restraint/>.

consumption, effectively functioning when freedom and moral restraint are well balanced. In other words, autonomy requires the countervailing force of ethical responsibility. Prior research in ethical consumption describes the importance of willpower, self-control, and/or self-regulation to guide consumer choice management. While personal control is often framed as a technique or skill (explicated later in this work), it can also be a personal value. Over time, moral restraint can become second nature, evolving into or becoming engrained as a character trait (Rokeach, 1973).

As an Outcome Goal

While self-regulation and self-control are the focus of numerous studies in the realm of consumer behavior (e.g., Baumeister, 2002), surprisingly little research examines moral restraint. Moral restraint is manifest via self-imposed incentives (to avoid costs and promote gains), derived from values that induce a decision-maker to conclude that acting on the opportunity is wrong. Bandura (2002) explains how self-control is rooted in personal standards linked to self-sanctioning. Consumers can learn how to trigger these mechanisms deliberately, maintaining the will to proceed with moral restraint when facing tempting consumer decisions. We argue that being an ethical consumer involves establishing, affirming, and demonstrating moral restraint as a valued goal, one that takes precedence over competing momentary desires.

Product temptations present ethical issues requiring self-awareness and vigilance, directing attentions toward short-term and first-order desires (e.g., buying a new outfit to look attractive in a social setting). Hoch and Loewenstein (1991) describe two forms of self-directed control: desire- and willpower-based. Ethical consumers may attempt to attenuate immediate desires prompted by temptation by physically or psychologically reducing their proximity to the product. Alternatively, they may attempt to overpower temptations by relying on willpower strategies. We identify moral restraint as an established moral action, thereby providing a competing value and

outcome expectancy to reduce the compelling nature of an unwanted product temptation. Based on goal-setting and -striving behavior, consumers can benefit from a deliberate consideration of whether acting (or not acting) on a product temptation contributes to their ability to achieve moral restraint.

Unexpected desires can drive impulsivity, thoughts and feelings that can influence behavior (Lemrová, Reiterová, Renáta Fatěnová, Lemr, & Tang, 2014). Desire fulfillment offers pleasure, whereas a lack renders a sense of loss. Satiating desires may enable short-term mood repair (Verplanken & Sato, 2011), providing relief and gratification. Although short-term benefits of unnecessary consumption are often accompanied by longer-term negative consequences (e.g., increased stress, anxiety, and depression) (Nisslé & Bschor, 2002), most people are willing to risk an uncertain future for an immediate benefit. As such, ethical consumers will have more power to refute product temptations if they identify moral restraint as a desirable character strength and as purposeful outcome expectancy. To foster the willingness to move in this direction requires moral identity salience.

MORAL COMPETENCIES FORTIFYING MORAL IDENTITY

Blindly affirming a sustained pursuit of self through consumption is, at some point, likely to present moral conflict. Making competition values known (to the self) is central in creating a more informed ethical decision-making effort. People experience possessions and consumption activities as extensions of their self-concepts or identities (Belk, 1988). What you wear, eat, read, and drive, along with where and how you live reflect numerous consumer decisions and thus your moral identity in action. For example, buying processed foods (rather than natural healthier options), a gas guzzling vehicle (rather than a more environmentally-friendly option), or any product that lacks ethical production and distribution. Gopaldas (2014) explains how consumers

integrate products into their concept of self (e.g., apparel, cars, phones, and computers). In so doing, products are no longer perceived as commodities; they become extensions of one's identity. Adopting the self-extension view, people are motivated to consume to distinguish themselves from others, retain a sense of past, maintain identity coherency, explore aspiration identities, and to signal a presumed or actual identity to self and others (Tian & Belk, 2005). One's identity becomes a heuristic tool in product purchase decisions, as the consumer considers: *Is this product me or not me?*

Moral identity refers to the extent to which a person sees themselves as being ethical, holding this identity central to their definition of self. It includes a desire to represent a particular aspect of self to others. Moral identity reflects acting on one's belief system, what the individual perceives as right or wrong, and then connecting these beliefs to a sense of self (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Based on principles of social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), moral identity appears in individual differences, central in defining the self (Blasi, 1984). Social cognitive theory explains that people with strong moral identities readily access and activate their ethical self-schemas (Lapsley & Lasky, 2001). Morality is described by the presence of traits like humility and care for others (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Having a sense and/or belief that the moral self drives internalized standards, the individual has principles that they strive to live up to in their everyday choice-actions.

As described by Zhu, Treviño, & Zheng (2016), moral identity is influential in how people perceive and address ethical issues; therefore, proving to be a critical factor in ethical decision-making and moral action. Research describes how moral identity is positively related to prosocial behavior and negatively related to unethical behavior (Shao, Aquino, & Freeman, 2008). The construct is represented by two dimensions: symbolization and internalization; the former

connotes a desire to represent the self to others as moral, and the latter a perception of possessing moral characteristics. When symbolization is high, people tend to publicly express aspects of their moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002). When internalization of moral identity is high, people tend to avoid, notice, or address unethical behavior, while also paying attention to how decisions are made (e.g., Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007). Moral identity thereby serves as a regulatory mechanism because of internalized notions of right and wrong that guide ethical decisions and behaviors (Aquino & Reed, 2002). The motivational power of moral identity arises from a desire for consistency of self (Blasi, 1984). To avoid negative moral emotions and experience positive ones, strength in moral identity moves a person to act in ways that are identity consistent (Aquino et al., 2009), which represents an important link between moral judgment and moral action (Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007).

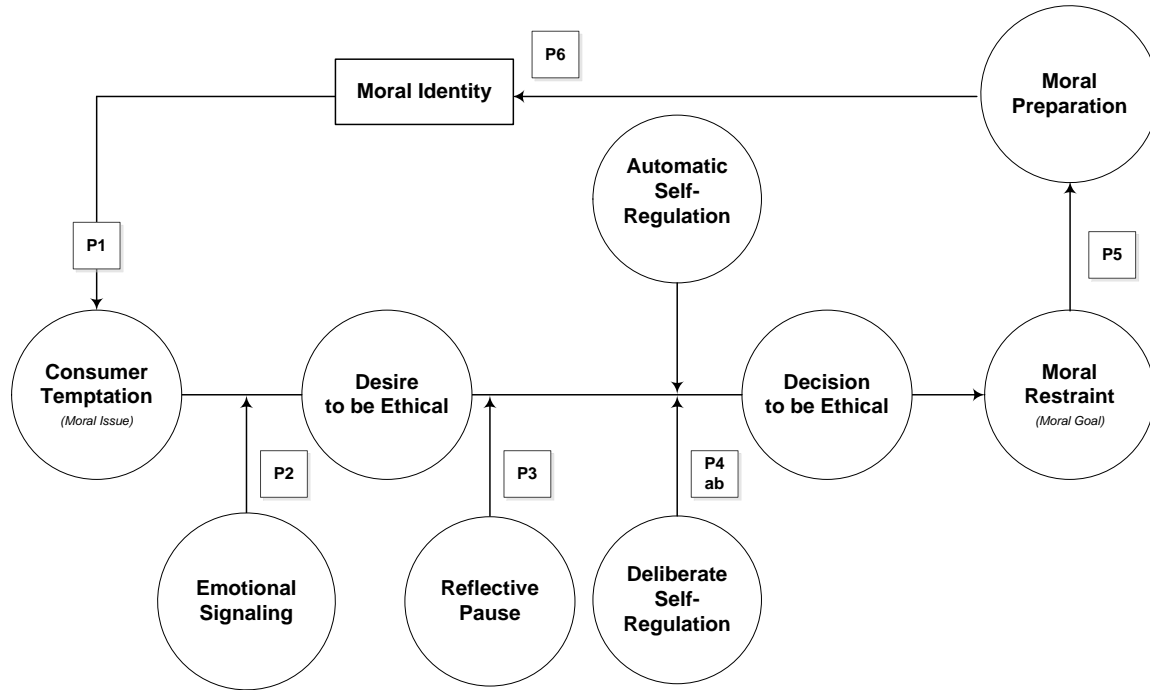
Moral identity demonstratively influences ethical decision-making (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 1999). Thus, we argue that people who see themselves as ethical consumers will be more likely to frame a tempting product situation as an ethical issue. Experiencing a purchase temptation can serve as a cue that one's moral identity is being tested. To establish internal consistency, the ethical consumer is likely to become motivated to align their decision-making efforts accordingly. Purchase temptations represent a potential threat toward sustaining an ethical self, thereby prompting ethical awareness. We state this expectation as:

Proposition 1: Saliency and strength of moral identity as an ethical consumer influences the degree to which a consumer product temptation is recognized and considered an ethical issue.

Assuming the consumer has a desire to be ethical and identifies moral restraint as a moral goal, certain practices can support their decision-making effort (see Figure 1). The four moral competencies, emotional signaling, reflective pause, self-regulation, and moral preparation, are

skills known to support moral strength (Sekerka, McCarthy, & Bagozzi, 2011). Standing up to a product temptation, refuting a desire to buy, is an act that requires strength of character. Because emotional reactions set the stage for behavioral responses, the use of emotional signaling is especially useful at the onset of the decision-making path.

Figure 1. Managing Consumer Product Temptations with Moral Restraint



Emotional Signaling

Personal feelings provide anticipations and/or intuitions that require recognition to be effectively managed (Hofmann & Baumert, 2010). How we feel, or think we might feel, significantly influences what value-based goals are relevant. Affective state can fuel unbridled impulsivity (Weiss et al., 2015) and thereby derail a thoughtful choice. Mood and other emotions accompanying temptation can be positive or negative, such as excited and invigorated or anxious and stressed (Baumeister & Alquist, 2009). A consumer's emotional status may enhance or deter cognitive processes. Feelings often signal where to direct attention (George & Brief, 1996) and facilitate choice-making (Bagozzi, 2003), which contributes to the development of options and

anticipated situations, thereby supporting the ability to recognize and consider the implications of one's actions (Damasio, 1994). Affective state can influence cerebral processes that inform how the moral aspects of a decision are perceived and managed. Emotions often play a critical role in motivating or deterring ethical choices, such as the decision to purposefully impose moral restraint (Fishbach & Labroo, 2007).

Scholars explain how moral emotions promote respect for self and others (Kristjánsson, 2002). Consumers wanting to be ethical can leverage emotions, using them to affirm their pre-established higher-order values to be ethical and to endorse a decision to exercise moral restraint. Emotions are linked with a sense of progress toward achieving desired goals in a cybernetic system of control (Carver & Scheier, 1990, 1998). Applying this idea to consumption, as the decision-maker pursues a moral goal (or fails to do so), emotional reactions are likely to emerge. Typically, positive emotions move a person toward goal completion, whereas negative emotions thwart progression. The influence of affect depends upon its intensity and how the person generally copes with affective cues (Moore & Zhang, 2010). Honoring and understanding how to deal with incoming affective information is a crucial element of resisting tempting product appeals. If emotions are ignored or go unmanaged, a presumptive plan to impose moral restraint may be unconsciously derailed.

The pursuit of moral action in the face of a temptation can be guided by moral emotions like pride, guilt, or shame. These feelings serve as a motivational force to do what is right and avoid what is wrong (Kroll & Egan, 2004). By understanding how emotions influence and/or fortify the desire to proceed with moral restraint (as a pre-established goal), consumers can learn to harness what tempts them and direct this affective power to affirm their moral identity (to be an ethical consumer). Mindful that disappointment may be elevated as a result of denying a desire,

people can learn to become aware of and then reframe/redirect their emotions (positive or negative) toward attaining their moral goal. For example, after an initial sense of displeasure, the person can feel pride in their ability to reaffirm their moral identity.

Emotional signaling is one of several skills present among those who respond with moral strength when facing an ethical challenge (Sekerka, McCarthy, & Bagozzi, 2011). Being aware that feelings are unconscious drivers of behavioral responses, individuals recognize emotions as cues to slow down, observe, and interpret feelings as information, then prompting the imposition of other moral competencies that support moral restraint. Such openness to visceral experiences and the ability to direct this input toward achieving a pre-established goal enables those with a first-order desire to be ethical to proceed with a more informed and self-directed decision-making effort. Looking for, being attentive to, and managing affective cues—rather than simply reacting—can help consumers effectively respond to internal motivational forces and to consider whether or not it is in their best interest to act on them.

Without awareness that emotions require self-imposed management, errors in perception and judgment can easily occur. Rather than experiencing temptation as a compelling enticement to buy, emotions spurred by short-term desires can signal a need to impose broader thinking and to cultivate anticipated emotions that support long-term goals. Thinking things forward and back in time (togglng) can be particularly useful when trying to impose moral restraint. For example, reflecting on questions like: *What happened the last time I succumbed to a temptation?; How will I feel in a week, if I acquiesce to this temptation?; Am I being hypocritical if I buy this product—i.e., would a purchase show a lack of commitment to my moral identity as an ethical consumer?; If I buy this product, what longer-term goal am I short-changing or forgoing?*

The potential for experiencing negative emotions brought on by the rejection of an

immediate desire is likely to test a consumer's resolve. Recognizing that loss is merely the denial of a short-term desire in exchange for achieving a longer-term gain is likely to require a deliberate effort. If attention is directed to affective cues with intention, individuals can corral and leverage their emotions, rather than being unconsciously driven by them. Moral agents learn to direct their emotional energy to serve higher-order pre-established goals; in this case, to be an ethical consumer and impose moral restraint. We state this expectation as:

Proposition 2: When facing a consumer product temptation, use of emotional signaling moderates ethical issue awareness and a desire to act with moral restraint.

Reflective Pause

People often yield to temptation by acting impulsively (Mukhopadhyay & Johar, 2009). Even consumers known for their self-control can be thrown off-course when short-term gains and emotional appeals interfere with a value-driven plan (Ajzen, 1991). To effectively counter external and internal forces, the intent to be an ethical consumer must be reinforced and supplemented by higher-order goals (Tang & Chiu, 2003). But these goals may not always offer enough salient value in the heat of the moment to oppose the countervailing power of an immediate temptation. Accordingly, a move to slow things down can be useful. The ability to impose a time-out for reflection is another moral competency that supports moral strength when facing an ethical challenge (Sekerka, McCarthy, & Bagozzi, 2011). In choosing to pause and reflect, consumers can reaffirm their awareness, imposing self-directed management to consider the ramifications of a purchase before taking action. During this pause, alternatives are considered, along with the potential outcomes associated with them. In pausing, the ethical consumer weighs the pros and cons of acting (or not acting) in a particular way, considering past and/or potential actions and their likely implications. More specifically, when faced with a

tempting product, self-imposed questions in a reflective period help foster clarity about one's motives. A consumer might ask: *What are my reasons for buying this product?, Do I really need this item?, Can I afford this purchase?, Why do I need to buy this product right now? (Can it wait?), What are the implications of my buying this product?, and/or How will acting on this temptation influence my ability to achieve my established long-term goals?*

A reflective pause provides a foundation for prudential judgment and temperance. This offers time to anticipate how other virtues might be applied. Reflection is a useful tool in determining the practicality of a decision or action, which is important in moral judgment. Pausing helps a person ascertain what issues are present, what is at stake, and what needs to be done (Sternberg et al., 2000). But discernment, thoughtfulness, and mindfulness (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000), and practical wisdom (Fowers & Tjeltveit, 2003) require time and effort. Reflection slows down the impulsivity that temptations tend to invoke. When faced with an ethical challenge, moral actors report stepping away from the situation and engaging in other unrelated activities (Sekerka, McCarthy, & Bagozzi, 2011). This side-step to take time out can alter, override, or postpone initial reactions while also targeting responses for appropriate next steps in keeping with a broader long-term value to be an ethical consumer. We state this expectation as:

Proposition 3: When facing a consumer product temptation, a reflective pause moderates a desire and decision to act with moral restraint.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation is an essential element of moral action at the heart of human welfare (Vohs, Baumeister, & Tice, 2008) and central in resisting impulses when faced with temptations (Vohs & Faber, 2007). Engaging self-regulation is a way to manage desires, enabling achievement of important goals designed to uphold moral principles (McAdams, 2009). Self-regulatory capabilities help keep affective experiences and desires in perspective and in check (Salovey,

Hsee, & Mayer, 2001). Importantly, self-regulation implies withholding an impulse to act, as well as knowing when to proceed. Prior research describes self-regulation as a tool or skill that enables moral strength, identified as a fundamental moral competency (Sekerka, McCarthy, & Bagozzi, 2011).

The idea of self-regulation may be unappealing when tempted by a product that offers immediate pleasure (Atalay & Meloy, 2011). Given that self-regulation may confer short-term hardship, it may initially be experienced as an interruption of natural tendencies (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004), but its application endorses resistance to temptation, thereby supporting a path toward achieving long-term aims (Myrseth, Fishbach, & Trope, 2009). Whybrow (2013) suggests that consumption cultures promote instant gratification, thereby reducing self-regulation in society. But most adults can learn to modulate their behavior “in accordance with self-regulatory goals or consciously held values and beliefs” (Hofmann, Friese, & Strack, 2009, p. 171). To the extent that an individual wants to be ethical and has acquired values that support ethical consumption, self-regulation can augment the influence of a desire to act with moral restraint on a decision to do so.

Automatic and Deliberate

To manage impulsive reactions to consumer temptations, self-regulating the influence of desires can be automatic or deliberate. The former imposes self-regulatory control as a consequence of a behavioral orientation learned early on in life (e.g., Kochanska, 1994; Posner & Rothbart, 2000). A natural automatic tendency may stem from a person’s values, traits, or virtues that translate into first-order desires. This is observable in an immediate willful application of personal standards to affirm a pre-established desire to be an ethical consumer and recognizing and striving to impose the value of self-regulation. Features of this concept were set forth by

Jones and Versteegen (1997) in their theory of moral approbation. Milyavskaya, Inzlicht, Hope, and Koestner (2015) explain that ethical motivations shaped by value-based desires can help protect consumers against the influence of temptation, boosting self-regulation and supporting self-control imbued automatically. Pursuing *want-to* goals are intrinsically satisfying and offer internal or natural incentives (Cantor & Blanton, 1996), which can endorse a decision not to buy. But rather than relying upon one's values to impose self-regulation, a more deliberate form allows a consumer to replace inappropriate initial reactions with more effective ones (DeWall, Baumeister, Mead, & Vohs, 2011).

For most people, making a decision to impose moral restraint in the face of a consumer temptation usually takes a concerted effort. People can learn to consciously evaluate their desires and decide whether or not they want to maintain them. Sekerka and Bagozzi (2007) explain how decision-makers can reflect upon a felt desire (first-order) to act in such a way that cancels out, overrides, or postpones acting on a desire (second-order). For example, when thinking about a desire to buy (a tempting product), the consumer might ask: *Is this desire consistent with the kind of person I ought or hope to be?; Will acting on this temptation serve personal and/or collective flourishing?; What effect will acting on this temptation have on others, like members of my family and friends, or the natural environment?; What effect will acting on this temptation have on others whom I may not know, society itself?*

In parallel, a person might reflect on his/her inability to sustain a (first-order) desire to act ethically and a decision not to buy. Here, ethical consumers might think about how to embrace and embolden a desire to act with moral restraint, imposing introspective questions that promote self-reflection. For example: *Is my lack of desire to impose moral restraint consistent with the type of person I want to be?* To augment a first-order desire to self-regulate, the consumer could

consider the adoption of a long-term perspective, asking themselves: *Will acting on temptation, indulging my desires, serve long-term goals that lead to personal and/or collective flourishing?* But even with deliberate self-regulatory efforts, self-serving biases and justifications can get in the way of rendering a prudent consideration of long-term motives (d'Astous & Legendre, 2009). Self-regulation can be strengthened over time by increasing awareness of its worth, consciously framing the ability as a personal value, and by recalling prior experiences (both failures [regret-driven shame/guilt] and successes [pride]). This can motivate new behaviors and reaffirm prior acts of successful moral restraint. However, even deliberate self-regulation can be difficult when feelings amplify, magnify, and distort situational elements (Stosny, 2011). In situations where the temptation is robust, consumers will need to choose to restrain certain feelings, impulses, and desires and channel them toward reaffirming the value of being an ethical consumer (cf. Bagozzi, 2003). Treating moral restraint as an outcome goal, a consumer can deliberately remind themselves to self-regulate by imposing ethical identity affirmations: *If I indulge, I am not exercising the moral restraint of an ethical consumer* or alternatively, *If I do not indulge, I am exercising the moral restraint of an ethical consumer*. We state these expectations as:

Proposition 4a: When faced with a consumer product temptation, automatic self-regulation moderates movement from having a desire to act with moral restraint to making a decision to do so.

Proposition 4b: When faced with a consumer product temptation, deliberate self-regulation moderates movement from having a desire to act with moral restraint to making a decision to do so.

Moral Preparation

Moral preparation is the ability to recognize and manage potential future internal desires after engaging in a moral action. While seemingly counter-intuitive in the naming convention, moral preparation refers to conscious attention to post-exertion status honors the demonstration of

moral strength while also becoming mindful of weaknesses that could likely arise when facing a similar scenario in the future. Post-hoc reflection and ongoing rehearsal of moral restraint can help consumers prepare for the next temptation, considering in advance how they will respond. Theoretical work on moral strength (Comer & Sekerka, 2015), shows how planning for endurance helps people sustain their commitment, even when difficulties arise. In planning ahead, consumers can learn to walk away from or not even approach situations where self-control is needed. In a morally mature adult, a keen sense of self-awareness and conscious self-directed management is not just something that happens after an ethical issue emerges; it becomes habituated as a way of life.

Moral restraint stems from a dynamic relationship among motivation, emotions, virtue and vice, identity, reasoning, choice, and past action. Like those with moral courage, consumers who respond to tempting product situations with moral restraint can reflect on the consequences of their actions after they have acted (Sekerka, Bagozzi, & Charnigo, 2009). The practice of taking personal inventory, assessing past and potential future actions, is a form of preparation, in an effort to sustain ethical issue readiness. People who demonstrate moral strength tend to self-monitor and strive to maintain an ongoing awareness of their genuine motives. Moral preparation is a discrete moral competency that supports moral identity, a skill that can be learned and become second-nature to most adults (Sekerka, McCarthy, & Bagozzi, 2011). It is characterized by pausing and explicitly recognizing one's actions, thoughts and feelings, and identifying where both strengths and vulnerabilities reside. In recognizing areas where improvements can be exacted, circumstances that tend to interfere with rejecting temptation can be addressed (e.g., creating and sticking to a budget, avoiding shopping unless specific items are needed, removing one's name from mailing lists/blocking online pop-ups, buying only what one can afford to pay

for at the time of purchase). Ethical consumption is supported by a better understanding of self and a willingness to honestly evaluate the implications of one's purchase decisions.

Vigilance, reminding the self of a desire to stay above reproach and consistent toward one's moral identity, is an important feature of moral preparation. As a finite resource, an exertion of self-control can potentially impair subsequent self-regulatory efforts (e.g., Gino, Schweitzer, Mead, & Ariely, 2011; Vohs & Heatherton, 2000). The capacity for self-control and intelligent decision-making involves a common limited resource that uses physical and mental energy. When this resource is depleted, self-control fails and decision-making is impaired. Thus, consumers need to be aware that after exerting moral restraint they may be more likely to indulge (Baumeister et al., 1998; Kivetz & Simonson, 2002). Learning to be cognizant of this depletion period and to deliberately impose measures to modify the situation (e.g., leave the shopping area) and rejuvenate resources is an important aspect of moral preparation.

Self-affirmations after resisting a tempting purchase situation honor moral restraint success with a sense of pride, supporting the value and desire to be ethical (Baumeister & Exline, 2002). Fortifying moral identity when a successful act of moral restraint has been deployed can increase the perceived manageability of the sense of loss. Goal achievement generates pride, which helps to restore resources and endorses the desire to engage in similar behaviors in the future (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). When a consumer acts on a temptation, adverse feelings of shame or guilt may also occur (Michie, 2009), which can also be used to bolster moral development if there is a desire to learn and improve. Moral emotions are intricately woven into self-conscious affective experiences, so they are likely to be effective if social norms endorse or reaffirm ethical consumption behaviors (Sekerka, McCabe, & Bagozzi, 2014).

Because people tend to emulate those among their social milieu, if a consumer wants to be

ethical, they will surround themselves with people who role-model moral restraint. Being a morally responsible adult means recognizing natural impulses or urges and mindfully assessing and managing them with recognition of the consequences. Not yielding to a product temptation can embolden efforts of future resistance, reflecting empowerment. Learning to frame moral restraint as a valued goal and then honoring its achievement can provide the requisite scaffolding that fortifies moral identity, thereby supporting ethical consumption issue awareness. Moving from moral restraint into moral preparation gives the consumer an opportunity to get ready for the next ethical issue. We state these expectations as:

Proposition 5: Having responded to a consumer product temptation with moral restraint, moral preparation reaffirms the value of ethical consumption.

Proposition 6: Moral preparation increases the saliency of moral identity, which helps to foster ethical consumption issue awareness.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The conceptual framework presented explicates a path of moral restraint as a viable route to ethical consumption. This work extends existing theory and offers a practical application for research streams addressing consumer education and business ethics. Consumers can exercise and maintain their moral identity when faced with a tempting product situation by exercising moral competency. The path highlights the role of specific skills known to support moral strength in action. The model is episodic; therefore we have elaborated on the notion of how moral restraint executed in one episode might influence the next. Hence, our work provides an effective way for consumers to develop moral strength, offering practical tools that can be used to thwart the desire to make unnecessary product purchases.

Educators can help foster adult moral development, helping learners to become aware of and to exercise moral competency, then affirming its relevance and value in today's society. If a

person wants to be an ethical consumer, product temptations can be framed as ethical issues. To foster the desire to be ethical, educators can help adult learners understand that well-being and happiness do not stem from satiating immediate materialistic desires, but from efforts toward achieving long-term goals that serve both self and others. Consumer education must embolden critical thinking, fostering awareness through reflective discourse to consider how material goods do not create lasting and meaningful happiness (Richins, 2013). This work offers a conceptual path to prompt discourse. Future research should extend inquiry with empirical studies that show how consumers can effectively and indefinitely delay gratification, based upon personal traits, context, and/or situational circumstances (Mead & Patrick, 2016).

Consumers can learn to exert their own willpower and exercise “voluntary simplification” (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). In becoming aware of the deleterious consequences of indulgence people learn to recognize the negative impacts of unnecessary consumption, which can influence their psychological well-being, social adjustment, and even physical health (Rose & Segrist, 2012). Academics and educators must grapple with how to encourage mindful consumption as an element of positive social change. Consumers’ desire to be ethical is constantly challenged by new forms of marketing that attempt to lure, woo, and entice instantaneous buying (e.g., one-click on Amazon). Inculcating moral restraint into the consumer mindset calls for business ethics education that endorses the appreciation for and adoption of long-term goals, learning the value of rejecting immediate rewards driven by external influencers. Making ethical consumption a valued character strength and exercising moral restraint as a practice require the development of social norms that emphasize consumer choice as the means to express care for others and the natural environment.

Future scholarship is needed to advance our understanding of how social and moral identities

are linked to self-worth in a consumer culture. Given that certain populations are more vulnerable to temptation than others, empirical work is needed to better understand how to help consumers from their unique starting points (Palmer & Hedberg, 2013). Scholars might develop educational tools that support those who can benefit most from enhanced consumer awareness, such as populations that are financially illiterate, living on fixed incomes, or prone to assume excessive debt. Given the limited resources directed toward social change for ethical consumption, additional research is needed to understand the motivational forces that leverage moral restraint as a personal value. Extant research in motivated cognition explains how our reasoning abilities have, in some ways, evolved to help us gain influence—to win or get what we want—rather than to aspire to become morally mature adults. With rampant appeals to buy unnecessary goods and services, a countervailing force is desperately needed to help people want to develop and exert the will to be ethical consumers. Pressures of social desirability compound this challenge, making it increasingly important that organizations value social responsibility and create markets for ethical consumers, where revised social norms can emerge and take hold. With greater awareness, consumers may come to terms with desires that are purely manufactured. Consumers will hopefully, at some point, come to embrace the reality that “less is more.”⁵

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⁵ Attributed to Andrea del Sarto, as it appears in the “The Faultless Painter” by Robert Browning.

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