

Do young consumers care about ethics? Influence of DEAR and GDI on buying preferences – A pilot study

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Abstract. These days' consumers can express their concern about ethical behaviour of companies by means of ethical buying and consumer behaviour. The purpose of this study was to investigate how DEAR (Development Education Awareness Rising) and GDI (Global Development Issues) knowledge affects consumers preferences among higher education students in the Czech Republic. The pilot survey covered 136 students out of total 488 from Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences (CULS Prague) and was conducted from February to March 2014. Data collection was done through online survey. Collected data were categorized, coded and analysed in a statistical programme Statistica 10. In the study we examined DEAR impacts on buying preferences and therefore revealed current preferences, intentions connected with knowledge background and practices among selected university students regarding ethical and local consumption. Our results show a positive correlation ($p = 0.664$, $\alpha = 0.005$) between examined factors – knowledge of specific terms (effects of GDI and DEAR) with socially responsible consumers' behaviour. If consumers are well informed, positively influenced and have access to ethical products, they act as socially responsible consumers. Therefore, there is proven importance of education and access to information as a key component for conscious behaviour. These days Global Development Education and Development Education Awareness Rising should be considered not only alternatively in education, but become more common parts of educational process. This paper is a pilot study to be followed by in-depth research covering representative samples of students at Czech HEIs which have incorporated DEAR in their study curricula.

Key words: DEAR, Global Development Issues, Ethical products, Ethical Consumption, Consumers Social Responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, DEAR (Development Education Awareness Rising) is a vital part of studies at many European universities. It aims at involving students in discussion about development issues while including GDE (Global Development Education) and knowledge of GDI (Global Development Issues). The EU higher education institutions (HEIs) have integrated DEAR into their curricula based on the long-term cross-sectoral European Strategy for Development Education, awareness rising and active global citizenship stated in the Declaration of the European Parliament on development education and active global citizenship from 5th July, 2012. Nowadays, consumers can

express their concern about ethical behaviour of companies by means of ethical buying and consumer behaviour (Shaw & Shiu, 2003; Carrigan et al., 2004; Ojasoo & Leppiman, 2016).

Doane (2001) defined ethical consumption as the purchase of a product that concerns a certain ethical issue (human rights, labour conditions, animal welfare, and environment) and is chosen freely by the consumer. It is important to notice that ethical consumption or consumerism is a burgeoning social movement (Cherrier, 2007; Carrington et al., 2014). Mainstream consumers increasingly express their concerns about the ethicality and impact of their consumption choices upon the environment, animals and society (Carrington et al., 2014; Shaw & Shui, 2002; Ladhari & Tchetsgna, 2015; Kamińska et al., 2016). There is increasing criticism about globalization of agriculture production among consumers (Zander & Hamm, 2010), which also questions economic, environmental and social consequences of global trade and highlight ethical consumption (Raynolds, 2000). Generally growing contribution of social responsibility is unquestionable (Stanislavská et al., 2010).

Consumers living in the world market economies, mainly in developed countries, enjoy a great selection of goods, often for a 'reasonable price' which are produced in different continents. However, it is essential to realize that this reasonable price is very often reached through production ignoring environment protection or decent working conditions (Macak et al., 2014). There are several dimensions of ethical consumer behaviour. Some forms benefit environment (environment friendly products, legally logged wood, animal well-being, local food); while others benefit people (products free from child labour, Fair Trade products). The economy of social and environmental sustainability plays already an inalienable role in the European Union, where accounts for more than 10% of the European economy (in terms of GDP) with more than 11 million workers (Becchetti et al., 2014). Nevertheless, in the field of ethical consumerism, an established and widely accepted theoretical framework for the decision making of ethical consumers has to be still developed (Fukukuwa, 2003; Deng, 2015). Consumerism and ethical thinking are both growing trends worldwide and continued to expand during the last decade (Ojasoo & Leppiman, 2016), because moral responsibility is an important buying motivation among various consumer groups (Shaw & Shiu, 2003; Carrigan et al., 2004). Czech consumers have also started to be increasingly concerned about the safety of their foods and environmental and social implications of food production as well (Zagata 2012; Hejkrlik et al., 2013). Despite embracing the values of ethical consumption, most consumers rarely support their beliefs at the check-out counter (Auger & Devinney, 2007; Szmigin et al., 2009). However, a critical viewpoint is becoming to be an integral part of lifestyle of young and educated people (Stanislavská et al., 2010). HEIs play an important role in shaping the future of the world society in terms of sustainable development and related issues; mainly by generating new knowledge as well as contributing to the development of appropriate competencies and raising awareness (Rieckmann, 2012). The ethical consumption, psychology, social psychology and consumer behaviour domain variously articles, but they do not explain the intention-behaviour gap (Bagozzi, 2000; Szmigin et al., 2009). In case of organic food evidenced by Zagata (2012) there are some beliefs and behavioural intentions bringing prediction of the behaviour of the Czech organic consumers. However, it is important to realize that ethical attributes go beyond conventional standards and increase production costs, usually having negative impacts on competitiveness (Zander & Hamm,

2010). The crucial point is whether consumers are willing to compensate additional production costs caused by keeping ethical principles. It is also essential to mention the neoclassical theory of sustainable consumption as it is a connected vessel with our topic. The neoclassical tradition is often seen as reliant for its authenticity on a presumption of human avarice. Therefore, we refer to Saunders (2014) who examines the question of whether the neoclassical theory can provide keys to deeper understanding of sustainable consumption instead; further, to the study of Illge & Schwarze (2009) who focus on the description how economists think about the issues of sustainability and economics.

This paper aims at investigating the linkage between GDE and DEAR influencing consumers' preferences and furthermore purchasing habits of young consumers. This paper is a pilot study to be followed by in-depth research covering representative samples of students at Czech HEIs which have incorporated DEAR in their study curricula.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The online survey was conducted among 136 B.Sc. and M.Sc. students selected by convenience sampling out of total 488 students of Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague in the Czech Republic from February to March 2014. It was expected that the target group was familiar with GDI and DEAR through their study programmes. Data was collected through online questionnaire sent via email and social networks to the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of three main parts; i) Characteristics of respondents ii) Respondents' knowledge about specific terms iii) Respondents' purchasing habits and their attitude. Asking awareness, dichotomous yes/no measures were used, for measuring the attitude either single or multiple choice nominal scales were used. Respondents decision making was measured either by Likert scale or by multiple choice scale. Collected data were analysed in a statistical programme Statistica 10. Due to the nature of data (not fitting in a normal distribution) nonparametric Spearman's correlation coefficient (ρ) was used to detect possible relation between knowledge and consumers' preferences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of respondents

Out of 136 respondents 34% were males and 66% females. The respondents were divided into two age categories 18–28 years old (97%) and 29–39 years old (3%). With respect to the university environment, 39% of respondents finished secondary education, 52% tertiary education of B.Sc. level and 9% tertiary education of M.Sc. Ethnicity of respondents was mainly European (90%), then African (5%) and Asian (5%). More than half of respondents (63%) reported their subjective economic status as average, 20% below average, 12% above average and 5% of respondents did not answer the question. According to Zhao (2012) and Camfield & Esposito (2014) subjective status is a relevant factor for ethical product purchasing. However, in our study differences between the variable '*subjective economic status*' and the variable '*importance of selected factors on acting as socially responsible consumer*' were not proven as significant.

DEAR and its effects on consumer's care

Undoubtedly GDE and DEAR belong to the essential and fundamental missions of educational system in various countries (Farahani, 2014). The Czech Republic undertook development of less favourable countries and contribute to the global poverty reduction after entry into OECD and the European Union. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic the state can meet this requirement only with the support of public opinion. The necessity of DEAR is also essential because of undignified labour conditions in some countries. In the Czech Republic GDE is one of the topics in primary and secondary educational system; however, it was added quite recently (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011). GDE has started to permeate the Czech educational system since 2000, mainly due to the activities of non-governmental organizations. Finally, in 2011 the National Strategy of GDE for 2011–2015 was created by the cooperation of three Czech Ministries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education Youth and Sports and Ministry of the Environment) with representatives of academics and non-profit sector. This opened the way for implementation of GDE at pedagogical faculties and further educational institutions. DEAR offers students to see development issues rather broadly and will make them ready to behave according to their best consciousness and to think about global issues as sustainable development and/or international trade with all their aspects. GDE and DEAR should provide knowledge development and understanding of the issues like social equality, environment protection, international law, citizenship role in international scale, rising awareness of global issues like migration, trade, consumer's rights, human rights, awareness of factors influencing sustainable development and awareness of labour conditions in countries of the Global South during goods production. In addition, GDE and DEAR should provide students with skills like critical thinking, tolerance, understanding ability, participation and cooperation ability, ability to evaluate different global issues, ability to lead dialogue and have logical decision making and many others. Last but not least, GDE and DEAR should enable students of creating unique values and attitudes (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2008).

Our survey showed quite good knowledge of Global Development Issues (GDI) among respondents as 65% of them are familiar with this term, 29% partially and only 6% are not familiar with this term at all. If we consider full and partial knowledge of GDI together, we are at the rate of 94%, which may indicate already essential absorption of these issues. Knowledge of respondents is empowered by the aim and activities of Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences; such as involvement of courses about ethical trade and sustainable agriculture practices in the countries of Global South in curricula, support of interest of students about issues of Global South also through activities of students' organisation focused on promotion and dissemination of information about ethical products. It is essential to think about HEIs as hubs of change, because capacity building for sustainable development education has been targeted over the last decade (Hansen & Lehmann, 2006). If we target on specific terms (Fig. 1), we can see that 40% of respondents know about issues of child labour and undignified working conditions, 33% are aware of dismemberment to the countries of Global South and countries of Global North, and 27% know the term 'socially responsible consumption'. It is essential to realize that universities and their broad spectrum of responsibilities is rapidly growing in importance in globalized, knowledge-based society (Zilahy et al., 2009). Therefore, it

is important to cope with an array of challenges in the 21st century including teaching of GDI.

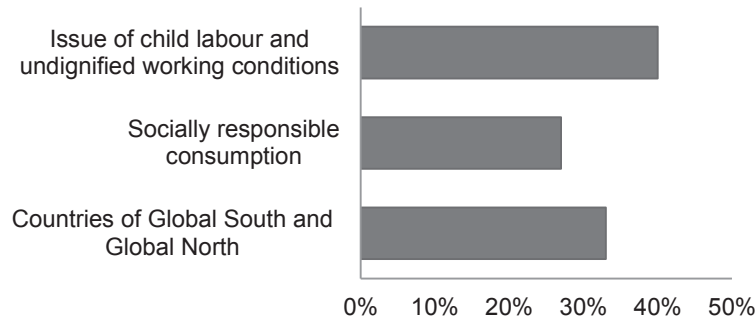


Figure 1. Knowledge of specific terms by respondents (N = 136).

Consumer's habits and attitude

Ethical consumers have different motives for purchase such as political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social or other motives (Carrington et al., 2014; Ladhari & Tchegnna, 2015) in comparison to those of conventional consumers. The overview of our findings about consumer's habits is shown in Table 1. For 78% of the respondents ethical history of purchased product or environmental aspects of its production are important and play role in their consuming habits. Ethical consumption also serves as a medium for ethical/moral action based on subjective moral judgments applied to individual products/brands across the production, consumption and disposition cycle (Brunk, 2010).

Table 1. Consumer's consumption habits (N = 136)

	Are the factors (ethical history of purchased product or environmental aspects of production) important to you in acting as socially responsible consumer? (%)	Do you buy local production? (%)	Do you buy Fairtrade certified products? (%)	Do you buy products with other ethical certifications? (%)
Yes	78	83	88	63
No	11	3	9	9
I don't know	11	14	3	28

Another factor is connected with preference of local production, also as socially responsible consumption habit. In general, consumers' interest in local production has steadily increased last decade (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). In our case 83% of the respondents buy local production, 3% does not and 14% do not care. The majority of respondents (Table 2) buy local production every week (39%) or every month (32%). These results show the trend among certain university students moving towards local production purchasing. If we move to the Fairtrade certified products, 88% of respondents buy these products, the rest (12%) does not or does not know.

Table 2. Frequency of products purchasing (N = 136)

	How often do you buy each product?		
	Local production (%)	Fairtrade certified products (%)	Other ethical certified products (%)
Every day	3	3	0
2–4 times per week	26	10	17
Every week	39	19	35
Every month	32	68	48

The surveyed respondents buy Fairtrade certified products every month in 68% of cases; every week in 19%; then 2–3 times per week in 10% and every day in 3% which might be caused by a newly installed machine with Fairtrade certified products at the building of Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences giving them such opportunity. On the other hand, reasons for not buying Fairtrade certified products (9% of respondents) were various: high price (53.3%), poor accessibility (26.6%), distrust in the product (6.7%), quality does not correspond with price (6.7%) and ‘because it is just a trend’ (6.7%). Remaining 6.7% (of those who do not buy fair trade products) claim to buy certified products in future. Related to other ethically certified products 63% of respondents buy such products, 9% do not and 28% do not know and do not pay attention to it. Frequency of purchasing other certified products is every month (48%) followed by every week (35%) (Table 2). Respondents showed awareness of the follows ethical certifications BIO (27.0%), KLASA (16.2%), Rainforest Alliance (16.2%), GMO free (8.1%), UTZ (5.4%), products without use of child labour (5.4%), FairWear (2.7%), Forest Stewardship Council (2.7%), EZA (2.7%), GEPA (2.7%), certified natural cosmetics (2.7%), Madeta (2.7%), not tested on animals (2.7%) and vegan products (2.7%). It is essential to notice, that respondents recognize some local certifications (as KLASA) as ethical. It also shows not so clear borders between consumers’ recognition of brands (like GEPA and Madeta) and labels (like Fairtrade or KLASA). Such (non)recognition of certifications, brands and labels proves how the orientation is difficult for consumers in the current ethical/non-ethical market. Padel & Foster (2005) came to similar findings in Great Britain as well.

Influence of DEAR on buying preferences

A few researchers and studies moved even beyond formation of cognitive intention to gain insight into the translation between consumers’ intentions and actual behaviour (Carrington et al., 2014). Carrigan & Attalla (2001) revealed that social desirability bias plays a significant role in respondent’s ethical intention-behaviour gap. Auger & Devinney (2007) extend these findings by estimating individuals’ willingness to pay for social attributes and by researching if what consumers say really matters and consumers’ misalignment of preferences with their ethical intentions. Some of the most recent studies tend to assume that some ethical intentions are authentic; however internal and external factors affect actual purchase decisions (Carrington et al., 2014). This is justification of searching for the relationship between DEAR and ethical consumption behaviour. Furthermore, as concluded in Riivits-Arkonsuo et al. (2016) quality labels have the function in extending when consumers are aware of them, understand them and therefore use them in their decision-making. Our results show a positive correlation

between examined factors ($p = 0.664$, $\alpha = 0.005$) such were knowledge of specific terms, GDI and DEAR with the importance of the factors to the respondents in acting as socially responsible consumers (meaning purchasing products with ethical history or environmental aspects of production). Such results indicate the connection between knowledge about specific issues and consumers' habits. If young consumers (university students) are well-informed, positively influenced and have got an access to willed products they act as socially responsible consumers. Therefore, there is a proven importance of education and access to information as key components for conscious behaviour. It confirms the importance of knowledge about GDI and proper DEAR, as the main linkage between knowledge and consumers habits and their socially responsible behaviour in connection with shopping preferences. There is prioritization of ethical consumption core values of consumers, which should be integrated into the consumer's lifestyle based on consumption enactments or shopping habits. When we think about ethical consumption intentions we should consider primary or secondary models of consumption (aligned or misaligned); however, both are bringing advantages to the producers. The primary model has a greater importance for us, as it is a primary intension of consumers and it is based on knowledge and long-term preferences. Carrington et al. (2014) showed in their study the translation of ethical consumption intentions into actual behaviour, this ethical intention-behaviour gap can be described with core motivational hierarch as following: i) separated into prioritisation ii) integration (plans, habits and willingness to sacrifice) and iii) consumption enactment (pre-mediated). The study of Carrington et al. (2014) also reveals a motivational hierarchy that divide ethical consumption concerns over three levels (ethical consumption core values at the base, then the integration of ethical consumption values into consumer lifestyles, and finally consumption enactments through different modes of shopping). In the case of misaligned behaviour, it is unplanned during integration and there is no willingness to commit sacrifice and during consumption enactment it is only spontaneous act and often it is random. As many consumers profess to want to avoid unethical offerings in the marketplace yet few actually act so (Eckhardt et al., 2010).

Ethical consumption and its prospects (at Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Czech Republic)

The current study shows quite satisfying results such as knowledge of GDI (at least partial knowledge has been shown by 94% of the respondents); however, attention to the wider context must be still paid. It encourages us to compare results with further studies and partly predict the current state in the Czech Republic. Recently, based on the Western model, Czech consumers have also started being increasingly concerned about further aspects of ways of production; mainly its environmental and social implications (Zagata, 2012; Hejkrlik et al., 2013). These findings support the idea of an increasing impact on ethical consumption and its significant role in shaping the market structure. Nevertheless, in the Czech Republic only few studies on such a topic are available. Further factors influencing consumers' attitude to the products with ethical history may also be socio-economical and geographical, as showed also in study done by Hejkrlik et al. (2013) that there is higher willingness to buy ethical products (with Fairtrade mark) within people from Prague or cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants and consumers with higher income. This leads us to presumption of higher ethical consumer's behaviour in major Czech cities, but we cannot predict the university students' attitude. However,

growing interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) among Czech universities (Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, University of Economics Prague and Charles University organized together the first CSR conference among universities) and two Fairtrade certified faculties (Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague and Faculty of Economics, University of South Bohemia) show a move towards ethical thinking. Currently modern communication media (including the internet) enhance the opportunities for consumers to influence through the ethical behaviour impacts on producers (Glazer et al., 2010), but only if they are well-informed (Folkes & Kamins, 1999). However, information distributions are highly dependent upon other circumstances like access to relevant information, connections and others. Similar conclusion was formulated in Spain by Vázquez et al. (2012).

CONCLUSIONS

These days Global Development Education and Development Education Awareness Rising should be considered not only as an alternative approach in education, but a common part of curricula. These issues deserve higher attention paid at international and global levels. In this pilot study we investigated Czech university students at Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague with the aim to find out their preferences and basics about their intentions connected with knowledge background and consequently buying preferences. Our results revealed the relationship between DEAR and ethical consumption behaviour; a positive correlation ($\rho = 0.664$) between examined factors: knowledge of specific terms, GDI and DEAR. This confirms the importance of knowledge about GDI and proper DEAR, as the main linkage between knowledge and consumers habits and their socially responsible behaviour in connection with shopping preferences. This pilot study will be followed by in-depth research covering representative samples of the Czech university students.

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