The tripartite model of responsible consumption

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ABSTRACT

Purpose
Whereas research on corporate responsibility has resulted in plausible theoretical developments, consumer responsibility research remains dominated by profiling studies with little, if any, sound theoretical basis. Accordingly this study is designed to explore the complex interplay between consumer responsible behaviours (CRBs) and their motivators (CRMs).

Design/Methodology/Approach
Following a review of relevant literature an interpretivistic methodology was adopted and data were collected by means of 27 in-depth interviews in conjunction with tours of the respondents homes and discussions of pictures and artefacts. Analysis identified CRBs and associated motivators enabling the development of a grounded conceptual model exposing the dynamics between CRBs and CRMs.

Findings
A tripartite model revealing the complex motivational and behavioural domains of responsible consumption comprising three CRMs -personal, ecological and social- associated with different high and low involvement CRBs. These are discussed in some detail.

Limitations
Given the small number of respondents, confirmatory research involving a survey of a representative sample is required to test the research propositions emerging from the findings.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, the social and environmental responsibilities of both marketers and consumers are both key elements within the business vernacular. Since the mid-20th century, researchers have increasingly focused on such responsibilities and have created a large body of knowledge related to it. The bulk of this literature is issue-specific addressing such areas as environmental concern (e.g., Kassarjian, 1971; Petty, 1994); information processing (e.g., Dyer & Maronick, 1988; Viswanathan, 1994); air pollution (e.g., Aaker & Bagozzi, 1982; Burns & De Vere, 1982); energy conservation (e.g., Downs & Freiden, 1983; McDougall & Anderson, 1981); recycling (e.g., Biswas, Licata, McKee, Pullig & Daughtridge, 2000; Mobley, Painter, Untch & Unnava, 1995); ethical consumption (e.g., Barnett, Cafar & Newholm, 2005; Cherrier, 2007); vegetarianism (e.g., Janda & Trochcia, 2001; Smart, 2004); and consumer agency (e.g., Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Klein, Smith & John, 2004). Some researchers, however, have taken an encompassing, integrative (as opposed to issue-specific) look at corporate responsibility and at consumer responsibility. Corporate responsibility research asks how the responsible and irresponsible practices of a firm can influence its short and long-term performance. Consumer responsibility research, on the other hand, explores the social and environmental attitudes and behaviours of consumers. Whereas research on corporate responsibility has resulted in plausible theoretical developments (e.g., Dacin & Brown, 1997; Ellen, Webb & Mohr, 2006; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006), consumer responsibility research remains dominated by profiling studies (e.g., Anderson & Cunningham, 1972; Antil, 1984) with little, if any, theoretically sound basis (see Osterhus, 1997). To address this issue, the current study utilises an interpretive approach and explores the complex interplay between consumer responsible behaviours as well as their numerous motivators via the conducting of in-depth interviews, home tours, and discussions of pictures and artefacts. In this article, responsibility denotes the consumer’s perceived obligation to behave in ways conducive to socially constructed ideals that pertain to the self in an unselfish manner and/or to others altruistically. Hence, consumer responsibility encompasses perceived obligations to others as well as unselfish obligations to self in the realm of consumption. Following the literature review, we describe the process of data collection and the method of analysis, present our findings, and discuss the results. We also suggest research and macro implications of our findings.

**Implications**

Social marketers need to combine personal, social and technological appeals in their communications to raise awareness and encourage socially responsible behaviours while recognising the importance and relevance of context specific factors.

**Contribution**

The research provides empirical confirmation of the complex nature of motivational factors that cumulatively affect the degree and spectrum of consumer responsible behaviours.

**Keywords** Responsible consumption, Motivations and behaviours
LITERATURE REVIEW

For decades, responsible consumption has been at the forefront of social marketing research, which initially focused on profiling ecologically and socially responsible consumers and identifying meaningful segments in order to enable businesses and policy makers to target them more effectively. This primarily empiricist (positivist) approach maintains that “green” consumers can have their needs satisfied within the existing marketplace (Scherhorn, 1993; Schwepker & Cornwell, 1991). With its roots in the neoclassical economic view of consumer sovereignty and individual utility maximisation, this approach has introduced numerous demographic, attitudinal and lifestyle correlations and antecedents for responsible consumer behaviours. However, despite numerous attempts to identify their correlates and antecedents, responsible behaviours have proven to be remarkably difficult phenomena to predict (Jackson, 2005; McCarty & Shrum, 2001). This difficulty has been explained in different terms: (a) the remote, public benefits of responsible consumption do not match immediate personal costs to the individual (McCarty & Shrum, 2001); (b) consumers are not choosers as they are locked into their cultural and institutional contexts and norms (Sanne, 2002); (c) consumers do not trust firms’ claims and motivations regarding responsible practices (Peattie & Crane, 2005); and (d) responsible behaviours boast a complex, dynamic nature and cannot be effectively understood using the conventional reductionist theories (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Holt, 1997; Thompson & Troester, 2002).

In an attempt to describe responsible behaviours as more socially embedded processes, some studies focused on such contextual-level variables as social and subjective norm (Biswas et al., 2000; Crosby, Gill & Taylor, 1981; Minton & Rose, 1997), individualist vs. collectivist values (McCarty & Shrum, 2001), and perceived responsible behaviours of other social actors (Pieters, Bijmolt, Raaij & Kruijk, 1998). However, the results of these studies have not provided uniform findings in explaining responsible behaviours. Hansen and Schrader (1997) and McCarty and Shrum (2001) suggest that the intangible and public nature of temporally remote benefits resulting from the immediate personal consumption decisions cannot be satisfactorily explained within the frame of the dominant individualistic and rational model of consumer behaviour.

Following the philosophy of gradual change from within, the New Environmental (more recently changed to Ecological) Paradigm (Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978; Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig & Jones, 2000) is becoming an influential theoretical foundation for pro-environmental research and policy-making. It postulates that as environmental conditions change, the currently dominant social paradigm entailing laissez faire government, individualism, material abundance, and conquest of nature becomes unsustainable (Pirages & Ehrlich, 1974; Prothero & Fitchett, 2000). Emphasising balance of nature, limits to growth, anti-anthropocentrism, and the “Spaceship Earth” view, the New Ecological Paradigm encompasses ecological, political, social, and economic domains, and claims that societal values and beliefs are gradually transforming as a result of disturbing scientific findings about ecological deterioration. This view is echoed by Arnould (2007) who suggests that market-mediated social movements are more successful than radical environmental extremists, since they are better understood by the mainstream population and can attract more allies. More recently, the adherents of the “green commodity” approach have suggested that a paradigm shift in the DSP is taking place at the global level, with societal belief
structure changing from materialistic to ecological sources and meanings of happiness and individual consumption (Moisander, 2000) and emergence of “environmental citizenship” (Hobson, 2002). As a result, environmental issues are becoming trendy and mainstream, allowing for the possibility of individual consumer agency in further affecting the shift of consumption discourse towards “green citizenship” (Prothero, McDonagh & Dobscha, 2010).

The current study supports the possibility of consumer agency in affecting the dominant social paradigm by espousing and promoting environmentally-responsible beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. It addresses the issue of dialectic relationships between individual-level responsible consumption practices and motivations. We use an interpretive approach to map the broad domain of responsible consumption behaviours, and explicate the complex and dynamic interplay between these manifold behaviours and motivations that bring about such behaviours. In particular, using in-depth interviews, home tours, pictures and artefacts we trace the dialectic of environmental learning leading to formation of motives that materialise into behaviours, which in turn create more learning, teaching, and other responsible behaviours.

**METHOD AND ANALYSIS**

The data and interpretations were derived from 27 audio-recorded interviews with responsible consumers, 27 field notes (observational data afforded by home tours), and over 520 pictures. Participants were residents of Southwest United States and were mostly professional adults in their late twenties, thirties, and early forties. They represented a variety of educational fields and occupations. Seventeen participants were female. The average age was 34 for female and 35 for male participants. Table 1 provides participant profile using pseudonyms to maintain privacy.

The in-depth (65-150 min) interviews were conducted by two researchers at participants’ homes in two stages. In the first visit, each participant learned about research objectives and procedures, consented to participate, and received a disposable camera to take pictures of whatever they considered to represent “responsible consumption”. During the second visit, participants were asked to rank-order the pictures based on their importance and relevance, and to comment on each picture. This was followed by a non-structured and non-directed conversation about CRB, and finally a home tour, which helped situate CRB and related meanings within the broader context of participants’ homes and lives (i.e., in natural settings; Kvale, 1983).

The interviews began with open-ended, grand-tour questions (McCracken, 1988) and were individuated by probes (Price, Arnould & Curasi, 2000). Participants were encouraged to express their personal perspectives and elaborate on their behaviours and experiences (Pryor & Grossbart, 2005). Data collection continued until new interviews produced minimal thematic variations from previous interviews (McQuarrie, 1993). We sought an understanding of the phenomenon, not a representation of a population (McCracken, 1988).

Using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we completed the following analytic stages: (a) compared incidents applicable to each category, (b) integrated categories and their properties, (c) delimited the findings, and (d) developed the theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss as cited in Lincoln &
Guba, 1985). The first stage followed a trajectory of identifying emerging themes by noting instances, patterns, and models (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 150). In the second stage of the constant comparison method, the coding was expanded into field notes and pictures to identify new codes and discover redundancies and disjunctures between self-reports and observations (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). While consumer testimonies served as the primary demarcation of responsible behaviours from other behaviours, reviewed literature and field notes were used to bear out emerging CRBs. This continuous refinement process enabled us to move from instances to emerging patterns, which were used to create new (families of) codes. Additional themes also kept emerging as the analysis progressed, signalling increasing understanding of the phenomenon. The emerging themes represent verbal and pictorial claims by participants that certain behaviours and reasons qualify as responsible consumption (e.g., dividing trash into four categories) augmented and/or corroborated by observations of conventionally recognised CRBs during home tours (e.g., observing the four trash categories kept at home). By going back and forth between various data sources, we were able to reach a comprehensive use and interpretation of the data (Spiggle, 1994). In the third stage of the constant comparison method, we sought to (a) divide CRBs into two or more groups based

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adorra</td>
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<td>B.A.</td>
<td>State employee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arlone</td>
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<td>Widowed and remarried</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>Auditor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Betsy</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Florist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catrice</td>
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<td>M.F.A. student</td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayla</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Divorced and single</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>Dietician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isadora</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Divorced and remarried</td>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>Bartender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazzlyn</td>
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<td>B.S.</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenisha</td>
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<td>Divorced and single</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Beautician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leona</td>
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<td>High school</td>
<td>Bank teller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nichelle</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oneida</td>
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<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Dental assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranae</td>
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<td>J.D.</td>
<td>Attorney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rima</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Divorced and single</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Fire fighter</td>
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<td>Shasta</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>Biologist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sherilyn</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>State employee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vilma</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>Architect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yancey</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Fashion designer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Male:</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Never-married single</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>Software designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brant</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Widowed and remarried</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>State employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Divorced and remarried</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Real estate broker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Technical school</td>
<td>Baker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethan</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Never-married single</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Tattooist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shayan</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Never-married single</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>Chemical engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramsey</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>M.B.A.</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Never-married single</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Child-care employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travon</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Divorced and single</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
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</table>
on the degree of investment, effort, and/or sacrifice each required of the consumer; (b) sketch the boundaries of CRBs; and (c) highlight descriptors suggesting possible (over)generalisations, vocabulary implying metaphorical or value-laden assertions, and claims of idiosyncratic experiences with responsible consumption. In the final and last stage, we focused on the interrelationships among the emerging themes and developed a grounded, conceptual model to highlight the major findings and expose the dynamics of CRBs and CRMs.

EMERGING THEMES

One of the recurring themes illustrates the belief that “not all responsible actions are created equal”. CRBs differ in terms of investment, effort, and/or sacrifice they require of the consumer. Both self-reports and field notes contain frequent references to this variation. Ramsey’s comment on two pictures showing his own and his neighbour’s trash bags exemplifies this theme:

This with paper plates in it is our trash, and this one with meat [containers] sticking out is neighbour’s. She told my wife we’re wasteful. It’s funny because they ain’t vegetarian… My wife and I are. Which shows more commitment: vegetarian diet or reusable plates? Vegetarian diet of course...

In this quote, Ramsey compares two emergent CRBs in terms of the commitment they require of the consumer. Specifically, he introduces vegetarianism as a higher-commitment CRB compared to “avoiding paper plates to save a tree”. For the purposes of this research, commitment denotes the willingness to undertake some investment, effort, and/or sacrifice required by a given CRB. Some CRBs entail greater initial investment but not necessarily more effort (e.g., buying an Energy-Star certified house), others require more effort but not necessarily greater investment (e.g., becoming a vegetarian), still others require more sacrifice but not necessarily greater investment or effort (e.g., discontinuing hot tub to save water and energy). Across CRBs, each of the three dimensions of behavioural commitment is best represented as a continuum. To expose the relative levels of commitment more clearly and to enable the reader to compare them across CRBs, this research aggregates the three dimensions of commitment (i.e., investment, effort, and sacrifice) and divides CRBs into low-commitment CRBs (e.g., throwing a soda can in a recycle bin) and high-commitment ones (e.g., buying a hybrid car; see Table 2). At the interpersonal level, almost every participant exhibited a unique combination of both low and high-commitment CRBs. At the intrapersonal level, almost no participant was neatly classifiable into low or high-commitment categories because each engaged in a combination of low-effort, low-investment as well as high-effort, high-investment CRBs. Therefore, CRBs, but not participants, form meaningful categories.

Participants express numerous reasons for their CRBs. These expressions are sometimes explicit and obvious (e.g., “to save on utility bills”, “to save a tree”, “to stop labour exploitation”) and other times implicit and subtle (e.g., “I read nutritional facts ‘cause dealing with HMOs is tough” signifies the desire to maintain health by controlling food intake). We identified 24 distinct reasons based on verbal expressions and classified them into three categories of concern: personal, ecological, and social. Previous research defines concern as an attitude towards a certain issue capable of motivating the consumer to initiate a course of action (e.g., Kassarjian 1971; Minton
TABLE 2 Consumer responsible behaviours and motivations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRB</th>
<th>Commit</th>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information and decision-making</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involuntary early learning</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>E S Learning about vegan lifestyle from a roommate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary early learning</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>E S Discussing nutrition with more informed co-workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced learning</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>E S Searching for news on genetically modified products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual teaching</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>S Displaying and explaining recycling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned teaching</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>E S Lecturing in schools about energy conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaying green image</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>E S Bumper stickers and shopping bags with “green” slogans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using package information</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>E S Buying products with “organic” or “natural” package claims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making conscionable choices</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>E S Buying organic foods and degradable products; informed voting; not smoking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Important contexts</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Favouring small/local businesses</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>S Avoiding sweatshop products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being friendly to animals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-animal consumption</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoiding animal-cruel products</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Refusing to buy products tested on animals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegetarianism</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>E S Maintaining a non-animal diet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting animal welfare</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>S Caring for injured or stray animals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conserving and recycling resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conserving resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passive resource conservation</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>E S Reducing the use of electricity, water, and paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active resource conservation</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>E S Purchasing Energy Star appliances and hybrid vehicles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycling</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Purchase recycle</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>E S Purchasing used products or recycled products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use recycle</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>S Re-using disposable products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposal recycle</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>S S Donating used products; trash sorting; recycling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  
L = Low Commitment  
P = Personal Concern  
H = High Commitment  
E = Ecological Concern  
S = Social Concern  

& Rose 1997; Petty 1994). Ecological concern pertains to the nature and quality of the interaction between two systems: (a) the community of humans and (b) the natural world as it exists without human beings or civilisation. Social concern is nested within the former system (i.e., the community of humans) and pertains to the quality and fairness of relations between individuals, groups, or peoples in both local and global arenas. Personal concern taps the consumer’s desire to maintain and
enhance her own or a loved one’s health, safety, social, or economic status without intending to influence something in the ecological or social domains. Personal concern represents situations in which the consumer is directly influenced by her own consumption activities (e.g., reading package information to enjoy the direct benefit of eating wholesome food). With ecological and social concerns, however, the impact of and upon the consumer is indirect and dependent upon others’ actions (e.g., the effectiveness of one’s recycling effort depends on whether others recycle, too; and the potential benefits are remote and public). As such, responsible consumption encompasses responsibility toward other entities, animate and non-animate, as well as unselfish responsibility toward oneself. Whereas social concern extends to people located in geographically and socio-culturally distant spaces, personal concern encompasses a handful of people intimately linked to one’s self-concept (e.g., family members and pets). Every CRB was based upon one or more of these concerns, which we refer to as CRMs.

THE TRIPARTITE MODEL OF RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

After coding instances into emerging patterns, we returned to the original data and sifted it several times, each time emphasising certain parts of the interpretation. The aim was to understand how different (families of) codes and patterns related to one another, and to create a tentative model to capture the inter-thematic relationships.

After frequent iterations between the tentative model and specific data episodes, a tripartite model emerged revealing the complex motivational and behavioural domains of responsible consumption (Figure 1). This model introduces three CRMs: (a) personal concern depicted as a triangle on the left; (b) ecological concern depicted as a square; and (c) social concern depicted as a triangle on the right. In addition, the model classifies CRBs into low and high-commitment spheres. CRBs that are plotted within the ellipse in the centre of the model are high-commitment, and those outside the ellipse are low-commitment. The model illustrates which CRMs underlie each CRB. For example, animal cruelty opponents are motivated by their concern for the ecosystem only. The overlapping areas formed by the two triangles and the square contain CRBs that could be motivated by either one or a combination of CRMs. For example, either personal or ecological or social concern, or a combination of these concerns, might underlie consumer advanced learning behaviours. The double-headed arrows denote the dynamic nature of responsible consumption suggesting transitions from low- to high commitment and from high to low-commitment spheres. CRBs for which multiple CRMs are indicated (i.e., those falling in overlapping areas formed by the two triangles and the square) are not always motivated by all of those CRMs. Consider advanced learning: researching the effects of smoking on human body can be solely motivated by a consumer’s concern for her own health (personal concern) and have nothing to do with ecological and social concerns. Similarly, tracking firms and brands that sponsor sweatshops can be solely motivated by a consumer’s concern for exploited workers (social concern) and have nothing to do with personal and ecological concerns. Finally, learning new and innovative ways of reducing toxic emission can be solely motivated by the consumer’s ecological concern and have nothing to do with personal and social concerns. Each of these behaviours is motivated by only one CRM. However, since all of these behaviours qualify as advanced learning, we say that advanced learning could be motivated by one or a combination of the three CRMs.
The emerging CRBs pertain to information and decision-making (learning, teaching, displaying a green image, using package information, and making conscionable choices). They mainly manifest in the following contexts: relations to businesses, relations to animals, and relations to resources.
1. Information and decision-making

1.1 Learning

Sources of information and ways in which participants learn about CRBs are emphasised in both interviews and pictures. Several of the pictures show web sites, magazine articles, and other sources that provide pertinent information. When elaborating on those pictures, participants appeared highly familiar not only with certain CRBs but with CRB-related information sources. Home tours provided ample opportunities to observe some of the information sources by examining participants’ book and magazine collections, list of “favourites” on Internet browsers, and electronic mailboxes. Familiarity with CRB appeared as the result of continual exposure to CRB information over time. For Shayan, exposure began during a date:

It wasn’t until the third or fourth date...that I found [Jen] was vegan...Things changed very quickly. I became interested in the whole idea of vegetarianism...I was interested and questioning all the time ever since I decided to be with her. [Now] we are more serious about vegan recipes and surf [the] Internet, like Healthdiaries.com...We also read a lot of other things, like [how] meat eaters are destroying the earth or how companies use rats and chimps for testing. We spend lots of time...

Shayan’s initial exposure to vegan diet was spontaneous and involuntary. After this initial period, however, he consciously sought to learn more about vegetarianism and other CRBs. This involuntary-to-voluntary escalation was common across participants. Involuntary early experiences comprise initial exposure to social institutions and other people (e.g., roommate, significant other, family, school, employer, or mass media) that hold pertinent information and inherent influence on the participant (e.g., Shayan’s date with Jen). Voluntary experiences are due to agentic and mindful pursuit of CRB information that takes place in the context of interpersonal communication with others (e.g., relative, neighbour, friend, colleague, or stranger). While some voluntary experiences require little effort and time (Shayan’s subsequent interest), others might entail significant effort and time investment (Shayan and Jen’s “serious” information-seeking). We refer to this latter pursuit of pertinent information as advanced learning. Although in advanced learning information can flow from any individual or institutional source including those associated with involuntary and voluntary early experiences, the bulk of novel and/or sophisticated knowledge of our participants usually comes from their weak ties (e.g., activist acquaintances) and the press (Granovetter, 1983). Cayla and Isadora, among others, always look for interesting ecosystem- or health-related articles and news in grocery lines, in various magazines, and on the Internet. Vilma tries to keep in touch with her two semi-activist friends who update her on latest developments in the nutrition science and irresponsible corporate practices. Whereas involuntary and voluntary early exposures represent low-commitment experiences with CRB, advanced learning is a high-commitment pursuit of pertinent information.

1.2 Teaching

Information dissemination, or teaching, can be thought of as the flip side of learning. As Shayan’s first salient source of information on vegetarianism, Jen played the role of an educator. Her effortless and spontaneous information sharing early on had a dual effect: it not only enlightened Shayan and influenced his attitudes and behaviours, but also endowed Jen with added convenience. Such casual teaching and its dual
effect were evident across participants and the three sources of data. For example, several of the pictures show two or more people engaged in a conversation. When asked why they had taken those pictures, they described themselves as providers of such education and suggested, “We need one another to create a better world; so, we must educate one another about how crucial and beneficial conscientious lifestyle [is]”. During home tours, participants showed their CRB-related bumper stickers and electronic postings/emails, and spoke of their desire and responsibility to educate others. Duke’s somewhat purposeful influence on his roommates to eat “healthy” food qualifies as casual education:

[We] rarely shared food, just because I don’t eat red meat and dairy[-based] food. But, over time, my eating habits transferred onto them...It was part intentional and part unintended...Now I can sometimes skip shopping [and] cooking and use some of their food.

Educating others was not always effortless and spontaneous. Sometimes it involved planning and the willingness to sacrifice convenience and/or expend extra effort. Whereas casual teaching is usually directed towards socially and/or spatially close people (e.g., family members, relatives, roommates, friends), the target audience of planned teaching often includes neophyte to sophisticated responsible consumers who welcome or seek learning opportunities (e.g., neighbours, schools, and a myriad of other social institutions). Kenisha, for example, has volunteered to lecture before members of different churches and teach them how to conserve energy and avoid giving business to socially irresponsible firms.

1.3 Displaying a green image

Participants speak of their role as consumers in ways that define “being green” as an essential aspect of their identities. They make repeated implicit and explicit references to who they think they are and who they aspire to be(come). In this sense, “greenness” joins other anchors of identity such as ethnicity and religion in moulding participants’ perception of self. Interviews are replete with instances of such identity markers that signify green images. These images are sometimes negotiated through verbal communication with members of social networks. Jazzlyn admits, “I let people know that I am a green shopper; these are great ways to strike up conversations with others”. Other times, visual presentations imprinted or installed on personal belongings help convey one’s green image. Field notes indicate that half of Shasta’s closet is filled with pro-ecosystem tee-shirts and shopping bags that she routinely uses to express her “responsible side”; and Vilma’s refrigerator magnets promote Green Mountain and vegetarian diet. Displaying a green image is a low-commitment CRB.

1.4 Using package information

Package information claiming some sort of responsible practice (e.g., organic, pet friendly, recycled material) attracts participants’ attention and informs their decision-making. Participants expect firms and brands to step in and take a more extensive role. Participants reward businesses that promise “green” and “friendly” practices. They actively seek such promises among package information. During the tour of Eli’s home we came across packages of organic pet food, on which Eli commented, “This is how I buy stuff; I just look for the words organic, FDA-approved, healthy, antioxidant, etc.”. Ranae and Yancey, when shopping for durable home appliances, use the Energy Star seal as a decisive feature. Yancey declares, “I usually divide the
existing brands of, say, microwave or toaster into two or maybe three groups based on cost, then select one of the groups, and then buy the one which has the least [ecological] damage”. The tour of Yancey’s home clarified that she usually selects the products/brands that claim quality and responsibility at higher prices. She showed us numerous “pricey” brands such as Go Green, Aveda, Sansegal, American Apparel, Whole Foods, The Body Shop, and Method; and pointed out that her attraction to these brands was primarily due to their green claims. The fact that home tours revealed several products representing relatively more green brands attests to participants’ attraction to responsibility claims by marketers. Participants also express resentment regarding the difficulty of locating, comprehending and remembering label information, which translates into the inability to effectively evaluate competing brands. They believe much has been accomplished in the way of mandating informative labels on products. Yet, they view such mandates only as a first step toward motivating and empowering consumers to make informed decisions. Among others, Arlene was more articulate in describing two situations in which label information could actually increase the likelihood of making a poor purchase decision: (a) when consumers are not sufficiently educated about what information to compare and how to make comparisons, and (b) when businesses deliberately or unknowingly include vague or misleading pieces of information. Using package information is a low-commitment CRB.

1.5 Making conscionable choices

Choosing conscionably between competing offerings is a defining element in participants’ narratives of responsible consumption. A conscionable choice denotes a product, service, idea, person or brand that the consumer prefers over existing alternatives because of its superior consistency with the consumer’s specific personal, ecological and/or social concerns. The urge to make conscionable choices pertains to a wide array of consumption situations such as shopping, weight loss, rehabilitation, voting, and tourism. Therefore, this CRB is not limited to buying organic foods instead of genetically modified foods or to adopting degradable household products instead of environmentally harmful ones; it also includes behaviours such as informed voting, losing weight, and not smoking. Nevertheless, consumers tend to feel the urge to make conscionable choices more readily when they go shopping. Participants report numerous instances where they attempt to substitute traditional products with all-natural alternatives. For Betsy, for instance, the quality of the material used in manufacturing clothes is much more important than the fashion they represent. She warns against “products that are largely detached and distanced from nature because these products are harmful to humans and society”. Statements such as “If you care, you go for all-natural” (Kenisha) and “We must honour those that offer all-naturals” (Adorra) characterise participants’ attitude. When it comes to action, however, several factors keep participants from full conversion to more conscionable choices. In Brant’s words:

In addition to [being] expensive, you end up taking a longer trip or stopping at multiple stores...Companies make it even harder. Like an inspector, a lousy one, of course, you must read all the fine prints...and sometimes you just don’t know there’s [an] all-natural substitute.

This and other statements by Brant given to our follow-up questions isolate four constraining factors, two of which relate to information processing. First, the word
"lousy" alludes to consumer imperfect motivation and ability to process factual information. Second, he believes that emotional appeals continue to dominate factual information in packaging and advertising. As a result, less space and importance is allocated to facilitating consumers’ cognitive processing of critical information. Third, with some exceptions, consumers still have to pay a premium for more conscionable choices including all-natural alternatives of traditional products. To Brant, this is the most dubious business practice that exists when corporations openly detach their pricing strategies from the cost of production and abuse consumer lack of power and information. Other participants report that their shopping expenses nearly double when they seek more conscionable alternatives across a variety of product categories (e.g., food, pet food, grooming products, dental products, cleaners, furniture). As the fourth recurring difficulty with making conscionable choices, stores that offer a wide variety of these products are fewer and far in between and participants experience the inconveniences of taking longer trips, shopping at multiple stores, or both. It should be noted that the inhibitive effects of these four factors are not limited to making conscionable choices and can indeed keep the consumer from practicing other CRBs such as advanced learning and favouring small/local businesses.

Despite these constraints, participants indicate willingness to make extra efforts and pay slightly higher prices for products containing no or ignorable non-natural materials. Such behaviourally committed consumers diligently seek alternatives to dominant brands, and consciously expose themselves to relevant information. They try not to restrict their urge for making conscionable choices to a particular consumption domain and, by so doing, reward conscientious marketers across industries and markets. Field notes taken during home tours confirm that participants have in fact allocated a significant portion of their consumption to all-natural products in both durable and nondurable categories. Advocating consumer empowerment, some participants take the idea a step further and equate consumption with voting. Travon urges, “Just like we should vote responsibly for or against a political candidate, we should feel responsible when we give business to companies”. Making conscionable choices includes a range of low- to high-commitment consumer behaviours, but since a majority of such behaviours involve relatively lower investment, effort, and/or sacrifice, it appears in the low-commitment sphere in the model.

2. Important contexts of CRB

The observed CRBs were mostly concentrated in three contexts: (a) relations towards businesses, (b) relations towards animals, and (c) relations towards resources.

2.1 Favouring small/local businesses

Participants portray large corporations as the force that restrains mankind’s quest towards a “green” life. In their view, large corporations are “legalised trusts and cartels” (Duke), “society-corrupting establishments” (Catrice), “capitalism’s darkest side” (Oneida), “promoting unsustainable lifestyles” (Ranae), “concealed sweat shops” (Leona), “poor economic solutions for too high of a social cost” (Vilma), “enemies of local cultures” (Allen), “too bureaucratic and inflexible for our post-modern era” (Sherilyn), “the reason Americans are overweight and unhealthy” (Adorra), and “enslaving masses for elites” (Eli). Unlike large corporations, small and/or local businesses are seen as socially (more) responsible, sympathised with, and supported. Small and/or local businesses are regarded as “those who care what happens to local
environment” (Allen), “careful not to exploit us because they are local, too” (Yancey), “respect the culture of the local people” (Rima), “help sustainability” (Ranae), and “would not make us look like Grizzly bears” (Adorra). Interestingly, enumerating large corporations’ irresponsible practices was an easier task for participants than describing the ways in which small and/or local businesses were socially (more) responsible. Simon complains:

*Inequality, consumerism, food that’s bad for you, strawberries are huge but tasteless; apples never go bad...What is this? Scary! Who is behind genetic modification? Large corporations, obviously. If [all products were] produced and handled locally, these problems wouldn’t be there.*

Like other participants, Simon posits cause-and-effect relations between large corporations and the society’s many problems such as wealth and income gaps, workforce exploitation, rampant consumerism, global warming, shrinking fossil-based energy, and endangered species. Participants are also concerned that large corporations focus on maximizing shareholder value and go as far as marketing plastic food and promoting ephemeral frolics detrimental to our physical and psychological well-being. These attitudes often guide behaviours in that participants try to avoid giving business to large corporations. During home tours, participants sometimes singled out products that they had obtained from small/local firms indicating their behavioural commitment to their attitudinal standpoint. Favouring small/local businesses is a low-commitment CRB.

2.2 Being friendly to animals

Since the main theme in several of the pictures involves animals, a considerable portion of the interviews revolves around the human-animal interface. Participants’ thoughts and feelings about animals are twofold: non-animal consumption and animal welfare promotion. We classify animals into three groups: (a) those we consume for food, clothing and the like; (b) those we “consume” as pets or through entertainment organisations like zoos; and (c) other animals. Whereas humanity’s interface with the first two of these groups lies in the domain of consumption (i.e., we can say humans consume those animals), our relationship with the third group of animals falls outside the consumption domain and is thus not a focus of our article (e.g., caring for a wounded bird one finds on the street). The first group of animals is discussed under Non-Animal Consumption and Vegetarianism. The second group pertains to Promoting Animal Welfare.

2.2.1 Non-animal consumption: Permeating pictures and narratives is the stance that “humanity must stop using animals for their labour, meat, skin, and so on”. Participants acknowledge the numerous ways in which humans, as “only one of the so many species”, have infringed upon animals’ habitats and eroded the natural balance of the planet. In the consumption milieu, such sentiments are often accompanied by abandoning products and brands that engage animals in exploitative ways. Arlene, a vegan who has a “Cruel-to-Animals not Welcome” sign at her entrance, asserts,

*Just like I condemn criminals, I boycott companies with animal cruelty...Leather furniture is cruelty toward animals, but eating meat is cruelty that’s bad for you and that puts pressure on the planet.*
Typical of the interviews with vegans, this quote introduces vegetarianism as a component of non-animal consumption that differs from and extends beyond abandoning animal-cruel brands. To Arlene, vegetarianism is also motivated by the urge to enhance one’s health and preserve the finite green resources. Quoting vegan participants, “it takes 12 pounds of grain, 55 square feet of rainforest, 2,500 gallons of water, and a lot of other things to produce one pound of beef”, (Ethan); thus, “vegans cause several times less ecological destruction” (Rima). They also strongly believe that vegetarianism elevates one’s health status and longevity. Stated with noticeable anxiety and resentment, such beliefs represent an ideological bias toward vegetarianism. Pictures and field notes indicate another concern among vegan participants. One of Rima’s pictures shows her husband, a cow, and a beef pack. Although Rima refused to comment on this picture, she is apparently linking her overweight husband with the cow through beef consumption. This portrayal is akin to the popular saying that we are what we eat. The important issue here is how one looks. Non-vegan participants, on the other hand, contest these claims and insist that responsible consumption neither is limited to nor requires vegetarianism. For example, Leona finds “serious flaws with calculations that suggest meat eaters are placing extra burden on finite resources”. She regards vegans as “hippies who know nothing about farm life or energy measurement”. Nonetheless, non-vegans acknowledge two points: (a) vegetarianism poses no ecological harm and is thus consistent with responsible consumption; and (b) living a vegan life requires much effort/sacrifice and is more costly. Therefore, non-cruelty consumption and vegetarianism qualify as low- and high-commitment forms of CRB, respectively.

2.2.2 Promoting animal welfare: The second category goes beyond non-animal consumption and represents unmediated actions that might enhance animals’ quality of life. Whereas non-animal consumption indirectly contributes to animal friendliness, animal welfare promotion signifies first-hand interactions between people and animals. The emic view here captures a myriad of responsible behaviours that lie outside the consumption arena (e.g., caring for injured animals one finds on the street). This article, however, focuses on consumer relationships with animals as pets or through entertainment organisations like zoos. Participants are divided as to whether pets qualify as one’s family members equal in status to parents, children, and siblings. An opponent of equal status, Betsy reasons that “people own pets but they don’t own their parents or children”. Advocates like Nichelle, on the other hand, argue, “Those who quote-unquote own their pets are illusionary, incapable of seeing the reality”. Apart from this point of divergence, both groups concur that people must be empathically concerned with their pets’ welfare. Arlene expresses this consensus succinctly: “[that] they’re only animals does not justify jeopardising [their] healthy, happy lives”. Participants find it irresponsible to feed “junk food or leftovers” to pets, scare or startle them, limit their contact with sexual counterparts, compromise their health, neglect their illness, or fail to euthanise them if necessary. Since effectively attending to and promoting animals’ welfare requires a high level of commitment, so doing qualifies as a high-commitment CRB.

2.3 Conserving and recycling resources

2.3.1 Conserving resources: A ubiquitous concern is with the consumption of biotic (e.g., plants, animals, birds, fish) and abiotic (e.g., land, water, air, minerals) resources in the form of consumable products. Although human exploitation of several
resources such as water and trees are stressed, the most notorious issue is energy. Participants disparage the grave global reliance on conventional energy sources like fossil fuels. They find this reliance responsible for the existing air and water pollution and global warming. Vilma feels overwhelmed:

*China and India! Wow! Wow! As if develop[ed] countries weren’t enough. Now that there are so many of us, we must embrace effective energy [sources]...Conservation is still necessary before we completely move to infinite energies like wind. It can be a pain and costly, but it’s necessary.*

First, Vilma has new fears of energy crises due to the rising standards of living around the globe. Informed by media, she finds the escalating residential and industrial demand for energy in developing countries to be impossible to confront without alternative energy sources. The result, in her words, could be *“an irreversible, global catastrophe.”* Although there are factual elements in these assertions, our participants tend to be visibly emotional regarding the magnitude of the issues and the effectiveness of known solutions. The pictures they paint of energy crisis and alternative energy sources are probably too grave and too rosy, respectively. For example, Vilma’s confidence that alternative energy sources such as wind are infinite and effective is moot. The interdisciplinary energy literature is far from a consensus as to which alternative (wind, solar, geothermal, etc.) energy sources are infinite and whether each comprises an efficient and effective solution (Coaffee 2008). Second, in addition to the sources and production of energy, conservative consumption of energy is important to Vilma. In her view, conservative energy consumption is a necessity that can cut both ways: reduce or increase costs and efforts for the consumer. This perceived variability of conservation efforts and costs is shared across participants. Simon, for instance, is unsure if a hybrid car will save him enough fuel expense to justify its higher initial price. As a low-commitment CRB, resource conservation manifests in a variety of ways such as using energy-efficient light bulbs or ceiling fans, turning off unnecessary devices and lights, and discontinuing waterbeds and hot tubs. Active resource conservation might involve the adoption of effortful and costly (in the short term) products and practices such as Zero Energy homes, hybrid cars, and alternative energy sources like Green Mountain.

2.3.2 Recycling: All participants used the term “recycle” when defining responsible consumption. This term encompasses an interrelated system of behaviours that ultimately help minimise aggregate consumption of resources, mainly abiotic. Oneida alludes to multiple aspects of recycling:

*Recycling is more than one thing. It’s about separating trash, but also [about] willingness to buy things made of trash. It’s about buying used things, but also about reusing disposables. It’s about passing things on to needy ones instead of letting them end up in landfills.*

Oneida envisions a more extensive presence for recycling activities within the consumption process, which includes purchase, use and disposal stages. She contrasts two “recycle” behaviours that occur during product disposal (i.e., separating different types of trash and passing durable products on to others) against another that takes place during product purchase (i.e., preferring products/brands made from recycled materials). She also differentiates willingness to purchase used durable products from keenness to reuse products one already owns. Field notes indicate several durable
products in Oneida’s and other participants’ homes that represent one or more recycle behaviours. Two behaviours qualify as recycling in the purchase stage: (a) buying products made from recycled materials; and (b) buying used durable products. In the use stage, three recycle behaviours surfaced: (a) reusing products for the same purposes; (b) reusing products for other purposes; and (c) reusing disposable products. In the disposal stage, participants indicated two recycle behaviours: (a) selling products or giving them away as gifts; and (b) complying with the City’s recycle program (separating different types of trash). Whereas purchase recycle emerged as a low-commitment CRB, use and disposal recycle are associated with considerable effort and sacrifice and, thus, are high-commitment CRBs.

**DISCUSSION**

This study provides insights into the interplay within and between responsible consumption behaviours and their motivations. As indicated in Table 2 and Figure 1, the tripartite model: (a) plots the emerging CRBs on various combinations of consumer personal, ecological and social concerns; (b) differentiates between low- and high-commitment spheres of behavioural commitment; and (c) recognises movement into and out of low- and high-commitment spheres over time. Building on past findings that responsible consumers face reduced convenience and increased sacrifice and cost (e.g., Osterhus, 1997; Titterington, Davies & Cochrane, 1996; Vlosky, Ozanne & Fontenot, 1999), we classify CRBs into low- and high-commitment spheres.

While individual CRBs may overlap, and manifest in three contextual domains, related manifestations of CRB do not necessarily share an identical motivational foundation. For example, although vegetarianism and promoting animal welfare are both components of being friendly to animals, they are not motivated by the same combination of CRMs. Whereas vegetarianism might be motivated by either personal or ecological concern or by a combination of these two concerns, promoting animal welfare is an altruistic CRB motivated only by ecological concern. Specifically, the consumer might adopt vegetarianism because he or she is concerned about the effect of meat-based diets on his or her health and longevity and/or about the cruelty that meat consumption imposes on animals. Consumers who find it irresponsible to feed pets with junk food or leftovers, on the other hand, believe so exclusively because they feel an obligation to respect animals’ welfare; they are not seeking to personally gain from promoting animal welfare. Another example involves purchase and disposal recycles. Consumers who purchase used durable products as a form of purchase recycle might be concerned about finite resources or attracted to the relatively lower prices of used products or both. Therefore, purchase recycle might be motivated by personal and/or ecological concerns. Consumers who comply with their City’s recycling program, however, are solely driven by their altruistic obligations to observe their individual share in minifying humanity’s impact on the ecosystem.

Interestingly, none of the participants in this research was neatly classifiable into low- or high-commitment categories as each engaged in a combination of low-effort, low-investment as well as high-effort, high-investment CRBs. This finding is not surprising because CRB pertains to all consumption activities and contexts, and different consumers exhibit different degrees of interest and act differently across these activities and contexts. It follows that CRB is at least as much domain
specific as it is a global (i.e., general) phenomenon; we expect to see interpersonal differences among consumers both in terms of the domains within which they act relatively more responsibly and in terms of their overall sense of responsibility. CRB is a domain-specific phenomenon because consumers incur more responsibility-related effort and investment in certain consumption contexts than in others. For example, a consumer who goes out of her way and significantly inconveniences herself in order to stop animal cruelty might exert comparatively less effort in supporting the City’s recycle program. The consumer in this example appears to be more responsible in the former context. CRB is also a global phenomenon because consumers with personal, ecological and social concerns will carry their awareness of their obligations across various consumption activities and domains to the extent that renders sense of responsibility a general personality trait. For instance, the consumer in the latter example is expected to provide verbal support for the City’s recycle program although she might not be willing to drive for several minutes to drop off her trash at a recycling facility. The dual character (i.e., global and domain-specific) encountered in this research is not a new finding; several of the familiar constructs that portray consumer traits have been shown to contain such duality. Innovativeness as a well established consumer trait, for example, has similar properties. While few, if any, consumers exhibit a high degree of innovativeness in all consumption domains, every consumer could be meaningfully compared against others based on the general innovativeness trait (Goldsmith, Freiden, & Eastman, 1995; Midgley & Dowling, 1978).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research has made an original contribution to the vast amount of existing literature on ecologically and socially responsible consumption by empirically confirming the complex nature of motivational factors that cumulatively affect the degree and spectrum of CRBs. In particular, by illustrating that similar behaviours can be brought about by diverse, sometimes situation-determined, motivations may render an explanation for unsuccessful profiling attempts encountered by earlier researchers and practitioners. As a result of this understanding, social marketers may modify their current campaigns to simultaneously include personal, social and ecological appeals to elicit environmentally-responsible behaviours in order to reach responsible consumers motivated by either of these concerns. Previous research suggests that communication campaigns aiming to enhance consumer awareness and compliance have fallen short of their ambition in part because they have emphasised only one of the three CRMs. We propose that combinations of motives be used when designing such programs. For example, both ecological and personal health concerns may be emphasised in communicating the need for alternative energy use. Similarly, financial savings, personal image, and environmental benefits may be all utilised to promote energy conservation.

Our finding that responsible consumers oscillate between low- and high-commitment CRBs as a result of their life and educational dynamics underscores the role of context-specific factors in affecting behaviours. A managerial implication of this finding may be placing a special emphasis on in-store social campaigns, and developing promotional efforts to reach consumers at the time of performing low-commitment responsible activities in order to escalate their situational commitment.
Identifying passive responsible consumers and leveraging their underlying responsible motivations might also help to transition them into the active circle. Markets may need to be segmented based not on whether they exhibit environmentally and socially responsible behaviours or their personal and demographic variables, but on the level of their environmental and social concerns and activism (i.e., into active or passive). Meanwhile, public policy could try to encourage and promote environmental activism, and marketing research could try to identify facilitators of this trend.

Another important contribution of this research consists in empirically tracing the mechanism of motivation formation and its influence on behaviour through consumption information- and decision-related activities. Our analysis shows that responsible consumers encounter, absorb, actively seek, and internalise pertinent information that subsequently affects their identity negotiation and expression, and influences their motivational structure for responsible behaviours. The intensifying role of information in consumption decisions by responsible consumers points to the opportunity to use educational campaigns in promoting responsible behaviour. Our finding that the use of label and package claims may evolve from a passive concern to an active preoccupation over time may explain different outcomes of educational campaigns (Stern, 2000). Apparently, relevant factual information contained in product labels that is proactively retrieved by a consumer plays a more important role than impersonal mass media messages not directly related to a consumption goal at hand. Also, community-based campaigns that involve mutual teaching may be more effective than passive absorption of generic facts conveyed in print mailings. Thus, scarce community resources may be better used by reducing costly social marketing advertisements aimed at passive responsible behaviours and by utilising local means and guerilla marketing to raise awareness and cooperation. Previous studies note that social marketers have not recognised, let alone leveraged, word-of-mouth communications, which determine much of consumer exposure and commitment to CRB (Collins, 2004; McKenzie-Mohr, 2000; Wagner-Tsukamoto & Tadajewski, 2006). By substantiating the importance of projecting a “green image” as part of responsible identity negotiation, our findings add to the extant evidence that communication strategies relating CRB to consumer membership in various social groups can encourage and extend CRB. This “selling brotherhood” strategy (Wiener & Doescher, 1991, 1994) may facilitate CRB by creating interpersonal incentives that outweigh intrapersonal, short-term gains of selfish behaviours (Messick & Brewer, 1983).

Our findings confirm the importance of responsible business practices in affecting consumption choices: the majority of respondents expressed lower price sensitivity to brands and products demonstrating ecological accountability. Reinforcing their associations with responsible business behaviour via informational product labelling and advertising may assist brands and companies in creating consumption-choice heuristics favouring their products with responsible consumers. The intriguing findings regarding the tripartite model of responsible consumption underscore the dialogical nature of the relation between marketers and the market. Several questions ensue that may direct future responsible consumption research: Where did the discourse of responsibility originate? Was it a radical innovation conjured up by some corporate mastermind in total isolation from the market or did it emerge during some market intelligence aimed at giving voice to consumers? Is it a market-driven or market driving force? Can a causal relation be drawn between marketers and the market in this respect? Depending on one’s philosophical tendency, one might stress the role of
either marketers or the market. Nevertheless, a process of co-creation is likely to have
undergirded the introduction and vitalisation of the responsibility discourse. Cherrier
(2007) argues that the consumer’s frame of reference for constructing and expressing
responsible consumption comes not only from the inside (i.e., the consumer) but
also from the outside (e.g., marketers). Yet, Valor (2008) asserts that there cannot
be responsible businesses if there are not responsible consumers. Although these and
other studies have shed light on the focal dialectic, further research is needed to map
the co-creative process of responsible practices and articulate the respective roles
of various co-creators and stakeholders. By focusing on specific events or trends,
future research can take an integrative look at the multifaceted and complex nature
of responsibility.

This study has identified three prominent contexts in which CRBs manifest:
consumers’ relationships with resources, animals, and businesses. Exploring other
domains of CRBs, as well as mapping these domains in more detail will help provide
structure to future research endeavours as well as managerial practice.

This research suggests that consumers have personal motives, in addition to
altruistic motives, to engage in responsible consumption in a variety of contexts such
as resource conservation, recycling and using package information. It can be argued
that when consumers’ ecological and social concerns couple with their personal
concerns, consumptive and productive relationships may come under stronger public
and private scrutiny and the kinds of changes envisioned by Dunlap and van Liere
(1978) seem more attainable and indispensable.

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