

Why Ethical Consumers Don't Walk Their Talk: Towards a Framework for Understanding the Gap Between the Ethical Purchase Intentions and Actual Buying Behaviour of Ethically Minded Consumers

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ABSTRACT. Despite their ethical intentions, ethically minded consumers rarely purchase ethical products (Auger and Devinney: 2007, *Journal of Business Ethics* 76, 361–383). This intentions–behaviour gap is important to researchers and industry, yet poorly understood (Belk et al.: 2005, *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 8(3), 275–289). In order to push the understanding of ethical consumption forward, we draw on what is known about the intention–behaviour gap from the social psychology and consumer behaviour literatures and apply these insights to ethical consumerism. We bring together three separate insights – *implementation intentions* (Gollwitzer: 1999, *American Psychologist* 54(7), 493–503), *actual behavioural control* (ABC) (Ajzen and Madden: 1986, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 22, 453–474; Sheeran et al.: 2003, *Journal of Social Psychology*, 42, 393–410) and *situational context* (SC) (Belk: 1975, *Journal of Consumer Research* 2, 157–164) – to construct an integrated, holistic conceptual model of the intention–behaviour gap of ethically minded consumers. This holistic conceptual model addresses significant limitations within the ethical consumerism literature, and moves the understanding of ethical consumer behaviour forward. Further, the operationalisation of this model offers insight and strategic direction for marketing managers attempting to bridge the intention–behaviour gap of the ethically minded consumer.

KEY WORDS: actual behavioural control, consumer ethics, ethical consumerism, implementation intentions, intention–behaviour gap, perceived behavioural control, situational context, theory of planned behaviour, word–deed gap

Introduction

Over the last decade, the reach of ethical consumerism has widened from the cultural fringes to mainstream society (Carrigan et al., 2004; Crane and Matten, 2004; Shaw et al., 2006). Researchers have sought to understand this social change by developing models of ethical consumer behaviour. These models have generally been drawn on Ajzen's (1985) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Chatzidakis et al., 2007) to suggest that the purchasing intentions of ethical consumers are driven by personal values, moral norms, internal ethics, and other similar factors (e.g. Arvola et al., 2008; Shaw and Shui, 2002; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008). Empirical evidence suggests, however, that while increasing numbers of consumers have absorbed and are motivated by the values of ethical consumerism, a change in consumption behaviour is much less apparent. Stated ethical intentions rarely translate into actual ethical buying behaviour at the moment of truth – the cash register (Auger and Devinney, 2007; Belk et al., 2005; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Follows and Jobber, 2000; Shaw et al., 2007). One recent study, for example, found that while 30% of consumers stated that they would purchase ethically, only 3% actually do (Futerra, 2005, p. 92). It follows that there are grounds for being wary of intentions-based models of ethical consumer behaviour. The data from the Futerra study (2005) suggest that models

that predict that ethical intentions are directly representative of ethical behaviour will be wrong 90% of the time. This situation has profound implications for the marketers of ethical products, as product launches based on intentions to purchase are more than likely to result in costly failures. Understanding the gap between what ethically minded consumers intend to do and what they actually do at the point of purchase, and understanding how to close this gap, is clearly an important academic, managerial and social objective.

The intention–behaviour gap has previously been addressed by Auger and Devinney (2007) and Carrigan and Attalla (2001). They both argue that the explanation lies principally in the way social desirability bias distorts measures of ethical consumers' intentions. They imply that consumers are not as ethically minded as many researchers believe; the intention–behaviour gap exists but has been exaggerated because of inflated measures of intentions. We accept this argument but suggest that it provides only a partial explanation of the intention–behaviour gap of the ethically minded. We argue that many of us *do* intend to consume more ethically than we end up actually doing, but are hampered by various constraints and competing demands before we get to the cash register. Sometimes, we just forget. In this article, we show that ethical consumerism researchers will benefit from insight into the intention–behaviour gap developed within the consumer behaviour and social psychology literatures. Our aim is to push the understanding of ethical consumption forward by drawing on what is known about the intention–behaviour gap from these literatures and applying this knowledge to ethical consumerism. We bring together three separate insights from these literatures – *implementation intentions* (Gollwitzer, 1999), Actual Behavioural Control (ABC) (Ajzen and Madden, 1986; Sheeran et al., 2003), and *situational context* (SC) (Belk, 1975) – to construct an integrated, holistic conceptual model of the intention–behaviour gap of ethically minded consumers. These insights are presented as mediators and moderators of the relationship between the intentions and behaviour of ethically minded consumers. Finally, we conclude by discussing the operationalisation of our conceptual model and suggesting future research directions.

The ethically minded consumer

Mounting ethical concerns about the impact of modern consumption culture on society and the environment, the rising prominence of these environmental and social issues within mainstream media, the emergence of organised consumer activist groups and the increasing availability of ethical products, have all led to a growing awareness by consumers of the impact of their purchasing and consumption behaviour (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Connolly and Shaw, 2006; Crane and Matten, 2004). A new type of consumer – the 'ethical consumer' – has arisen. Ethically minded consumers feel a responsibility towards the environment and/or to society, and seek to express their values through ethical consumption and purchasing (or boycotting) behaviour (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Shaw and Shui, 2002). 'Ethical' will encapsulate different expressions, concerns and issues for each individual. Examples of ethical concerns for the ethically minded include environmental/green issues, sustainability concerns, workers' rights, country of origin, arms trade, fair trade and animal welfare. 'Green' consumerism, it should be noted, is subsumed within the wider category of ethical consumerism. The broader range of issues (including environmentalism) integrated within ethical consumerism creates complex decision-making processes for ethically minded consumers (Freestone and McGoldrick, 2008). This trend towards ethical purchasing and consumption is illustrated by the 47% growth in global sales during 2007 of products endorsed by Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (2007).

The growth and popularisation of ethical culture (Shaw et al., 2006) has inevitably attracted the interest of companies seeking to meet the needs of their stakeholders – including 'ethical' consumers (Polonsky, 1995). From 'green' beer (a carbon neutral beer) and hybrid car technology to 'Fair Trade'-endorsed tea and -chocolate, marketing strategies targeted at the ethically minded are widely being adopted to tap into potentially profitable ethical market segments and to promote the ethically responsible and environmentally sustainable credentials of products, brands, services and/or corporations.

Mind the gap

Companies are increasingly finding, however, that ethically minded consumers do not always walk their talk. There exists a gap between what consumers say they are going to do and what they actually do at the point of purchase (Auger and Devinney, 2007; Belk et al., 2005; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Follows and Jobber, 2000; Shaw et al., 2007). This phenomenon is referred to by researchers such as De Pelsmacker et al. (2005), Carrigan and Attalla (2001) and Auger and Devinney (2007) as the attitude-behaviour or word-deed gap, and has been widely documented within both the social psychology field and the ethical consumerism sub-field (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Elliot and Jankel-Elliot, 2003).

It has long been understood that intentions are poor predictors of behaviour and that gaining insight into this gap is of critical importance to understanding, interpreting, predicting and influencing consumer behaviour (Bagozzi, 1993). The gap, however, remains poorly understood, especially within the ethical consumerism context (Auger et al., 2003; Belk et al., 2005; De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Shaw and Connolly, 2006). Seeking to address this disparity between the attitudes, intentions and buying behaviours of ethically minded consumers, two contrasting research perspectives have emerged within the ethical consumerism literature (Newholm and Shaw, 2007). One stream is concerned with the limitations of the self-reported survey methodological approaches commonly employed to assess consumers' ethical purchase intentions and subsequent behaviour (e.g. Auger and Devinney, 2007; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001). These authors suggest that in research considering ethical issues, attitudes and intentions, people respond with answers they believe to be socially acceptable, overstating the importance of ethical considerations in their buying behaviour (Auger and Devinney, 2007; Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000; De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Follows and Jobber, 2000; Ulrich and Sarasin, 1995). A second stream takes a modelling approach; identifying influencing factors that directly and indirectly affect the translation of ethical attitudes into ethical purchase intentions and actual behaviour (e.g. Areni and Black, 2008; De Pelsmacker and Janssens, 2007; Shaw and Shui, 2002; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008). Similarly, we contend that social desirability and flawed research

methodologies only partially explain the gap between intention and behaviour of the ethically minded. Respondents to questions regarding their ethical intentions are not only biased by social desirability (Auger and Devinney, 2007; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001), but will also almost certainly make errors in their predictions of their future shopping context. For example, they may arrive at the shopping location with less money than they predicted, or the desired ethical product may not be available at that time, or a competing 'unethical' product may be heavily discounted or be promoted in a more attractive manner, and so on. In order to address these issues, we look to build on the theoretical advances made within the ethical consumerism literature by drawing from the advances in decision-making models presented within the consumer behaviour and social psychology domains. First, however, we review the current state of the literature on ethical consumerism.

Current theory development

Within the field of ethical consumerism, theory development is in its early stages, and an established and widely accepted theoretical framework for the decision making of ethical consumers is yet to be developed (Fukukawa, 2003). Attempting to understand the purchase decision-making processes of ethically minded consumers, researchers within this stream have drawn on the established theoretical frameworks from within the consumer behaviour, business ethics and social psychology domains (Newholm and Shaw, 2007). These models tend to be based on cognitive approaches, focusing on the internal (mental) process of decision making (Fukukawa, 2003). For example, Rest's (1979) model of moral judgment and Hunt and Vitell's General Theory of Marketing Ethics (Hunt and Vitell, 1986) [based on the foundations of Rest's (1979) model] were originally developed for a business/managerial ethics context and have since been applied to consumer ethics. These models have been used to explain 'un-ethical' behaviour such as shoplifting, as well as the purchase decision-making process within ethical consumerism. In a similar vein is Schwartz's Norm Activation Theory, which was developed to understand the altruistic behaviour of individuals (Jackson, 2005).

The models most frequently applied and modified to understand the purchase decision-making process of the ethically minded, however, are the theoretical frameworks of ‘reasoned action’ (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and ‘planned behaviour’ (Ajzen, 1991; Chatzidakis et al., 2007; De Pelsmacker and Janssens, 2007; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008). As such, the majority of ethical consumer behaviour models are built on a core cognitive progression: (1) *beliefs* determine *attitudes*, (2) *attitudes* lead to *intentions* and (3) *intentions* inform *behaviour*. In addition, *social norms* and *behavioural control* moderate intentions and behaviour (De Pelsmacker and Janssens, 2007). Using this framework, there are two circumstances that may contribute to the overall disparity between attitude and behaviour – a gap between consumer *attitude* and purchase *intent*, and a gap between purchase *intent* and actual purchase *behaviour*. The majority of research within the ethical consumerism field on the attitude–intention–behaviour gap has focussed on the disparities and relationships between *attitudes* and *intentions* of the ethically minded. In contrast, this article is primarily concerned with the gap between ethical purchase *intentions* and actual buying *behaviour*.

In their modifications to the TPB, scholars within the ethical consumerism field have sought to include the influence of ethics, morals and values in this attitude–intention–behaviour framework. For example, Shaw and colleagues (Shaw and Clarke, 1999; Shaw and Shui, 2002) developed theoretical models that include the influence of *internal ethics* (personal values) on intentions, and did so within the context of fair trade. In addition, Arvola et al. (2008) included *moral norms* to predict purchase intentions of organic food, and Vermier and Verbeke (2008) integrated the role of *personal values* within the purchase intentions of sustainable food. These studies have tended to accept the theoretical assumption that an individual’s intentions will directly determine their actual behaviour (Fukukawa, 2003). This assumption, however, has been widely criticised as an oversimplification of the complex transition from intentions to action (Bagozzi, 2000; Morwitz et al., 2007). Furthermore, empirical studies in the field of consumer behaviour more broadly suggest that purchase intentions do not translate literally into purchase behaviour (Morwitz et al., 2007; Young et al., 1998).

Current limitations

The intention–behaviour assumption and a number of other significant limitations exist within the ethical consumerism literature pertaining to the purchase decision-making process and the associated attitude–intention–behaviour gap. First, it is generally accepted within cognitive theoretical models of purchase decision making that purchase *intent* is a mediating element between *attitude* and *behaviour* (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). As the studies within ethical consumerism have focused on the *attitude–intention* relationship, they imply that an individual’s *intentions* will directly determine their actual *behaviour* (Fukukawa, 2003). For example, in relation to the application of the TPB, Ozcaglar–Toulouse et al. (2006) suggest that ‘behaviour is deemed to be a direct function of an individual’s intention to conduct the behaviour’ (Ozcaglar–Toulouse et al., 2006, p. 504). Yet, as Ajzen et al. (2004) have warned, ‘investigations that rely on intention as a proxy for actual behaviour must be interpreted with caution’ (Ajzen et al., 2004, p. 1119).

Secondly, attitude–intention–behaviour models of consumer choice artificially isolate decision making, ignoring the external effect of the environment/situation on purchase behaviour (Foxall, 1993; Fukukawa, 2003). During the transition between purchase intention and actual buying behaviour, the individual interacts with a physical and social environment (Phillips, 1993). This interaction with environmental factors influences their decision making. Cognitive approaches assume perfect and constant conditions without consideration of environmental or social settings, thus oversimplifying the complex translation of purchase intentions into actual buying behaviour (Fukukawa, 2003).

Thirdly, with the application of the TPB within the ethical consumerism context, scant attention has been given to the actual control the individuals have over their personal behaviour at the point of purchase and how this differs according to their own perceptions of behavioural control when they were formulating their purchase intentions. When adapting the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) into the TPB, Ajzen (1985) specifically introduced the *perceived behavioural control* (PBC) construct as an indirect moderator between intention and behaviour to account for variance. However, perceptions of

control rarely reflect actual control (Ajzen, 1991). The assumption broadly employed within both ethical consumerism and social psychology fields that PBC can be used as a proxy for actual behavioural control (ABC) in the transition from purchase intentions to actual buying behaviour is therefore generally inaccurate (Sheeran et al., 2003).

Finally, the lack of ethical and general consumer decision-making studies that measure and observe actual buying behaviour, as opposed to stated intentions or self-reported behaviour, is a significant methodological limitation that leaves the extant research open to the influence of social desirability bias (Auger and Devinney, 2007). *Social desirability bias* occurs when people feel social pressure to respond with answers in research that they believe to be socially acceptable. Social desirability bias is inherent to research methods that employ self-reported behaviour, and is pronounced in studies with ethical considerations (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Podsakoff and Organ, 1986).

Conceptual development

A holistic approach

In order to overcome the limitations inherent in the cognitive frameworks of ethical consumer decision making favoured by ethical consumerism researchers (Fukukawa, 2003), this article proposes an integrated holistic framework that further develops this cognitive approach, but also recognises that decision making of ethically minded consumers is complex and does not occur in isolation from the world outside their own cognitive processes. Relevant elements of the external environment are integrated within a cognitive framework, thereby ensuring that the conceptual model reflects the complexity of real-life purchase decision making.

The internal and environmental factors integrated into the conceptual model are elements of what are referred to as the 'cognitive' and 'behaviourist' traditions, respectively. Cognitive perspectives of human behaviour are based on the mental (internal) processes that have a determinate role in behaviour. Such perspectives seek to understand the interaction and correlation of cognitive constructs, such as

beliefs, attitudes and intentions (Hobson, 2006). Behaviourist perspectives, in contrast, are based on measurement of observable behaviour, where the environment plays a determining role in this behaviour (Norton, 2003).

There has been an increasing discourse within the wider field of human behaviour regarding the integration of relevant elements of these perspectives to better understand consumer behaviour and address the shortcomings of either perspective (Bagozzi, 2000; Davies et al., 2002; Norton, 2003). For example, Stern (2000) presents the holistic conceptual 'Attitude-Behaviour-Constraint (ABC)' model of environmentally significant behaviour, which suggests that behaviour (B) is a function of (internal) attitudinal variables (A) and (external) contextual factors (C). By means of developing 'An action theory model of consumption', Bagozzi (2000) integrates 'Situational Forces' into the cognitive decision-making model as a contingent factor which facilitates or inhibits the attainment of consumption goals (Bagozzi, 2000). This stream of discourse and its application are of particular interest to the explanation of the intention-behaviour gap of ethically minded consumers. Indeed, as Fukukawa (2003) argues, 'The lack of any holistic models to understand consumer ethical decision-making remains significant; their development is surely crucial to the advance of theoretical knowledge in the area of consumer ethics research' (Fukukawa, 2003, p. 396).

Our conceptual model is based on the assumption that contextual elements may assist to explain the gap between purchase intentions and actual purchase behaviour. Hence, these elements are integrated into the cognitive intention-behaviour framework to develop a holistic conceptual model of ethical consumer behaviour, focusing specifically on the translation of purchase intentions into actual purchase behaviour (Figure 1).

The proposed conceptual model seeks to address the key shortcomings of the attitude-intention-behaviour framework identified earlier by exploring the mediating effect of *implementation intentions* and integrating the moderating effects of ABC and SC. The purpose of the model is to develop an understanding of why ethically minded consumers rarely follow through with their ethical intentions at the cash register.

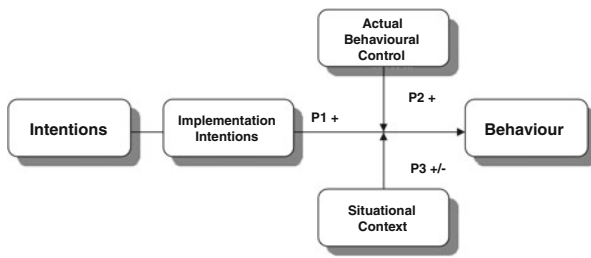


Figure 1. Intention-behaviour mediation and moderation model of the ethically minded consumer.

Implementation intentions

It is a simple yet logical notion that the existence or the absence of a mental implementation plan of how to put one's good intentions into action is a key explanation, respectively, for the success or failure of individuals to act on their intentions. This concept is widely referred to within the action/social psychology literature as *implementation intentions* or *implementation plans* (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 1999; Gollwitzer, 1993). While *intentions* specify a desired end point and signal a commitment to achieving this outcome, *implementation intentions* specify the plan to bring this intention into fruition (Dholakia et al., 2007). An implementation intention is an *if/then plan* formed by the individual that outlines when, where and how their intentions will be realised as actual behaviour (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006). This plan is internally (cognitively) developed in advance of the behaviour/purchase, and specifies the situational cue to instigate the intended behaviour ('When situation X arises, I will respond with behaviour Y') (Gollwitzer, 1999). For example, an ethically minded coffee consumer builds an intention to purchase only Fair Trade coffee and develops an implementation intention: 'When I need more coffee beans and I am at the supermarket, then I will seek out the Fair Trade coffee products and buy the Fair Trade coffee that looks most appealing'. Empirical evidence suggests that when people form implementation intentions, they substantially increase the probability that they will successfully translate their intentions into behaviour. In their meta-analysis of 94 studies, Gollwitzer and Sheeran (2006) found strong support ($d = 0.65$) for the contention that implementation intention/planning increases the likelihood of attaining one's goals (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006).

Implementation intentions positively mediate the relationship between intentions and behaviour because these simple plans help individuals to *get started* in realising their intentions, *shield their intentions* from unwanted influences and *avoid conflict* (Dholakia et al., 2007; Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006). Making if/then implementation plans also help individuals to change their existing habits (which enable them to shop on auto-pilot) and potentially make new ones (Ajzen, 2002b; Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006).

Often people have problems getting started towards realising an intention because they forget to act accordingly, particularly when the intended behaviour is unfamiliar or not part of their routine (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006). This forgetfulness is relevant to the ethically minded individual, to whom ethical products may be a relatively recent inclusion in their purchasing repertoire. Individuals also have problems getting started because they fail to seize or detect an opportunity to enact the behaviours required to translate their intentions into reality (e.g. not recognising the relevant opportunities to inject a counter-argument into a conversational debate until after the discussion has ended and the moment has passed) (Gollwitzer, 1999). Forming an implementation intention/plan places the individual in a state of readiness, guiding their attention to available opportunities and situations to enact their intended behaviour (Dholakia et al., 2007).

Mentally rehearsing a pre-determined implementation intention/plan assists the individual to shield their intentions from unwanted and conflicting influencing factors (Dholakia et al., 2007; Gollwitzer, 1999). Both the SC (e.g. visual temptation) and factors internal to the individual (e.g. habits and moods) provide the potential to block, derail, and conflict with an individual's intentions (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006). Implementation intentions/plans protect and maintain intentions by enabling the individual to pass control of their behaviour over to the situational environment (Gollwitzer, 1993). By mentally rehearsing the planned behaviour and linking this behaviour to a specific context (e.g. picking up the Fair Trade coffee in the supermarket coffee aisle), individuals are able to switch from conscious and deliberate control of their behaviour to a state of 'automaticity' where their behaviour is effortlessly guided by the situational cues (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 1999; Gollwitzer, 1999). Automaticity

is a mental state where the relinquishing of conscious behavioural control results in the individual switching behaviour from effortful to effortless, as it frees the cognitive capacity of the individual (Gollwitzer, 1999; Webb and Sheeran, 2007). Being in a state of automaticity helps the individual to avoid conflict and tempting distractions within the shopping environment, and enables them to ignore competing goals and demands (e.g. price discounts on a competing non-Fair Trade coffee) (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006). In the context of ethical consumerism, where the ethical purchase intentions of the 'ethically minded' may often be competing against long-term habitual non-ethical shopping behaviours, the formation of implementation plans may be crucial in setting up new and ethical shopping routines, which then become automatic.

Gollwitzer (1999) suggests that there are two underlying psychological processes in forming an implementation intention: the identification of the anticipated situation (the *if*-component of the plan), and the linked behavioural response (the *then*-component of the plan). The effect of an implementation plan, however, is only as strong as the intention informing the plan. Implementation intentions/plans that are based on an intention that is weak or has been abandoned will not be effective (Gollwitzer, 1999). In addition, the strength of commitment to the formed implementation intention, and the completeness/specificity of the plan are also an important elements underlying its effectiveness (Dholakia et al., 2007). Therefore, when measuring implementation intentions, the following items need to be taken into account: (a) the existence of implementation plan (both *if* and *then* components); (b) the strength of intentions; (c) the strength of implementation plan; and (d) the completeness of implementation plan. Bagozzi (1993) broadly conceptualises that volitional processes mediate the relationship between forming attitudes and enacting behaviour (Newholm and Shaw, 2007), linking the three consecutive concepts of *desire*, *intention* and *planning* (Perugini and Conner, 2000). Considering consumer decision making in the context of sweatshop manufactured goods, Shaw et al. (2007) found that *plan* was a distinct construct and that there was a direct relationship between *intention* and *plan*. While the Shaw et al. (2007) study does not investigate the impact of forming an execution plan on behaviour,

their notion of *plan* is conceptually aligned with *implementation intentions*, empirically supporting the relevance of forming *implementation intentions/plans* to the ethical consumerism context.

Implementation intentions/plans help us to minimise the influence of moderating factors that we will discuss below (i.e. *behavioural control* and *situational context*), which form barriers to the translation of intentions into behaviour. The formation of an implementation intention/plan will assist the ethically minded individual to ignore these influences. In contrast, the absence of an implementation plan leaves the individual exposed to the moderating effect of unwanted distractions on their ethical intentions. Assisting ethically minded individuals to evoke implementation intentions/plans may strongly assist in bridging the gap between their ethical purchase intentions and buying behaviour.

Therefore:

P1: The ethical consumerism intention-behaviour gap will be positively mediated by implementation intentions/plans.

Actual behavioural control

Our conceptual framework points to the role of cognitive and environmental influencing factors that act as barriers or facilitators to the translation of ethical purchase intentions into ethical buying behaviours. Accordingly, *behavioural control* and the SC have been represented as a moderating influence to the intention-behaviour relationship within the literature and in our integrated conceptual model. We now explore each of these in turn.

The TPB asserts that an individual mentally develops their purchase intention before they enact the corresponding buying behaviour. In this model, the formation of purchase intentions is based on a number of factors including: attitudes, social norms and PBC. The PBC refers to an individual's perception of their capability to perform a given behaviour – i.e. the extent to which the performance of this behaviour is perceived to be under their (external) control and within their (internal) abilities (Kidwell and Jewell, 2003; Sheeran et al., 2003). In the TPB framework, PBC also has an indirect impact on behaviour. While PBC is not a

new concept within the domain of modelling ethical purchase decision making, researchers have tended to limit the focus of PBC to its role in the formation of purchase intentions (e.g. Shaw et al., 2000; Arvola et al., 2008).

The PBC construct has always been controversial, and this is partially due to the ambiguity of the construct as initially conceptualised and presented within the TPB (Trafimow et al., 2002). Attempting to address this ambiguity, a number of studies (e.g. Armitage and Conner, 1999; Trafimow et al., 2002) suggest that PBC is a higher-order construct consisting of two discrete base conceptual elements. Ajzen (2002a) refers to these two lower-order concepts/variables as: *controllability* and *self-efficacy*. Some studies have found these two factors to be highly correlated, whilst in others they are not (Trafimow et al., 2002). *Controllability* refers to the extent to which the performance of a particular behaviour is up to the actor (Ajzen, 2002a). Factors such as cooperation of others, finances, knowledge and habits have a determinate role in perceived controllability. *Self-Efficacy* refers to the ease or difficulty of performing a behaviour, and is closely aligned with Bandura's (1997) conceptualisation and operationalisation of the concept. Bandura suggests that perceived self-efficacy refers to 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments' (Bandura, 1998, p. 624). Factors that have been found to determine self-efficacy include time, will power, skills, and abilities.

The individuals' ability to control their behaviour through controllability and/or self-efficacy may be influenced by factors that are internal or external to the respective individual (Davies et al., 2002). For example, in their exploratory study of consumer purchase decision making in a Fair Trade context, Shaw and Clarke (1999) identify price, availability, convenience, information, ethical issues and time as influences on the ethical consumer's behavioural control. In addition, McEachern et al. (2007) identify the common scenario in which the consumer is not the shopper as an influencing factor in the context of purchasing RSPCA products.

The controversy surrounding PBC has also been fuelled by the questionable ability of PBC to accurately reflect ABC (Kraft et al., 2005; Sheeran et al., 2003). PBC is based on an imagined scenario of

what the situation will be like when and where the behaviour occurs, and a perception of one's capabilities and resources (Ajzen, 1985). Yet, imagined scenarios often differ from reality (Ajzen, 1991). In addition, PBC is based on *perceptions* of control not actual control, and these perceptions may be accurate or inaccurate, stable or unstable over time (Notani, 1998). Therefore, one's intentions may not be an accurate representation of one's behaviour. It follows that a gap between one's PBC and ABC may be a key driver in the gap between purchase intentions and buying behaviour.

Recognising that individuals do not always have complete voluntary control over their behaviour, Ajzen and Madden (1986) introduced the concept of PBC to extend the TPB model (Armitage and Conner, 2001). In this framework, PBC directly influences the formation of behavioural intentions and indirectly impacts on behaviour. A key justification for the inclusion of PBC in the TPB framework was that PBC represents a proxy measure for actual control. The TPB does not claim 'a direct causal effect for PBC' (Ajzen and Madden, 1986, p. 472) on behaviour, because 'it is *actual control* – not PBC – that is the causal determinant of behaviour' (Sheeran et al., 2003, p. 394). Ajzen and Madden (1986) outline two contingencies that determine the validity of using PBC as a proxy for ABC: first, the behaviour in question cannot be totally under the wilful control of the individual; secondly, 'perceptions of behavioural control must reflect actual control in the situation with some degree of accuracy' (Ajzen and Madden, 1986, p. 460). Yet, perceptions of control rarely reflect actual control (Ajzen, 1991; Armitage and Conner, 2001), and 'when PBC is inaccurate all kinds of possibilities open up' [Ajzen (1999) as quoted in Armitage and Conner (2001, p. 474)].

Owing to the difficulty of operationalising ABC, researchers have tended to use PBC as a proxy for ABC (Sheeran et al., 2003). In an attempt to address this operational difficulty, Sheeran et al. (2003) developed a *post-behavioural* assessment of ABC, known as the *Proxy Measure of Actual Control* (PMAC). This enables ABC (not PBC) to be included as a direct moderating influence within the conceptual model. ABC encompasses the sub-elements of controllability and self-efficacy, and is consistent with the concept of *action control* presented

within The General Theory of Marketing Ethics (Hunt and Vitell, 1986). In this process model, action control refers to the 'extent to which an individual actually exerts control in the enactment of an intention in a particular situation' (Hunt and Vitell, 2006, p. 146). The influence of ABC/action control on actual purchasing behaviour, however, has been neglected both within the ethical consumerism and broader social psychology fields, and is yet to be thoroughly explored within the translation of purchasing intentions into buying behaviours (Sheeran et al., 2003; Vitell, 2003). Its role is, therefore, still highly conceptual and abstract, with little empirical work to ground its influence on consumer behaviour. Nevertheless, we argue that ABC will play a crucial role in the disparity between purchase intention and actual behaviour.

Ajzen (2002a) suggests that there are two approaches to the measurement of behavioural control: *belief based* and *direct*. While asking direct questions about performance capabilities is preferred within the literature due to the ease of measurement, belief-based observations provide additional insight into the basis of an individual's PBC (Ajzen, 2002a). In *belief-based* studies of behavioural control, pilot studies are initially conducted to identify the salient control beliefs within the research context. A survey questionnaire is then constructed using this list of factors (internal or external) that the pilot respondents believed would facilitate or inhibit their ability to perform the behaviour. In contrast, direct measures of PBC aggregate the limiting or facilitating influence of all accessible control factors, for example 'I feel completely in control'. As the measurement of ABC is post-behavioural, measurement of this construct would need to reflect this present/past temporal order.

It is the ABC an individual has over the performance of the behaviour that will moderate the translation of purchase intentions into buying behaviour (Sheeran et al., 2003). Thus, we suggest that the gap between PBC and ABC is a key factor underpinning the intention-behaviour gap. In particular, an individual's perception is likely to be farther away from 'reality' when imagining a new situation or one in which the individual has little experience (Ajzen, 1991; Morwitz et al., 2007; Notani, 1998). Hence, the discrepancy between PBC and ABC is specifically relevant to the

purchasing of products with ethical credentials, which will often be relatively new to an individual's purchasing consciousness and repertoire. In this situation, with little or no prior experience to draw on, the individual's perception of the ease or difficulty associated with purchasing an ethical product may hold little resemblance to the actual scenario. Therefore, ethical purchase intentions may also hold little resemblance to the actual buying behaviour.

P2: The ethical consumerism intention-behaviour gap will be positively moderated by actual behavioural control (ABC).

Situational context

The intention-behaviour gap, however, is not solely determined by the cognitive evaluation processes of ethically minded consumers. Such consumers encounter an environment outside of their minds which has 'a demonstrable effect upon current behaviour' (Belk, 1975, p. 158). In the translation of purchase intentions into buying behaviour, the ethically minded consumer enters into, and interacts with, a physical and social environment – the shopping environment. Bagozzi (2000) suggests: 'Theories of consumption must incorporate causal factors beyond or in addition to the control that a consumer has over his/her behaviour' (Bagozzi, 2000, p. 102). Accordingly, the situational context (SC) (Belk, 1975) needs to be considered.

In the context of consumer behaviour, situations represent 'momentary encounters with those elements of the total environment which are available to the individual at a particular time' (Belk, 1975, p. 157). Our model introduces the SC construct to represent the momentary contingent factors within the shopping environment that may act to block or facilitate the translation of ethical purchase intentions into ethical buying behaviour.

According to Belk (1975), there are two types of environmental stimulus that influence consumer behaviour: *situation* and *object*. The *situation* refers to a single point in time and space, and these situational characteristics are momentary, such as a price promotion or being accompanied by a child on this shopping occasion (Belk, 1975). These situational factors are relevant to the conceptual SC construct.

In contrast, the *object* factors refer to the characteristics of the product/environment that are lasting and a general feature of the brand (or retailer) such as ongoing recommended retail price or standard packaging graphics (Belk, 1975). Given the chronic nature of the object stimulus, we suggest that these factors are more conceptually relevant to the PBC/ABC construct.

Attempting to provide an encompassing framework for situational research, Belk (1975) suggests a taxonomy of five overarching situational factors which define the situational context. This taxonomy is based on prior research in the field of consumer behaviour, and prescribes a combination of situational factors that are internal and external to the individual.

1. *Physical Surroundings*: readily identified physical features of the marketing environment, such as product placement and visibility, proximity of competing products and accessibility of price comparison.
2. *Social Surroundings*: consideration of whether other people are present, their roles and the interpersonal interactions that occur.
3. *Temporal Perspective*: all time-related aspects of the situation, such as time of day, time restrictions, time since last purchase.
4. *Task Definition*: the purpose of the individual within the situation. For example, consideration of whether the individual is intending to select, buy or gather information about a purchase. Also, the task may consider whether the buyer is also the end-user.
5. *Antecedent States*: momentary states that the individual brings with them (antecedent) to the situation, and include momentary mood (such as anxiety, hostility, excitement) and momentary constraints (such as cash on hand, tiredness, illness).

Belk (1975) suggests that there are two dimensions to the measurement and observation of situational factors: *psychological* and *objective*. The *psychological* measurement of the SC considers how these situational factors are perceived/construed by the individual. This approach is favoured within the literature due to the ease of measurement by questionnaire methods. However, many situational

factors are unconscious to the individual (such as subtle lighting cues), yet they have an effect on consumer behaviour. Indeed, Zaltman (2003) suggests that tangible attributes have less influence on behaviour than subconscious attributes. In order to capture salient subconscious situational factors, *objective* measurement refers to the features of the situational environment that existed prior to the individual's interpretation (Belk, 1975). Examples of possible subconscious factors include subtle fragrances, the presence of other shoppers in the nearby vicinity, and store lighting effects. Belk (1975) concludes that 'situational research must utilise both types of measurement' (p. 161). Later research (e.g. Pullman and Gross, 2004) also measures the endogenous and exogenous emotional experiences elicited by situational environments.

In his meta-analysis of studies employing the TPB, Stephen Sutton (1998) contends that 'more attention [...] needs to be paid to situational factors' (Sutton, 1998, p. 1335). Our conceptual model addresses this deficiency through the addition of *situational context*; reconnecting ethically minded individuals and their behaviour with the actual/external environment at the point of purchase.

P3: The ethical consumerism intention-behaviour gap will be positively and negatively moderated by the Situational Context (SC).

Integration and interaction

The concepts of *implementation intentions*, ABC and SC are integrated within our model to function as an 'integrated whole' rather than three disparate insights. It is important, therefore, to outline the integrated influence that these factors have on the translation of intentions into behaviour, and the potential interaction between these factors.

Before doing so, however, we must firstly define the construct boundaries. Creswell (2003) suggests that constructs can be defined as discrete variables using two characteristics: temporal attributes and how they are measured (Creswell, 2003). Accordingly, using time-based attributes it is possible to identify the distinguishing features and interplay between the constructs integrated in the conceptual

model. Temporally, an individual forms an *implementation intention* or plan before they are influenced by elements of ABC and SC. This distinction in temporal order enables implementation intentions to be clearly differentiated from the SC and ABC constructs. The temporal order between SC and ABC is less discriminating, however, as the sequence in which these factors influence one's behaviour is interchangeable and potentially could occur simultaneously. For example, an ethically minded consumer visits a sporting equipment store intending to purchase a sweatshop-free soccer ball. He/she has formed his/her intention based on the perception that the store will stock a range of sweatshop-free soccer balls at a price that he/she can afford. On arrival at the store and standing in front of the soccer ball display, he/she finds that the sweatshop-free balls are temporarily out of stock [SC] and priced significantly higher than he/she had expected [ABC]. A salesperson approaches him/her in the store [SC] and provides him/her with the technical details of a competing range of non sweatshop-free soccer balls [ABC], which are also on a temporary price reduction [SC]. Despite his/her ethical intentions, the ethically minded consumer walks out of the sports store with an unethical ball in his/her shopping bag, having found that the actual decision was out of his/her control and influenced by the situation in store. This example also highlights the potential for interaction between one's behavioural control and the situational context.

Distinctions between ABC and SC can be made, however, by considering how, when, and where these constructs moderate the translation of intentions into behaviour. The moderating influence of ABC occurs because the actual control that the individual has over their purchasing behaviour is different to their initial PBC. So, due to factors affecting ABC, the individual is more or less in control of their behaviour than they imagined they would be, making it easier or more difficult to actually execute their intentions. In contrast, when the consumer is influenced by the SC, their behavioural control has not necessarily changed, it's just that they have changed their mind or been distracted because of stimulus in the environment. The differences between the ABC and SC constructs can be further understood by considering the temporal and spatial boundaries of their influence. Temporally, SC

is a momentary state, a situation at a single point in time and space (Belk, 1975). The SC is the short-lived scenario when and where the actual shopping/purchase decision occurs, and includes both temporary external factors (e.g. presence of a shopping companion) and temporary internal factors (e.g. current mood of the shopper). In contrast, ABC is not bound within a momentary situation and can be influenced by internal and external factors that may temporally extend before, during and beyond the momentary point of purchase, such as cooperation of others, ongoing product price and affordability, habits, and a lack of knowledge. A similar distinction can be made in terms of the location of influence. The influence of the SC occurs at the very location of the purchase decision (i.e. inside the store), whereas the influence of ABC spans both inside and outside the point of purchase.

Having distinguished the constructs, we now integrate these insights to form a holistic model. Intention is a singular notion that incorporates multiple influences – such as attitudes, social norms and PBC. When the consumer is confronted with an ABC and situational environment (SC) different to that perceived, their previously singular intention unravels and the multiple influences reform into a singular behavioural decision to fit the ABC and SC. The TPB suggests that salient factors such as belief in the relative value for money, ethicality or pleasantness of the behaviour in question, ethical and moral concerns, and the expectations of significant others, are all internally evaluated by the individual in the process of forming their purchasing intention. In other words, when a consumer has formed an intention to purchase an ethical product, this ethical intention has been based upon the consumer's internal assessment and weighing up of multiple and sometimes competing salient beliefs (e.g. value for money *versus* ethical concerns). In this case, the singular notion of 'intention' subsumes all of these influencing factors. We contend, however, that salient influencing factors may return to block or disrupt the translation of purchase intentions into buying behaviour, creating an intention-behaviour gap. Captured within ABC and SC constructs, these salient influencing factors may include elements such as: extenuated time commitments and competing ethical demands (ABC), and proximity of competing products and accessible price comparison (SC).

Assuming that ethically minded consumers do have legitimate ethical purchase intentions, we suggest that there are three instances which influence and interrupt the translation of these ethical intentions into behaviour: they get distracted, shop on auto-pilot, or simply forget (*implementation intentions*); the actual purchasing scenario is different to what they had imagined (ABC versus PBC); the stimulus around them at the moment of truth derails their ethical intentions (*situational context*). The conceptual model developed within this article combines these mediating and moderating influences as an integrated explanation for the intention-behaviour gap of the ethically minded consumer. In the social psychology literature and in our integrated conceptual model, *implementation intentions* are represented as a positive mediating influence between one's intentions and actual behaviour. Mentally rehearsing a pre-determined implementation plan assists the individual to shield their intentions from conflicting influencing factors that could potentially block or derail these intentions (Dholakia et al., 2007; Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006). *Situational influences* and *behavioural control* are such influencing elements that act as 'unwanted distractions' (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006), barriers or facilitators to the translation of intentions into buying behaviour. Consequently, the SC and ABC have been represented as moderating influences to the intention-behaviour relationship within the literature and within our integrated conceptual model.

While it is possible to conceptually delineate the three constructs integrated within the conceptual framework, significant interaction occurs between the constructs. In particular, momentary elements of the SC may interact with one's ABC. As in the previous example, while standing at the soccer ball display contemplating the affordability of the out-of-stock sweatshop-free ball, the ethically minded consumer is approached by a salesperson. This momentary social contact is part of the environment and situational context. The salesperson informs the ethically minded consumer of the technical details of a competing (non sweatshop-free) soccer ball, providing him with an in-depth knowledge of the competing ball well over and above the limited knowledge he has of the sweatshop-free ball. This lasting product knowledge is relevant to the consumer's ABC, and yet was dependent upon the SC

(interaction with salesperson). This interplay between the moderating influences of the SC and one's ABC illustrates the integrated nature of the conceptual model.

Operationalisation

While the individual concepts of *implementation intentions*, *behavioural control* and SC have relatively well developed measurement and testing traditions, they are yet to be integrated and operationalised within a single model. The integration of contextual factors within a cognitive framework poses operational challenges and offers significant rewards. In this section, we discuss the measurement and testing of the individual constructs and then the operationalisation of the integrated conceptual model as a whole.

Measuring implementation intentions

The *implementation intentions* construct is sourced from within the field of Social Psychology, which favours experimental methodologies. In particular, experiments with undergraduate students in laboratory or field conditions. These experiments tend to be longitudinal in nature, as the participants are surveyed/observed at two time points: initially when they are forming their implementation intention, and secondly once the goal has/hasn't been achieved.

Much of the experimental social psychology literature limits measurement and observation of implementation intentions to single binary items measuring whether or not the participant has an implementation intention to achieve the desired goal (yes or no). However, Dholakia et al. (2007) extend this limited measurement to include the following: (a) *intention strength*: 'The strength of my actual intention to pursuit the goalcan best be expressed as... (6 point scale)'; (b) *implementation intentions strength*: 'The strength of my actual intention to perform the actions (execute the plan) needed to achieve.....can best be expressed as... (6 point scale)'; (c) *existence and completeness of implementation intentions*: 'I have a plan of action to carry out my decision/intention (7 point scale)' and 'The

plan I have made to carry out my decision/intention can be considered to be complete (5 point scale)'.

It is a key limitation of laboratory experimental methodologies that implementation plans are often artificially enforced and survey response relies on respondent's own interpretation of the completeness of their plan. Relatively few studies are conducted out of the laboratory and in the real world of consumers. This gap provides an opportunity for significant contribution (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006).

Measuring actual behavioural control

There are two approaches to measuring behavioural control, *belief based* or *direct* (Ajzen, 2002). In *belief-based* studies of behavioural control, salient control beliefs that facilitate or inhibit the ability to perform the behaviour are identified by pilot study respondents within the research context. These salient control beliefs are then used to construct a survey questionnaire. In contrast, direct measures of PBC capture the facilitating or limiting influence of an aggregate of all accessible control factors. Examples of direct measures of PBC include survey questions such as: (a) 'I feel completely in control' (perceived controllability); and (b) 'I believe I have the ability to...' (perceived self-efficacy). In contrast, assuming that family-related time demands (self-efficacy) is a possible control factor relating to the purchasing behaviour of ethically minded consumers, examples of belief-based measures of PBC obtained from a pilot study might include: (a) *Control belief strength* (*c*): 'I anticipate that my family commitments will be placing high demands on my time in the near future (strongly disagree – strongly agree)'; (b) *control belief power* (*p*): 'My family placing high time demands on me would make it (much more difficult – much easier) to purchase products with ethical credentials' (Ajzen, 2006). Ajzen (2006) suggests that it is possible to formulate a composite control belief using the formula: $PBC \propto \sum c_i p_i$. Similarly, we suggest the use of belief based measures derived from a pilot study to measure the ABC construct. As the study would be observing *actual* rather than PBC, however, the questionnaire measures would need to reflect the present/past tense. Using the above

example, a belief-based measure of ABC might include: (a) *Control belief strength* (*c*): 'My family commitments are currently placing high demands on my time (strongly disagree – strongly agree)'; (b) *control belief power* (*p*): 'My family placing high time demands on me is currently making it (much more difficult – much easier) to purchase products with ethical credentials'. In the case that ABC is being measured in a post-purchase questionnaire, the second survey question could be further altered to: 'My family placing high time demands on me made it (much more difficult – much easier) to purchase products with ethical credentials on my last visit to the store'.

Measuring the situational context

The effects of situational factors have been measured and observed using experimental, semi-structured interview and survey research methods. In experimentation research (both laboratory and field), single situational factors are modified (whilst others are controlled) and the consumer response to these manipulations are observed. These observations are made either by eliciting responses within the lab environment or by observing consumer behaviour in a field environment. The most common dependent variables measured in field experiments studying the effect of the physical situational factors are sales/purchase behaviour, time in the environment, and approach-avoidance behaviour (Turley and Milliman, 2000). In contrast, semi-structured interview and survey response methods have also been employed to observe the impact of SC, in particular the emotional responses to situational factors. The five categories of the SC developed by Belk (1975) are mapped against research methods used to measure and observe these environmental factors in Table I to illustrate possible methods to operationalise the SC (Pullman and Gross, 2004; Turley and Milliman, 2000).

Pre-testing in pilot stages of research may be valuable to discover the salient *psychological* situational factors and appropriate emotional responses to further develop the specific questionnaire items, and to identify relevant *objective* situational factors for experimental manipulation.

TABLE I
Measurement of the situational context

| Situational factor | Situational element | Experimental measurement | Sample questionnaire items |
|------------------------------|--|--|---|
| <i>Physical surroundings</i> | (a) General store interior and exterior variables (e.g. audio & visual) (b) Store location & merchandising (c) In-store information (d) Price displays (e) Temporary pricing | Unit sales, interactions with products, time spent in the aisle and at the shelf, browsing activity, repeat purchase | <i>Exogenous response</i> : e.g. convenience, visibility, availability, ambience, information (e.g. poor-outstanding) <i>Endogenous response</i> : e.g. comfortable, exciting, sophisticated, relaxed, hip/cool (e.g. pleasure-displeasure) |
| <i>Social surroundings</i> | (a) Interaction between staff & customers (b) Lone <i>versus</i> accompanied shoppers (c) Crowding in-store | Unit sales, interactions with products, time spent in the aisle and at the shelf, browsing activity | (a) <i>Exogenous response</i> : e.g. interaction, knowledge transfer. <i>Endogenous response</i> : e.g. valued, avoidance, interesting, inconvenience (b) <i>Exogenous response</i> : e.g. shopping habits. <i>Endogenous response</i> : e.g. focused, distracted, fun (c) <i>Exogenous response</i> : e.g. accessibility, shopability. <i>Endogenous response</i> : e.g. stressed, avoidance |
| <i>Temporal perspective</i> | (a) Time of day (b) Time constraints | (a) Unit sales, interactions with products, time spent in aisle and at the shelf | (b) <i>Exogenous response</i> : e.g. physical time restrictions. <i>Endogenous response</i> : e.g. rushed, hurried, distracted and relaxed |
| <i>Task definition</i> | (a) For whom the shopper is buying (b) The purpose of the product to be purchased and consumed (e.g. special event <i>versus</i> everyday) | | (a) <i>Exogenous response</i> : e.g. self, family, friend. <i>Endogenous response</i> : e.g. constrained, responsible and pampered (b) <i>Exogenous response</i> : e.g. purpose. <i>Endogenous response</i> : e.g. focused, image conscious |
| <i>Antecedent States</i> | Momentary moods and conditions | | <i>Exogenous response</i> : temporary functional conditions – e.g. illness, financial. <i>Endogenous response</i> : e.g. happy, antagonistic, distracted and suspicious |

Operationalisation of the integrated conceptual model

The translation of ethical intentions into actual buying behaviour is a highly complex process for ethically minded consumers, as competing ethical

and traditional concerns are combined, contrasted and traded-off (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Freestone and McGoldrick, 2008; Shaw et al., 2006). The experimental and survey response methodologies traditionally favoured by researchers

to empirically measure and observe the concepts presented within the conceptual model may not have the capacity to represent this complexity or to build an understanding of why or how these constructs underpin the intention–behaviour gap of the ethically minded consumer (Belk et al., 2005). In their cross-cultural study of consumer ethics, Belk et al. (2005) used qualitative research methods, which they augmented with an interpretive approach to the data analysis. Similarly, we also suggest a break with tradition to operationalise the holistic conceptual model presented in this article.

The constructs integrated within our conceptual model have been drawn from separate research traditions (cognitive and contextual), and have been observed and measured using different methods. Consequently, the conceptual model integrates new and established constructs within the context of ethical consumerism, proposing unexplored theoretical relationships and suggesting an *intermediate state of prior research* (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). Edmondson and McManus (2007) posit that the best methodological fit within an intermediate field of theory development is that of a hybrid (mixed) method research strategy. Taking a blended methodological approach to testing these provisional relationships may help provide both – emergent insight about the constructs, their dimensions and relationships within the context; and validity/rigour through triangulation (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). In addition, Auger and Devinney (2007) suggest that to produce valid research about ethical consumer behaviour that minimises the effect of social desirability bias: ‘it would be prudent to utilise a combination of methods instead of relying exclusively on a single method’ (Auger and Devinney, 2007, p. 378). For these reasons, we advocate mixed methods research strategies to operationalise the conceptual model, integrating qualitative, pilot and empirical field studies. The combination of these mixed research methods within a single overarching study, not only leads to a greater depth of understanding, but also works to produce robust research results through triangulation methods.

First, a substantial qualitative study would assist to further delineate, refine and understand *implementation intentions*, ABC and SC from the perspective of ethically minded consumers. The overarching aims of this qualitative study would be to gain a deep

understanding and elaborate the underlying mechanisms and interrelations of these conceptual constructs within this context, promote openness to emergent insights through an interpretive approach to data analysis, and to triangulate the data (Edmondson and McManus, 2007).

Secondly, pilot studies could be employed to bring further depth and rigour to the operationalisation of the conceptual model. Ajzen (2006) suggests that the use of direct measures in questionnaires that are arbitrary or have simply been adapted from items used in prior research, can lead to measures of low reliability. While asking direct questions to measure ABC is methodologically easier, additional insight can be gained using belief-based measures to observe an individual's perceived and ABC (Ajzen, 2002). Salient control beliefs are identified by conducting pilot studies. These pilot studies could serve several purposes by identifying: (a) salient control beliefs (ABC); (b) salient situational factors (SC); and (c) relevant items for the measure of purchase intentions to ensure high internal consistency (Ajzen, 2006).

Finally, in-store empirical field experiments and questionnaires offer relevant and rewarding research methods to empirically test our conceptual model, after qualitative and pilot studies have been completed. Empirical field study within the store environment is a relatively innovative research approach to test the concepts of implementation intentions and behavioural control. In order to overcome the social desirability bias limitations of self-reported survey research, Auger and Devinney (2007) argue that research strategies as close to natural shopping behaviour as possible should be employed within the ethical consumerism context. This element of realism is an inherent asset of in-store field research. According to McGrath's ‘Strategy Circumplex’, however, increasing one feature (generalisability, precision or realism) in a single research methodology will inevitably lead to a decrease in the other two – the ‘three-horned dilemma’ (McGrath, 1994). The pursuit of realism (and to some extent precision) in this empirical field research strategy, therefore, is at the cost of generalisability. Indeed, from an empirical perspective, observing behaviour in a single context, on a single occasion may be of little practical significance (Ajzen, 2006). The ability to generalise research findings can be increased,

however, by conducting research and observing behaviour in multiple relevant contexts (Ajzen, 2006). The research can observe multiple products within product categories and across multiple product categories (e.g. Morwitz et al., 1993). Behaviour can be observed and research conducted across a range of relevant field locations, at multiple times of day and week (Ajzen, 2006; Morwitz et al., 1993). In addition, in order to empirically test the model for mediation and moderation effects, purchase intentions would need to be measured and observed with sufficient variance. This requires a random sample from the field population of participants whose measured ethical purchase intentions range from high to low on a scale of intention strength. This in turn will improve generalisation from the research results.

Discussion and conclusion

Regardless of their ethical intentions, ethically minded consumers rarely place ethical products in their shopping baskets (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005). Despite its pivotal nature, this phenomenon is poorly understood within the ethical consumerism context (Auger et al., 2003; Belk et al., 2005; De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Shaw and Connolly, 2006). When addressing the overall gap between ethically minded consumers' ethical attitudes and their often non-ethical buying behaviour, ethical consumerism researchers have generally failed to consider that intentions are not a reliable proxy for actual behaviour with few exceptions (e.g. Newholm, 2005; Shaw et al., 2007). Thus research has been focused on understanding the relationships and disparities between the attitudes and intentions of ethically minded consumers, yet minimal attention has been paid to the critical gap between the ethical purchase intentions and buying behaviours of these consumers. Our aim has been to push the understanding of ethical consumerism forward by drawing on what is known about the intention-behaviour gap from consumer behaviour and social psychology literatures and applying these insights to ethical consumerism. We have integrated three insights into a conceptual framework on which this critical understanding can be built – *implementation intentions*, ABC and SC. This holistic conceptual model

addresses significant limitations within the ethical consumerism literature, carrying the understanding of ethical consumer behaviour forward. Further, the operationalisation of this model offers potent insight and strategic direction for marketing managers attempting to bridge the intention-behaviour gap of the ethically minded.

Understanding the role of *implementation intentions* in the intention-behaviour gap of ethically minded consumers offers a rich marketing platform on which to build effective strategy. An *implementation intention* is an 'if/then' plan internally formed by the individual, specifying when, where and how they will translate their intention into actual behaviour. Assisting ethically minded consumers to formulate these simple implementation plans may have a strong positive effect in bridging the gap. This could be done by aiding ethically minded consumers to visualise the situation and corresponding behaviour that will allow them to activate their ethical intentions in the aisle and at the cash register. For example, using a combination of out-of-store and in-store visual media to remind consumers and shoppers of their ethical intentions ('remember to buy the recycled toilet paper this time, go on, you really wanted to') may help them to snap out of their shopping automaticity, remember their intentions and change their shopping habits.

Similarly, understanding the impact of ABC in the intention-behaviour gap of the ethically minded provides fertile ground for marketing strategy and activation. As we explained, ABC refers to the capability of an individual to perform a given behaviour – the extent to which this behaviour is under their control and within their (internal) abilities. A gap between the consumer's perceptions of control (PBC) and their actual control (ABC) when making the purchase decision underpins the intention-behaviour gap. Marketing strategies for ethical products that increase the consumers ABC or help the consumer paint an accurate PBC in the first place may assist in closing the intention-behaviour gap. Based upon an understanding of ABC, effective marketing tactics could include: influencing others within the household to ensure cooperation in ethical purchasing goals, and providing these consumers with accurate information and the knowledge to make informed decisions in-store. For example, to assist consumers to form accurate price

perceptions when marketing ethically produced soccer balls, communication could include the message: 'Yes, our ethical soccer balls are a little more expensive, but that little bit extra is worth a great deal to the people who make them'.

Finally, considering the role of the SC in the intention-behaviour gap may enable marketing managers to harness this influence to facilitate (rather than derail) the realisation of ethical intentions into ethical buying behaviour. Tactics such as providing staff in the aisle to interact with the ethically minded consumer in-store, merchandising the product to ensure stand-out visibility relative to competitive offers, tactical price promotions to gain product trial, and using clear visuals to symbolically and effectively communicate the ethical credentials of the product are all possible marketing implications of the SC.

Until empirically tested, however, our model remains purely conceptual, and the insights remain potential. Therefore, we anticipate and encourage research to challenge, strengthen and expand the integrated conceptual model presented in this article. Mixed methods research combining qualitative, pilot and empirical field testing research strategies may be employed to overcome the operationalisation challenges of integrating cognitive and contextual concepts within a single model. Future research may also seek to test the conceptual model in other consumer-behaviour domains, outside of the ethical consumerism context, to increase its generalisability and provide a broader contribution to the literature.

A limitation of the integrated holistic framework presented in this article is that the conceptualisation of ABC is currently underdeveloped. Pioneering study by Sheeran et al. (2003) shaped this concept and used the Proxy Measurement of Actual Control (PMAC) to empirically measure and verify its moderating effect on the relationship between intentions and behaviour. To date, this concept has yet to be further developed or refined. In addition, the transition between PBC and ABC (i.e. when and how one's PBC is transformed into one's ABC in a given situation) is not currently understood. Therefore, we see the infancy of ABC within the literature as a limitation of the conceptual model, and encourage further conceptual research regarding this construct. We have discussed the potential for the SC to interact with one's ABC, yet the interplay

between these two constructs is highly conceptual and also yet to be empirically explored.

The key contribution of our conceptual framework is two-fold: it is integrated and holistic. In bringing together the insights of *implementation intentions*, *actual behavioural control* and situational context to understand the intention-behaviour gap of ethically minded consumers, we combine powerful insights from separate literature fields that function as an 'integrated whole'. In addition, the integration of environment factors at the point of purchase within a cognitive framework results in a holistic model that reflects the complex real-life purchase decision making of ethically minded consumers.

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