An Analysis about the Relations between the Human Values and the Consumer Behaviour

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Abstract

This article seeks to present a literature review of the theory and of the empirical researches on personal values, consumer behavior, a new marketing concept and social marketing. It also tries to examine the links between people's values and the consumer behavior in a changing consumer society that came with the globalization and with the effects of the economic crisis. The personal values are presented as a central point of interest for the marketers. But also the consumer behavior concept is well defined, together with its capacity to evolve as a sustainable/ethic one.

In this new context, the role of marketing begins to take other forms, different than the old ones changing its mission gradually and the consumer begins to define a new identity and thus redefining its role in society through a more active and valuable presence.

The results of this analysis are some useful recommendations for the marketers to take into account with regard to values and consumption behavior. New ideas of how marketing should develop are also presented, and also the urgent use of social marketing in making this transition towards a sustainable society easier. A good correlation between all these concepts could lead to a better quality of life, if they will be taken into consideration by marketers, businesspeople, researchers and policy makers.

Keywords: personal values, consumer behaviour, quality of life, marketing and social marketing

Introduction

After a critical and reflective research of the literature regarding certain phenomena of sociological, economic and pshiological nature, through which our society is passing I will try to introduce the changes of the customer status and changes of the marketing science. Moreover, I will try to explain the importance of the personal values of the consumer as essential elements in redefining economic and social space in which they live.

The objective of this article is to try to approach these issues with main focus on:

- A description of the values concept and also if their relationship with the consumer behaviour;

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- Presentation of a suitable operational value paradigm for studying consumer behaviour;
- The Role of Marketing in the new context.

1. HUMAN VALUES AND THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

1.1 The context of the consumer behaviour changing

With the economic crisis through which our society is facing increasingly more people have begun to reassess the consumer behaviour that have had so far. A very important element in this process is assessing own personal values. They seem to have changed in the post-communist transition since our country is going through due to fierce competition between the country's citizens for consumption and material accumulation.

1.2 How to define human values from the consumer behaviour point of view?

The marketers have usually given a lot of attention to the changes of attitudes, which had a great impact in the market research and consumer behaviour analysis, but very little attention to the role of the human values. Even if marketing literature reflects an developing interest in this topic, personal values were not widely used to investigate basic dimensions of consumer behavior. This is surprising given the importance of values usually attributed to a variety of social and business observers. Although it seems that personal values have important implications for marketing practitioners and researchers, values and how they influence consumer behavior and choice of brands, product classes and their attributes is not yet clear. In order to investigate these relationships, it is necessary to define what values will be operational.

Conceptualization of the term "value" reflects the interest of several disciplines:

- Anthropology, with its interest in life styles and cultural patterns. (For example, Thomas and Zaraniecki define values as "… objective, social elements which impose themselves upon the individual as a given and provoke his reaction.")
- Sociology, focusing on ideologies and cus-toms. (For example, Bronowski suggests that "a value is a concept which groups together some modes of behavior in our society.")
- Psychology, which examines values from the standpoint of attitudes and personal motives. (For example, Rokeach views "... a value as a centrally held, enduring belief which guides actions and judgments across specific situations and beyond immediate goals to more ultimate end-states of existence.")

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In this article, and in the study reported here, the authors followed mostly the psychological definition, and in particular Rokeach's view.

1.3 What is the consumer behaviour?

Definition: "Consumer behavior can be defined as a par excellence multidimensional concept, as a specific result of a system of dynamic relationships between the processes of perception, information, attitude, motivation and effective manifestation that characterize individual or group integration in all open space consumer goods and services in society at a time, by means of individual or group decision relating to them.

1.4 Which is the relationship between human values and consumer behaviour?

In order to gain insight into this question and to understand how changing national values influence consumption patterns, it would be useful, both for students of consumer behavior and for those marketing executives responsible for the formulation of marketing strategy, to have a framework integrating:

- Deep-rooted personal values;
- Generalized consumption values;
- Beliefs relating to product attributes.

A model of Consumers' Value Systems

A review of existing value literature, recent empirical research, and the cultural conditioning viewpoint on value acquisition leads us to propose that values may be investigated at three mutually dependent and at least partially consistent levels of abstraction.

These levels, arranged in a hierarchical network, are referred to as global or generalized personal values, domain-specific values, and evaluations of product attributes.

Exhibit 1 shows each level of values and suggest the influence of the socio-cultural, economic, and familial environment on the formation and development of the individual's value system.

The social envirnoment role in consumer decision. Socialization agents (parents, peers and the media) are all-important in the formation of values, emotions and attitudes and can stimulate both approach and avoidance behaviors, leading to the acceptance or rejection of products or services (Exhibit 1).

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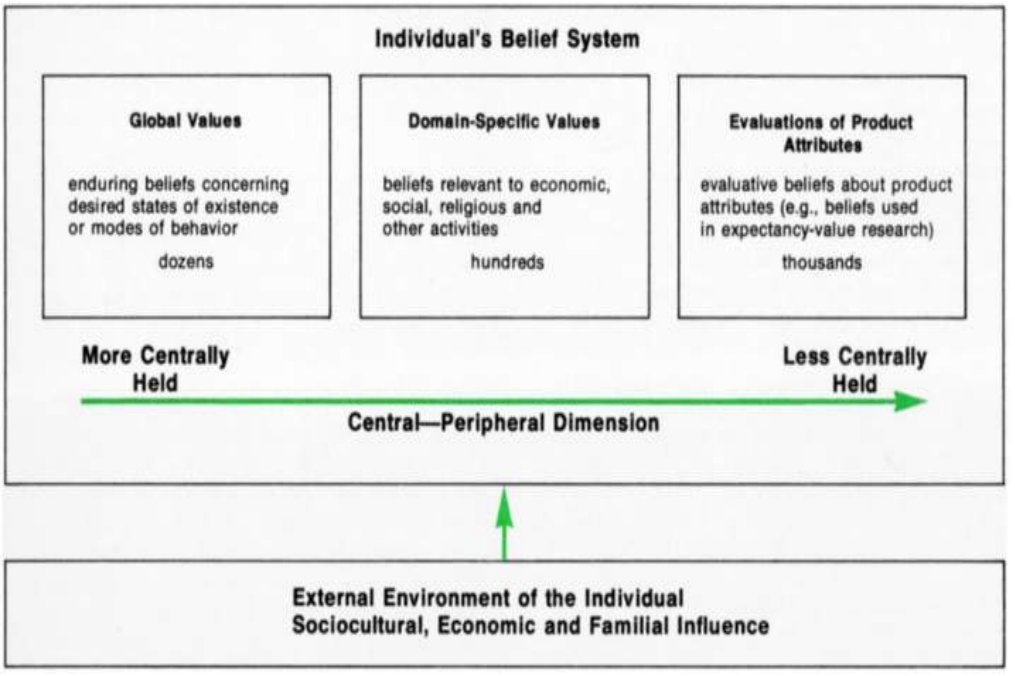
EXHIBIT 1
Organization of the Consumer's Value-Attitude System



(Sursa: Vinson, D. E., Scott, J. E., & Lamont, L. M., 1977: 46)

Exhibit 1. ***Organization of the consumer Value-Attitude System***

Global values

Beliefs exist as the most elementary unit within this system. Very centrally held and enduring beliefs guide actions and judgments across specific situations and are referred to as global values. These global values are more abstract and generalizable than less centrally held beliefs. In our conception, these values form the central core of an individual's value system. They consist of closely held personal values which are of high salience in important evaluations and choices.

Domain Specific-Values

The second level of values, domain-specific values, reflects the belief that people acquire values through experiences in specific situations or do- mains of activity and that behavior cannot be understood or efficiently predicted except in the con- text of a specific environment. Thus, we contend that individuals arrive at values specific to economic transactions through economic exchange and consumption, at social values through familial and peer group interaction, at religious values through religious instruction and so on. (Vinson, Scott, & Lamont, 1977)

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A list of domain-specific values developed for consumption-related activities is shown in *Exhibit 2*:

EXHIBIT 2
Domain-Specific Values (Consumption-Related)

Manufacturers should . . .	Manufacturers & products should be . . .
provide prompt service on complaints	durable, long lasting
guarantee products to work as advertised	fairly, reasonably priced
be responsive to true needs of consumers	non-polluting
supply clear, accurate information on products	safe
help eliminate environmental pollution	inexpensive to use
care about the needs of individual consumers	exciting, stylish
repair defective products free of charge	easy to use
locate stores for convenience to consumers	dependable, trustworthy
not lie or be deceptive in advertisements	beautiful, attractive
make products available nights and weekends	in a wide variety
use courteous, helpful sales personnel	health-promoting
maintain the lowest prices possible	easy to repair
compete for the business of consumers	resistant to environmental damage
help solve urban decay and unemployment	quiet
work for legislation to protect consumers	comfortable, secure
not misrepresent a product	

(Sursa: Vinson, D. E., Scott, J. E., & Lamont, L. M., 1977: 47)

Exhibit 2. **Domein specific values (Consumption-related)**

This value set was developed from exploratory research with a large set of items and reduced through factor analysis. It includes statements about desirable modes of company behavior and desirable attributes of consumer products.

Evaluative beliefes

The third category of values shown in Exhibit 1 is less abstract and consists of descriptive and evaluative beliefs. While such beliefs may be important, they are less centrally held. Among the many kinds of beliefs in this category are evaluative beliefs about the desirable attributes of product classes as well as specific brands. It is this category of values that most of the expectancy-value research has used in predicting brand appeal.

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Note that the conceptual model shown in Exhibit 1 suggests that people have many thousands of evaluative beliefs, hundreds of domain-specific values, but only dozens of global values. Those beliefs and values do not exist as sharply separated and unconnected elements; they coexist in an interconnected hierarchical structure with the more durable and closely held global values exerting influence on each other as well as affecting the more peripherally located domain- specific values. These domain-specific values, in turn, are inter-connected along the central-peripheral dimension and further influence the individual's evaluative beliefs associated with the attributes of products or brands

It has been suggested that values are centrally held cognitive elements which stimulate motivation for behavioral response. They exist in an interconnected, hierarchical structure in which global values are related and connected to generalized consumption-related values which are, in turn, similarly associated with product attributes. It has been generally accepted in consumer behavior re-search that these product attributes represent the basic elements ordering an individual's attitude toward products and services. Hence, in authors view, an individual's attributes are ultimately based upon his values, and changing values could have a profound impact upon these attitudes and upon behavior as well.

Finally, while values have been shown to be theoretically important for studying consumer behavior, these authors have attempted to describe their relevance to the businessman engaged in marketing management activities. (Vinson, Scott, & Lamont, 1977)

1.5 The sustainable/ethic consumer behaviour could lead to a better Quality of Life (QOL)

Most of us use the term “quality of life” so loosely that it can mean almost anything-unpolluted air, the serenity of the mountains, the depth of an aesthetic experience, the arts, the preservation of the land, among many others. Of course, politicians are notorious for using the term as a “catch-all” phrase. Scientists are more precise with its definition, and in the basic and applied sciences the quality of life (QOL) is a subject of serious study. Many conceptual models, theories, and measures have been developed to show what the QOL is for an individual, a group, a community, or society, and the key factors that affect QOL.

Social psychologists, for example, often define QOL as subjective well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, or simply contentment with one’s life accomplishments (Diener, 1984). In other words, the happier people are, the higher their QOL. Happiness and life satisfaction, thus, are positive feelings that endure, or the kind of feelings that stay with a person over time- not a fleeting moment of satisfaction or happiness. Thus, the challenge becomes how to enhance people’s lives in a manner to ensure long-term happiness (cf. Sirgy et al., 1982)

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From a QOL perspective, the role of the marketing and management disciplines to produce an understanding of the factors and the psychological/ sociological dynamics that influence satisfaction/dissatisfaction decisions within each life domain (and to a certain extent between/among life domains). Also, QOL studies in marketing and management help guide organizational resources to satisfy particular needs in a specific life domain of particular population segments in society. (Sirgy, 1991)

In her article Martha A. Starr presents a conceptual framework for understanding the spread of ethical consumption, in which heterogeneous preferences and sensitivity to social norms feature centrally. It then presents empirical evidence from a well-known nationally representative survey (USA, 2004) on factors associated with tendencies to 'buy ethically'.

The key results of our empirical analysis can be summarized as follows. First, buying ethically is positively associated with education, consistent with education conferring 'efficiency' advantages in acquiring and processing information about social, ethical and environmental implications of individual consumption decisions. Second, buying ethically is also positively affected by income, consistent with its extra costs being less prohibitive for those with less binding budget constraints. Third, women are more likely to buy ethically than men, ceteris paribus, in line with gender differences in altruistic behaviors documented in other studies. Fourth, while ethical buying is not much affected by religious background or involvement, given other personal characteristics and attitudes, it is less common among people who see the world through a fundamentalist Biblical lens. Fifth, people with relatively strong interests in politics are more likely to buy ethically, suggesting a general influence of pro-active attitudes in socio-political participation. Finally, given people are more likely to buy ethically when they live in an area in which it is relatively common, suggesting an influence of area-specific social norms on individual behavior. (Starr, 2009)

2. MARKETING WHERETO?

2.1 Service-dominant Logic

Nearly a century ago, marketing scholars began debating the question, "What is marketing?" and today, the debate continues. Despite the simplicity of the question, the answer is complex. For example, Hunt (1976) illustrates that the conceptual domain of marketing includes micro and macro marketing, positive and normative theories of marketing, and profit and not-for-profit marketing.

An examination of the responses to the question of what is marketing shows that there is a wide divergence of views. For example, Jack Trout, a well author and business adviser believes that "marketing is simply figuring out what you have to do to sell your product or service for a profit." (Keefe, 2004).

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Professor Robert Lusch from Arizona University interprets the evolution of the definition of marketing given by the American Asociation of Marketing (AMA), which dates back more htan seven decades, and suggests that perhaps the recent definition does not go far enough to capture current trends in marketing practice. The author states that "in terms of the practice of marketing, the definition does not provide sufficient focus on collaboration and cocreation activities; in terms of the domain of marketing, the definition needs to recognize marketing more explicitly as a societal process; and in terms of the emerging dominant logic, the definition needs to pay particulat attention to adaptive social and economic processes."

An evolutive defintion of Marketing

Embracing a long and abstract view, professor Lutsch characterizes the evolution of marketing thought and practice as going through three stages over the past 100 years: to market, market(ing) to, and market(ing) with. Briefly, "to market" means that the primary mission of marketing is taking things to market, "market(ing) to" means that the primary mission of marketing is identifying customers and marketing to them, and "market(ing) with" means that the primary mission of marketing is collaborating with customers to cocreate value. (Logic et al., 2009)

According to www.sdlogic.net:

"Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic is a mindset for a unified understanding of the purpose and nature of organizations, markets and society. The foundational proposition of S-D logic is that organizations, markets, and society are fundamentally concerned with exchange of service—the applications of competences (knowledge and skills) for the benefit of a party. That is, service is exchanged for service; all firms are service firms; all markets are centered on the exchange of service, and all economies and societies are service based. Consequently, marketing thought and practice should be grounded in service logic, principles and theories.

In line with S-D logic, it follows that instead of service marketing "breaking free" from goods marketing, as has been the pursuit of the services marketing sub-discipline for the last several decades, all of marketing needs to break free from the goods and manufacturing-based model—that is, goods-dominant (G-D) logic. S-D logic embraces concepts of the value-in-use and co-creation of value rather than the value-in-exchange and embedded-value concepts of G-D logic. Thus, instead of firms being informed to market to customers, they are instructed to market with customers, as well as other value-creation partners in the firm's value network. (Fig 1 and 2)

With the rise of a network economy, customers are part of an extended enterprise and co-producers of the firms marketing. Enterprises need to learn not to fear it but embrace it as a healthy part of a highly networked market economy.

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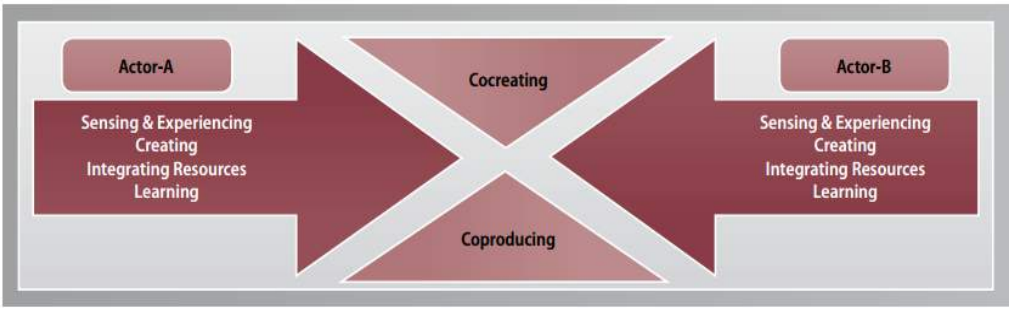
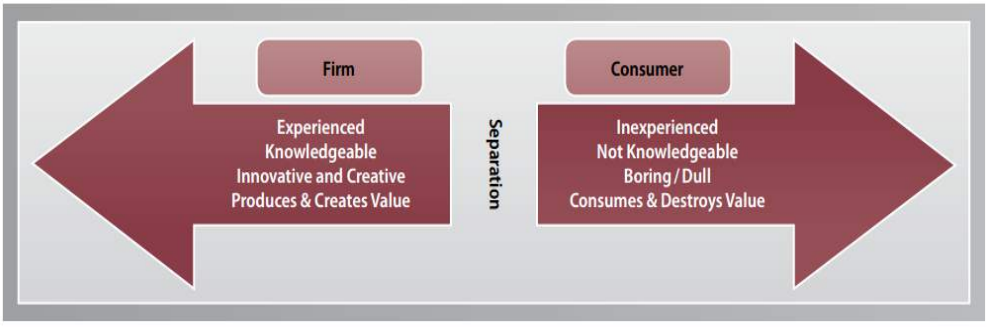
Fig. 2 Service-Dominant Logic is Inherently Collaborative



(Sursa: (Logic et al., 2009: 9)

Fig 2. **Service-Dominant Logic is Inherently Collaborative** vs

Fig. 1 Goods-Dominant Logic Produced an Inherent Conflict



(Sursa: (Logic et al., 2009: 8)

Figure 1. **Goods-Dominant Logic Produced an Inherent Conflict**

A more proactive involvement of the customer which is well beyond the traditional word-of-mouth or customer-to-customer (C to C) practices is emerging. This proactive customer is involved in inbound marketing or customer-to-business (C to B) activities, but also may be talking, negotiating, and planning with your sup- pliers with the intent of bypassing your firm. Even more disheartening to many executives is the growth of customer-to-public (C to P) practices where customers or would be customers are attempting to influence public opinion and policy about your business.

With the rise of a network economy, enabled by global tele-communications and ubiquitous computing, customers are part of an extended enterprise and co-producers of the firm's marketing. This trend is projected to rise over the next decade. (Logic et al., 2009)

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2.2 Which is the role of social marketing the new paradigm?

George Brenkert suggests in his article that social marketing distingushes from commercial marketing mainly because of its social challenge. It is an issue that is infrequently noted by marketers. It involves the relation that social marketing, asopposed to commercial marketing, has to the well-being or the good of the people it targets (see Andreasen 1995). This involves what I call a welfare exchange, as opposed to a market exchange

The commercial marketing is bound up with fulfilling the desires of people who have the requisite means (which may include extensions of credit) to engage in an exchange and who are willing (or can be persuaded) to engage in such an exchange. This is based on a theory of market exchanges in which a person who engages in an exchange seeks to fulfill his or her own goals in a manner that requires meeting the desires of others, even if this does not improve the person's well-being. Commercial marketing offers a rational, scientific approach to sorting out various wants or desires customers have (or may be elicouraged to have) and providing the products and the methods to satisfy those wants. (Brenkert, 2012)

Within this market setting, the touchstone for commercial marketers is whether, within their own profit constraints and after the education and/or persuasion of the people they target, they are able to satisfy the desires of those people. Admittedly, commercial marketers may mistake what people's desires are. So too, consumers may be mistaken about what will satisfy their desires. Still, the moral justification of commercial marketers' actions is ultimately that people voluntarily choose what they offer. It is for this reason that the unintended negative effects of commercial marketing (e.g., spillover effects of advertising) are viewed as raising serious problems. People affected in these ways have not chosen to engage in such exchanges. As such, the ethical issues commercial marketing faces are tied to a theory of market exchange. Commercial marketers are measured in terms of their responsible successes in accomplishing such exchanges. (Brenkert, 2012)

This difference between market and welfare exchanges is manifested in various ways. To begin with, because a welfare exchange is involved, social marketers appear to know what they want to accomplish (reduce family size, stop drug use, improve the educational opportunities of women) before they address the specific individuals they target.6 Social marketers may take their goal or objective from society, a theory of human nature, or the organizations for which they work. Whichever is the case, social marketers turn to the people they target not to identify what ends or goals they should encourage but to find in what ways "they must 'package' the social idea [or end they propose] in a manner which their target audiences find desirable and are willing to purchase" (Kotler and Zaltan, 1971)

So there are two questions that social marketers must address: (1) What is the relevant welfare? and (2) What may be done by social marketers to bring

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about the realization of this welfare by the people who have been targeted? As such, this theory of welfare exchange explains not only what constitutes people's welfare but also how the agents of welfare change, that is, social marketers, may act. (Brenkert, 2012)

Social marketing attempts to induce people to change their behaviors as part of a welfare exchange to solve a social problem. However, the changed behavior is not necessarily bought through some expenditure of money or bartering of goods. Even if an expenditure of money is involved, it is, given the nature of social marketing, not the same as would be expended in a commercial marketing exchange. In short, welfare exchanges are not designed, as are market exchanges (at least in principle), to cover the full cost of the product or service, plus an adequate level of profit for the marketer. (Webster, 1975).

2.3 With the help of which instruments could we change the values and the attitutes of the consumers towards an sustainable/ethic behavior?

The QOL movement has been clearly articulated in management thought by the classic works of McGregor (1960) and his followers. McGregor described 2 styles of management which he termed Theories X and Y. Theory X managers believe that workers in general are lazy, dislike responsibility, are self-centered, and are motivated strictly by extrinsic rewards (e.g., money). Hence, managers should allocate much energy toward directing and controlling people, and organizing the elements of productive enterprise.Theory Y managers, on the other hand, believe that workers are inherently not lazy and self-centered. Workers can enjoy responsibility and are motivated to the most extent by intrinsic rewards (e.g., self-esteem, belongingness, social recognition, and self-actualization). Managers who believe in the central tenets of Theory Y focus their efforts to arrange things so workers can achieve their individual goals while working toward organizational goals. (Sirgy, 1991)

In marketing, much debate has centered on the role and scope of marketing in society, and particularly marketing's role in QOL. Marketing philosophy in terms of marketing role in society has changed from a production orientation, going through a selling orientation, a marketing orientation, and a societal marketing orientation. A basic premise of societal marketing, as a philosophy guiding marketing efforts, is the creation of consumer satisfaction of particular consumer segments in society with the minimal social cost to society. In other words, marketers guide the development of products and services that meet certain needs of consumer groups in a manner that may not tax other publics through pollution, product hazards, environmental clutter, energy depletion, etc Marketing practices should have had an important role in inducing an ethical behavior. (Sirgy, 1991). This notion of QOL is a simple idea but a very powerful one for the marketing community. It is simple because it preaches that marketers should be actively involved in marketing those products and services that significantly enhance QOL of certain consumer groups with

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minimal social costs to society. It is powerful in the sense that it provides the marketing community with a new way of thinking about their marketing responsibilities. The QDL concept in marketing is a new marketing philosophy that is one step above the societal marketing concept on the moral. (Sirgy, 1991). Business in general is beginning to realize that its responsibility to people extends beyond meeting certain market demands and generating employment. Business's responibility is also to contribute to the QOL of its employees and the community. That is, business is now expected to contribute to the social, as well as the economic, welfare of society (e.g., Davis and Blomstrom, 1975). Businesses cannot simply sell products and services they "happen" to make. They have to engage in research in order to understand human needs and wants, and to deliver goods and services that can satisfy important needs in such a way as to enhance the QOL of a certain consumer segment, while not debilitating the QOL of other publics. Similar expectations are building with respect to the public sector, i.e., government, schools, and other nonprofit organizations. (Sirgy, 1991)

Conclusions

I would like to conclude my theoretical research with the conclusion of Martha A. Starr, who already gave me the premises of my next research project and the future value added. The findings of this paper are broadly supportive of the strategy adopted by several authors for modeling ethical, 'green', or socially responsible consumption behaviors – in which there is a core of consumers who consume ethically for 'intrinsic' reasons; another group who may not place the same intrinsic value on consuming ethically, but would begin consuming ethically if it became a social norm; and a last group of peoplewhoare neither intrinsically concerned with consuming ethically nor sensitive to social norms related to it. The theoretical model presented in this paper suggests that ethical consumption may become widespread if the first two groups make up a sizable share of the population and if the actions of people in the first group induce people in the second to also change their behavior. However, if the intrinsically motivated group is relatively small and/or its behavior does not much influence the behavior of others, ethical consumption might remain a niche phenomenonand/or spread too little to make a dent in the social, ethical, and environmental problems it aims to address (Starr, 2009 and Eriksson, 2004).

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