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From Green to Ethical consumers: what should you change in your advertisement to motivate

them to buy ethical products?

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces a two-dimensional model (social/non-social, internationalized/externalized) that aims to capture the complexity of motives of contemporary ethical consumers. The framework identifies four broad motivations for ethical consumption: Self-actualization, Hedonic, Conformity and Self-Orientation. To illustrate how the framework may be used, we present the results of two exploratory studies; the first examining the motivations of self-identifying ethical consumers (173 consumers from 27 nationalities), and the second analysing the primary motivating message of a set of 23 advertisements for ethical products from eight different countries. Our results indicate that while all four categories of motivations are salient to consumers, advertisers in our sample tended to focus their message on only one category of motivations (self-actualization).

Keywords: green consumers, ethical consumers, motivations

INTRODUCTION

Consumption and ethical activism have often been presented as conflicting behaviors towards the act of buying products. Most researchers trace the history of the green consumer movement to the 1962 publication of 'Silent Spring' (Carson) which documented the use and harmful effects of pesticides like DDT, and is credited with launching the environmental movement of the 1960-70s (e.g. Lytle 2007). This early environmentalism became highly radicalized (Marcuse 1972) and the notion of green consumerism was characterized by boycotts and advocacy against what was viewed as 'mainstream' consumer culture (ITC Report 2009). In this landscape, to be ethical was to *avoid* consumption, and so ethical action required consumers to be outside mainstream society (Tallontire et al. 2001).

Changes in subsequent years have led to a transformation in attitudes towards consumption and ethics. Since the establishment of the consumer ethics scale by Muncy and Vitell (1992), the ethical actions of consumers and businesses have drawn much attention, and the number of people identifying themselves as ethical consumers is on the rise (e.g. Flatters and Willmott 2009; Hughes 2012). Whereas early environmentalists were anti-consumption, current ethical consumers seek to combine altruism with the benefits of consumption by choosing and consuming products or services that they believe are ethical. A new vocabulary has been propagated in the media telling the consumers about environmentally-friendly products, fair-trade brands, and corporate social responsibility. Ethical products are now so normalized that, rather than being niche, they have become part of mainstream consumerism. At the same time, several multinational groups known for being unethical and often the target of early green activists – like L'Oréal and Coca-Cola Company - have progressively sought to change their images (Assiouras and Karsaklian, 2012).

Despite these changes, and in spite of a growing body of relatively isolated studies, the reasons why people consume ethical products are still not well articulated. Similarly, given the increasing tendency towards ethical consumption, it is surprising that researchers are yet to investigate the role of advertising in stimulating consumption of ethical products. Although some work has been conducted to measure the intention-behavior gap in buying ethical products (Carrington et al., 2010), the attitudes towards products based on green advertising (Matthes and al., 2014), skepticism towards green advertising (Finisterra do Pao and Reis, 2012), and the moderating role of environmental affect

and purchase intention (Grimmer and Woolley, 2014), no researchers have investigated the congruence between consumers' motivations to buy ethical products, on the one hand, and the motivations advertisers address, on the other. In this paper we introduce a tentative two-dimensional framework that seeks to integrate the disparate research into the motivations of ethical consumers. We illustrate the utility of this framework with two exploratory studies which examine the 'pull' and 'push' of ethical consumption. The first analyzes the motivations of 173 self-identifying ethical consumers from 27 nationalities. The second examines a sample of 23 international advertisements for ethical products across eight countries. While our findings indicated that consumers are motivated by all four motivational types in our conceptual framework, advertisements tend to address just one; self-actualization, as though the main driver for ethical consumption was altruism. The intriguing inconsistency between the declared motivations to buy ethical products and the ones featured in advertisements led us to consider a number of plausible explanations for such a gap in companies' communication for ethical products. We start by briefly reviewing the literature on motivations for ethical consumption.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation can be defined as 'why' an individual or group have behaved or are about to perform an action (e.g. Dann 1981). A number of authors have begun to articulate typologies of motivations for consumption of ethical products – Table 1 summarises the most prominent of these, and identifies the type of motivations described in each typology.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Our review of studies into ethical consumption motivations identified two characteristics. Firstly, with the increasing prevalence of ethical brands and outlets making these available (Assiouras and Karsaklian 2012; Cowe and Williams 2010), great complexity exists among consumers and their different visions of ethics and ethical products (e.g. Lockie, Lyons et al. 2002; Shaw and Newholm, 2002; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, Shaw et al. 2006). Such complexity is mainly tied to the multifaceted aspect of ethical products which makes its definition nebulous to both researchers and consumers. Secondly,

researchers have begun to recognise that ethical consumption has a social dimension (Holt 1995; Szmigin and Carrigan 2006). For instance, Szmigin and Carrigan (2006) propose that consumers use their fairly traded consumption choices in order to, among other reasons, distinguish themselves from others (distinction), or demonstrate love through the care and attention given to a purchase decision (love). The consumption decision can be motivated by the desire to express one's self-concept; doing so allows consumers to reinforce their own view of themselves and achieve consistency between their behaviour and how they see themselves, based on their beliefs about their own identities, values, lifestyles, preferences, and habits (Sirgy et al. 2008).

The literature review leads us to conclude that there is a change in pattern over time, from a narrow focus on 'being green' to a broader, more socially-derived, concept. Indeed, the broad ranges of products now available along with numerous communication campaigns run by companies in stimulating consumers to buy their ethical products, seem to have simplified the buying process whilst complexifying the identification of real motivations to buy ethical products. It seems that a new way for identifying consumers' motivations to buy ethical products should be seen as multifaceted, not simply 'doing good.'

Drawing on this review of the literature, we introduce a framework of universal motivations for ethical consumption that aims to encapsulate the different themes identified in the literature, and which would be generalizable across product category or country. The first of these dimensions is the extent to which the motivation is externally directed towards others (*social*) or internally-directed, independent of what other people think (*non-social*). Social influence stems from a person's perception of how relevant others will perceive their behaviour (e.g. Pavlou and Fygenson, 2006). At the *social* end of the continuum, decisions are influenced by group norms. The second dimension is the extent to which the motivation is oriented towards the self and one's individual benefits (*individualistic*), or towards others and the collective good (*collectivist*). People with *individualistic* motivations are most concerned with their own welfare, instead of the group welfare. In contrast, *collectivist* motives stimulate individuals to associate their behaviour with, and direct their behaviour towards, a group as shown in Figure 1.

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INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE
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From these two dimensions, four motivations applicable to ethical consumption were identified:

1. *Conformity motivations* (social, collectivist motives) focus on the needs of a group to which individuals wish to belong. This motivation stems from the desire to be accepted to the group, and to be perceived as 'one of them' as a result of the decision.

2. *Self-orientation motivations* (social, individualistic motives) are directed at 'self concept', or the way individuals think that they are perceived by others (Freestone and McGoldrick 2008). Unlike conformity motivations, where people seek to build an image consistent with the group's values, individuals motivated by self-orientation seek to differentiate themselves.

3. *Self-actualisation motivations* (non-social, collectivist motives) are directed towards self-fulfilment and an enriching experience from the ethical consumption (Maslow 1943; Goldstein 1995). People with self-actualisation motivations seek the experience for egoless, selfless, detached reasons. Fulfilling the needs has underlying altruistic motivations.

4. *Hedonism motivations* (non-social, individualistic motives) are driven by the need for individual enjoyment or pleasure (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). The consumption is used to advance the desire for sensory or cognitive stimulation, with the ethical aspect of the purchase producing a higher level of enjoyment, novelty, interest or excitement.

Collectively, these four categorises capture, we believe, the breadth of ethical consumption motivations. In line with the research reviewed above, we suggest that, rather than being motivated by a single factor, people's motivations for consuming ethical products are shaped by a combination of these factors, although for each ethical consumption decision one of the four motivational forces is likely to take precedence. In the following sections, we summarise the results of two exploratory studies that aim to illustrate (or 'test') the utility of this model.

STUDY ONE: CONSUMERS' MOTIVATIONS FOR ETHICAL COMSUMPTION

We surveyed a sample of 173 self-identifying ethical consumers about their motivations for buying ethical products. The aim was to compare respondents' verbatim qualitative descriptions with the model in Figure 1. Data were collected via open-response written questionnaires. The questionnaire defined ethical products as those that are respectful of environment, people and animals, and asked a single open-response question: 'Briefly explain why you buy ethical products – please be as specific and detailed as possible.' Additional short-answer questions collected basic demographic data (age, nationality, gender). Respondents were not asked to describe the types of ethical products they bought nor to link products to motivations. The questionnaire was pre-tested with 10 students prior to use in this study. Respondents were drawn from professionals attending post-graduate and executive education programs at three large universities in Australia and France. Just over a half of respondents (57%) were female, with ages ranging from 27 to 56 years old. Participants came from a total of 27 home countries, primarily Australia, France, the United States, Canada, Argentina, Japan, Brazil, and the United Kingdom. The content analysis process took cues from procedures suggested by prominent researchers (e.g. Silverman & Marvasti 2008) and involved four stages. First, data strips reporting motivations were identified in each response. These ranged from just a few words to several sentences; single responses frequently contained multiple motivations, and these were coded separately. Next, both researchers independently coded each data strip into one of five categories: the four descriptors in the framework described above plus an additional category for ambiguous descriptions ('unclear/unable to be coded'). In this first tranche, 3 data strips were categorized as 'unable to be coded'. Next, the researchers compared the results of their analysis and discussed differences in patterns. All remaining data strips were coded into one of the four motivational categories. Following this, responses reporting multiple motivations were re-examined and mapped to represent the patterns of reporting, a process that involved the creation of visual representations.

Findings

Respondents reported a total of 154 motivations for purchasing ethical products (average of 1.3 per respondent). Table 2 summarizes the frequency that each of the four categories was reported as the respondents' primary motivation (the respondents' first listed motivation, an approach used in 'Top of Mind' for brands) or a subordinate motivation, as well as the total number of respondents reporting

each motivation. The percentage of all respondents that this number represents is indicated in brackets. The right hand column provides sample responses for each category or motivation.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

As the table shows, all four motivations in the framework were represented in participants' responses. The two non-social motivations were reported most frequently, with self-actualization (67 respondents, or 58% of all respondents) and hedonism (53 respondents, 46%) being reported by the largest number of respondents as either a primary or secondary motivation. Sixty seven respondents (58%) indicated a single motivation for consuming ethically; of these, the most frequently reported motivation was self-actualization (33 respondents). The remaining 48 respondents (42%) reported two or more motivations. While the sample size is small, our findings show no clear cultural patterns; respondents' motivations to consume ethical products seem independent of their nationality and culture.

Looking more closely at the features of each category, respondents reporting self-actualization motivations identified a number of issues, the most common of which were animal welfare, reported by 42% of those articulating self-actualization motivations (28 out of 67 respondents), the environment (23/67 respondents, or 43%), and labor/workers' rights (20/67, or 30%). Similar variety was evident amongst the hedonism motivations, which included responses like 'feel(ing) better about myself', 'tastes better', and 'healthy'. While less frequently reported, the social aspects of ethical consumption were not neglected, with conformity and self-orientation motivations being reported by 25 respondents (22%) and 9 respondents (8%) respectively. All responses fell into one or more of the four categories in the model.

In summary, the results of Study One give some initial validation of the four motivational categories identified in the framework. They also highlight the relative importance of social motivations, which had – until recently – been overlooked by research into this topic.

STUDY TWO: CORE MESSAGES IN ETHICAL ADVERTISEMENTS

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This study involved analyzing advertisements for ethical products in order to identify the types of consumer motivations that advertisers appeared to direct their main message toward. The sample comprised 23 advertisements for different product categories. The only criterion for inclusion was that products being advertised came from the FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) industry and thus would be accessible to all consumers regardless of socio-economic status or nationality. Compatibility with the four motivations typology was not a one of the criterion for selecting the advertisements. Advertisements were taken randomly from organizations' websites. Organisations from eight nations were represented. Table 3 provides a full list of the advertisements analyzed. Sample ads are presented in Figure 2.

INSERT TABLE 3 AND FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Data analysis involved the researchers reviewing the visual and verbal cues contained in the advertisements using the following coding template:

1. Self-actualization: Information in the advertisement appeals to consumers' desire to do good to others (e.g. planet, people, animals);

2. Hedonic: Information in the advertisement appeals to consumers' desire to do good to themselves (e.g. health, beauty);

3. Conformity: Information in the advertisement appeals to consumers' desire to do what is approved by their peers;

4. Self-orientation: Information in the advertisement appeals to consumers' desire to do something different or to differentiate themselves from the average consumer.

Findings

The results of the data coding are presented in the right hand column of Table 3. As it shows, three out of the four motivations depicted in our conceptual framework were identified in the advertisements. Self-actualization was the primary motivation, appearing as a prominent motivation in all but one of the advertisements we sampled (22/23, or 96%). In 11 of these ads (46%), self-actualization was the sole motivational appeal that we identified. By way of example, the Ford motor vehicle advertisement

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(Figure 2) contains a message about protecting the planet. Although the brand produces cars which pollute the environment, the company counters this by showing how respectful it is of trees. We infer the message to be that, by extension, buying a *Ford* car is supporting the planet, a message appealing to self-actualization motives. Similarly, *The Body Shop's* advertisement (Figure 2) focuses on commitment to the planet and general wellbeing (self-actualization) rather than the benefits of their products, such as softer skin or hair thanks to natural and organic products (hedonic).

Hedonic motivations were identified in 11 advertisements (46%), and were the sole motivation in just one advertisement (*Trader Joe's* fruit). As an example of this category is the advertisement for *Green Mountain Coffee* which evoked enjoyment of drinking a high quality fair-trade coffee (self-actualization) as much as consumers enjoy great music (hedonic motivation).

Just one advertisement contained conformity motivations (4%) while no advertisements analyzed in this research addressed self-orientation motivations. Interestingly, the combination of self-actualization and hedonic motivations made up almost half of all the advertisements we reviewed (10/23, 43%). In looking at the type of products that were promoted in the advertisements, most emphasized environment friendly (11/23, 48%) or fair trade (5/23, 22%) products. Although not the focus of our study, it is worth mentioning two additional observations relating the advertisements we analyzed. First, the type of motivation addressed by the advertisements appears related to the product category, rather than the country of origin. Categories often criticized for damaging the environment (vehicles, cleaning products, soap) tended to promote their environmental credentials. Animal welfare was emphasized by cosmetics advertisers, food advertisers focused on fair-trade and the environment. Second, a clear difference existed in the tone of advertisements. Specifically, message appeared to be more subtle when addressing self-actualization motivations and stimulating (ethical) buying. In contrast, advertisements using more direct language and shocking images tended to promote boycotting and non-consumption (in our sample, this included campaigns by the pro-environment not-for-profit multinational *Greenpeace*).

DISCUSSION

This paper has introduced a two-dimensional model of motivations for ethical consumption, and tested this by looking at consumers' motivations (Study One) and the appeal intentions of advertisers (Study Two). We found that while consumers' motivations appear diverse and complex, encapsulating social as well as altruistic objectives, this did not fit with the motivational appeals used by advertisers. Rather, our analysis of advertisements in Study Two suggests a bias in the appeal used by advertisers that, on the surface, appears incongruent with the stated motivations of consumers in Study One. That is, our findings demonstrate the existence of a gap between the type of motivation predominantly promoted in advertisements and the different reasons why consumers buy ethical products as reported by respondents. We hypothesize that advertisers may be 'stuck in the past', encouraging consumers to feel good by doing good (self-actualisation). While this is consistent with the 'green consumers'' motivations to act against unethical companies (Marcuse 1972) – and, it should be noted, the majority of consumers' surveyed in Study One – our findings do provide evidence that consumers' motivations may have moved on from this, and that advertisers could consider the benefits (and costs) of highlighting other benefits in advertisements.

A number of possible reasons for this discrepancy exist. It is still more socially acceptable to promote self-actualization motivations, despite the fact that a substantial number of consumers in Study One overcame the social desirability bias and admitted to buying ethical products for reasons other than doing good. Similarly, hedonic, self-orientation or conformity motives may be better tapped through other advertising mediums not examined in Study Two (e.g. social media). Similarly, the social dimension of consumption may be best represented by particular products; for instance, fair-trade and environment friendly (Holt 1995; Szmigin and Carrigan 2006).

Notwithstanding these discrepancies, results from this research do, perhaps, point to an evolution from 'greens' to 'ethicals'. Some evidence for this comes from communication campaigns stimulating boycott (e.g. the DETOX performed by Greenpeace, Figure 2) and advertisements stimulating the consumption of ethical products for self-actualization motives. One commonality between the two approaches is the use of emotions, with 'green' ads eliciting fear (negative consumption) and 'ethicals' eliciting desire (positive consumption).

Historically, self-actualization motivations were the main reasons why people boycotted companies and started buying ethical products, most of them based on fair-trade and environment friendly approaches (Tallontire et al. 2001). While 'greens' and 'ethicals' have altruism as common ground that is likely to bridge old assumptions ('companies are bad, let's boycott their products') and new assumptions ('I buy ethical products because they are good for me and for the planet'), Study One shows that other motivations push consumers to buy ethical products. While logical that advertisers would target socially acceptable motivation (Sirgy et al. 2008), it seems incongruous that they may yet to recognize that 'ethicals' are motivated by reasons other than altruism.

While more comprehensive validation is required, the studies reported here give some initial support for the robustness of the framework in Figure 1 as a universally applicable tool to understand both the pull (consumers' motivations) and push (advertisers' intentions) of ethical consumption. This has set the platform for a range of possible research directions, including cross-analyzing motivations with types of ethical behaviour, which was outside the objectives of the present paper.

The findings do provide a platform to assist producers of FMCG, and other products, to better understand the underlying motives leading to ethical consumption. This, in turn, may help producers encourage consumers to buy ethical products by more directly addressing their motivations. The framework used in Study One provides a platform to compare the motivational drivers of contemporary ethical consumers with earlier generations green activists. It may also assist marketers and advertising agencies address the most salient motivations able to trigger consumers' intentions of purchase.

With increasing pressure on consumers to behave and consume ethically, producers and their advertising agencies are likely to be seeking efficient ways to attract the growing number of consumers interested in ethical products. Our studies suggest that advertisers could consider expanding the breadth of motivations that their campaigns appeal to. Focusing solely on self-actualization, while beneficial, may be constraining their ability to encourage more consumers to buy ethical.

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Table 1: Research identifying motivations to buy ethical products (sample)

Szmigin and Carrigan (2006)	Fair-trade products	Distinction Hedonic satisfaction Love and aesthetic appreciation
Brikmann and Peattie (2008)	Fair-trade products	Public motives Private-social motives Private-caring motives Private-hedonism motives
Devitiis et al. (2008)	Fair-trade food in Italy	Selfish Pleasure-seeking and curious Ethical Ethical hygienist Hygienist selfish
Barkman (2010)	Fair-trade and eco-friendly products in Sweden	Idealists Able and willing Ok, I'll do it Unwilling responsibility takers

Table 2: Motivations for ethical consumption

Self-actualization	68 (39)	29 (17)	97 (56)	• I consider that it is absolutely terrible that in the 21st century there are children who instead of going to school are forced to do illegal work … buying products that you are sure are made by people working in proper conditions is a way of stopping illegal work and contributing to the world's social evolution. (Argentina) • I buy from farmers' markets to help them face imported products. This also helps buy declining air fuel usage. (Scotland) • I buy ethical products because I think that it is important to protect the environment and to help it. (Spain) • By purchasing fair-trade products I am upholding the right I believe in: fair wage in order to make a living/ We all have the right to a clean environment, and this also applies to animals as they have the right to be treated with respect and not be used for purposes such as animal testing. (Canada)
Hedonism	69 (40)	17 (10)	86 (50)	• Those chemical things they give to animals and food are bad to people. You can be seriously sick after several years of consuming them/ I buy ethical goods because they are healthier (Greece) • Less harm to me and my family … my health is my number one concern for a long, happy and prosperous life/Organic products make my skin feel great (Canada) • Organic products are healthier and better for my body (Brazil)
Conformity	26 (15)	9 (5)	35 (20)	• In my culture, you should do your best to help the society and save the environment/ Buying those kinds of products, show that you care about the environment … let this set of values affect your everyday life and decisions about how to spend your money. (Denmark) • I feel like doing my part in promoting the production of good products which do not cause damage to the environment, people or animals/Buying ethical products is not out dates with the way in which people live today. I might be appreciated if the product is appealing. (UK) • The problem is that ethical alternatives to the existing products are rare. We consume all the time and have a certain style to fit in with the group we want. We are always tempted to go shopping all the time, to have new brands and clothes. (Canada)

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Self-orientation	7 (4)	3 (2)	10 (6)	• When we buy ethical products we belong to a different type of consumers. It feels good. (Italy) • Buying ethical products is being yourself. You stand out from the crowd. (UK)

Because a number of respondents reported multiple motivations, percentages do not sum to 100%.

Table 3: Sample of advertisements analyzed in Study 2

Iphone	Smartphones	United States	Environment friendly Self-Actualization
Ford	Cars	Argentina	Environment friendly Self-Actualization
Max Havelaar	Bananas	Belgium	Fair-trade Self-Actualization
The Body Shop	Cosmetics	United Kingdom	Cruelty free Self-Actualization
Maestro Limpio	Cleaning products	Argentina	Environment friendly Self-Actualization
Green and Spring	Cosmetics	United Kingdom	Cruelty free Self-Actualization/Hedonic
Coca-Cola	Soft drinks	United States	Green packaging Self-Actualization/Hedonic
Lush	Shampoo	United Kingdom	Preservative free Self-Actualization/Hedonic

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Sun Green Power	Dish washer soap	France	Environment friendly Self-Actualization
Lush	Moisturizer	United Kingdom	Organic Hedonic/Self-Actualization
Rinso	Washing machine soap	Indonesia	Environment friendly Self-Actualization
Innocent	Smoothies	United Kingdom	Environment friendly Self-Actualization
McDonald's	Milkshake	Finland	Animal/Environment friendly Hedonic / Self-Actualization
Persil	Washing machine soap	United Kingdom	Environment friendly Self-Actualization
Volvo	Cars	Portugal	Environment friendly Self-Actualization/Conformity
Starbucks	Coffee	United States	Fair trade Self-Actualization/Hedonic
Traders Joe	Fruits	United States	Organic Hedonic
Marks and Spencer	Clothes	United Kingdom	Environment friendly Self-Actualization
Aveda	Cosmetics	United Kingdom	Environment friendly Self-Actualization/Hedonic
Nescafé	Coffee	United Kingdom	Fair trade

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			Hedonic/Self-Actualization
Green Mountain	Coffee	United States	Fair trade
			Hedonic/Self-Actualization
Ben & Jerry's	Ice Creams	United States	Fair trade
			Self-Actualization/Hedonic
Chipotle	Restaurant	United States	Animal friendly
			Self-Actualization

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Figure 1: Framework for understanding the motivations for buying ethical products

Social
Externally directed; norms dictated by the group.

| | 1. Conformity | 2. Self-orientation |

Collectivist
Decision associated with a group.

Individualistic
Motivated towards self; personal > group.

1. Conformity	**2. Self-orientation**
I want to be accepted by the group (everyone else is doing it, so will I); adaptation; sense of belonging; doing to be like others; connecting.	*I want to be perceived positively by others (self-respect/status); sense of uniqueness, differentiated from others; doing to be seen; showing good.*
3. Self-actualisation	**4. Hedonism**
I want to achieve something; generosity; sense of accomplishment; doing for others; being good.	*I want to feel good; selfishness; self-fulfilment/pleasure; doing for self; feeling good.*

Non-social
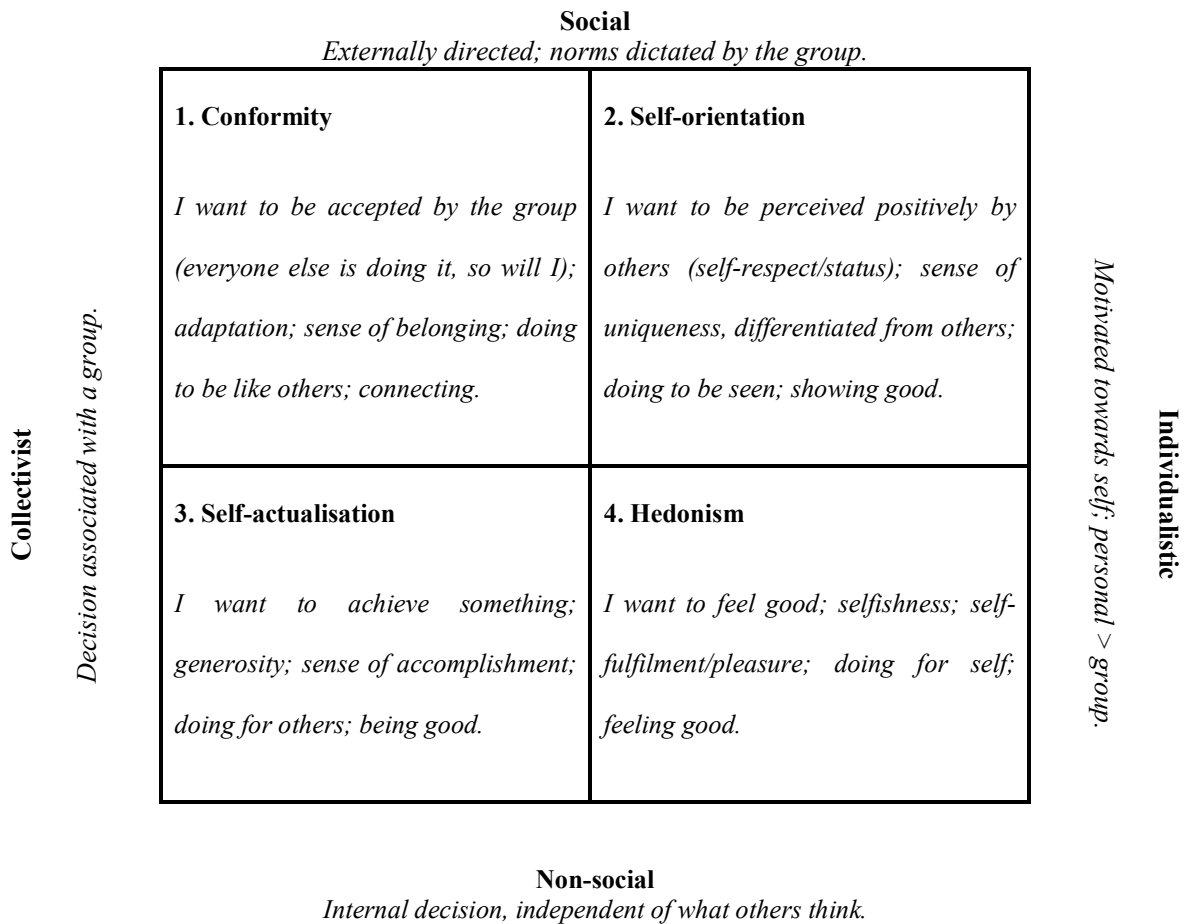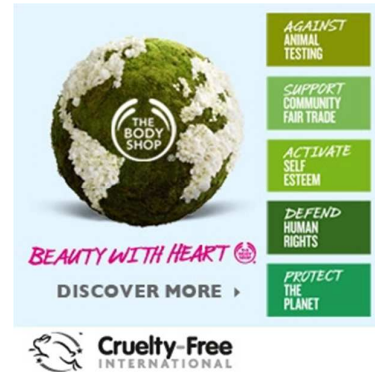*Internal decision, independent of what others think.*

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Figure 2: Examples of advertisements analyzed in Study 2

Clockwise from top left: (a) Ford (Argentina), (b) The Body Shop (UK), (c) Green Mountain Coffee (USA), (d) Coca-Cola (USA), (e) Greenpeace (Detox campaign).

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