Universiteit Leiden

Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen

The price tag of moral superiority:

Willingness to pay for ethical products after appealing to moral superiority

Oscar Loomans

Master thesis proposal Psychology
Specialization Economic & Consumer Psychology
Institute of Psychology
Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences – Leiden University

Date: 3rd of May 2018
Student number: 2081601
Supervisor: Ruthie Pliskin
Second examiner of the university: Daan Scheepers

Abstract

Based on previous research it was suggested that people are willing to pay more for ethical products when they desire a sense of moral superiority. I have tried to find evidence for the hypothesis that people who are threatened in their moral superiority are willing to pay more for ethical products to gain moral superiority ('lower' condition). In addition to this I have tested if these people would have the greatest gain in willingness to pay (WTP) for ethical products to gain moral superiority compared to people in other conditions. Secondly, I tried to find evidence for the hypothesis that people who have the opportunity to gain moral superiority would be willing to pay more for ethical products ('same' condition). Thirdly, I have tested the hypothesis that people who feel morally superior are willing to pay the same or willing to pay more for ethical products to maintain moral superiority ('higher' condition). Results show that people are indeed willing to pay more for ethical products when they desire a sense of moral superiority. This effect has been found in the 'lower' and in the 'higher' condition, where people in the 'lower' condition had the highest WTP for ethical products. Although people generally have an intention to consume ethically, they do not show this behavior as much as they intend to. This study shows that a desire for a sense of moral superiority in consumers can be an important step towards filling this intention-behavior gap in ethical consumerism.

Introduction

Imagine that you are in the supermarket and that you are deciding which chocolate bar you want to buy. There are a lot of different bars, but there is one particular bar with a Fairtrade logo and when you read the text on the wrapping, it tells you that you can make a difference in the world by buying this chocolate bar in comparison to other chocolate bars. You see that other

people around you are grabbing different kinds of chocolate bars, other than the Fairtrade option. This means that choosing the Fairtrade option can give you a sense of moral superiority over these other people. Since the Fairtrade chocolate bars are more expensive, the next question derives: are you willing to pay a little extra in order to gain a sense of moral superiority?

It is found that there are many people who have the intention to consume ethically (i.e. Fairtrade, biologically, sustainable, organic, etc.), but there is just a small percentage of people who turn this intention into buying behavior (De Pelsmacker, Driesen & Rayp, 2005). A lot of research has been done to examine this phenomenon but until now no solution has been found to explain this gap between intention and behavior (De Pelsmacker, Driesen, & Rayp, 2005; Hassan, Shiui, & Shaw, 2016; Nicholls, & Lee, 2006). In this paper I will show that there is reason to believe that this gap could be partially filled by appealing to an ethical consumers' feeling of moral superiority in comparison to other consumers, because of the boost in self-esteem that may be caused by feelings of moral superiority (Leach, Ellemers & Barreto, 2007). Under such circumstances, people are more likely to consume ethical products and are willing to pay more which would not only lead to an intention, but would also result in actual buying behavior of ethical products.

Moral superiority

In order to understand moral superiority, the concept of morality as a psychological characteristic has to be explained first. Morality consists of the personality traits honesty and sincerity (Rosenberg, Nelson & Vivekananthan, 1968). Because these are positive personality traits, people like to see themselves as moral. Being moral is regarded as positive and desirable, while being immoral is regarded as negative and undesirable. People feel morally superior when

they evaluate their actions or beliefs as more moral compared to the actions or beliefs of others (Parker & Janoff-Bulman, 2013). This social comparison can drive people to act in a certain way and show behavior, which will lead to a sense of moral superiority because it gives people the opportunity to be evaluated more positively than others (Parker & Janoff-Bulman, 2013; Van der Pligt & Vliek, 2016). There are several motivations why people strive for moral superiority. Leach, Ellemers and Barreto (2007) found that it can boost self-esteem which gives people the desired outcome of feeling good about themselves, while Jordan and Monin (2008) found that it can help to deal with self-threat. People who feel threatened in their self-esteem can escape these feelings by claiming that they are morally superior over others which counts as a valid reason for their actions.

Thus, could people be more likely to consume products which could help them to achieve the desired feelings that are associated with moral superiority? According to the theory of emotion regulation consumption, people consume with the prospect that it will make them feel good or to keep their positive feelings (Kemp & Kopp, 2011). When people know a sense of moral superiority will give them these positive feelings, they may consume more products that are appealing to a sense of moral superiority. The literature on ethical consumerism may offer insights into this process.

Ethical Consumerism

In order to feel morally superior because of the consumption of a product, this product will need to have an association with moral values and there needs to be an opportunity to compare your own consumption with the consumption of others. Ethical issues are associated with moral values (e.g. labor conditions, preservation of the earth, human rights, animal well-

being, etc.), which generally evoke feelings and opinions of right or wrong. Therefore, ethical consumerism could be a consumption category which can serve to induce a sense of moral superiority. Ethical consumerism refers to buying products which are associated to certain ethical issues, while consumers are not forced to buy these products (Doane, 2001).

Peoples' willingness to pay (WTP) for any given product is known to be bounded by a floor reservation price and a ceiling reservation price (Dost, Wilken, Eisenbeiss & Skiera, 2014). If the price of a product goes below the floor reservation price, the consumer is a definite buyer. When the price goes above the ceiling price, the consumer is definitely not going to buy the product. The consumer is indecisive about buying when the price lies between these reservation prices. People are willing to pay more for ethical products because they are evaluated more positively, which predicts purchase intention (Hustvedt & Bernard, 2008; Hyllegard, Yan, Ogle & Lee, 2012). More specifically, Fairtrade products are most preferred over other ethical products (De Pelsmacker, Janssens, Sterckx & Mielants, 2005).

Because of these findings, it seems logical that there are many people who actually buy ethical products. However, in practice this does not seem to be the case, because there is a gap between the intention of buying and the actual buying behavior (De Pelsmacker, Driesen & Rayp, 2005; Hassan, Shiui & Shaw, 2016; Nicholls & Lee, 2006). Although people are generally willing to pay more for ethical products, the prices of ethical products are mostly higher than the extra that people are willing to pay. Therefore, there is only a small percentage of people who are prepared to pay the actual retail price of the ethical products (De Pelsmacker, Driesen & Rayp, 2005). In terms of WTP ranges, there is just a small percentage of people who see ethical products as below the floor reservation price, which would make them definite buyers. The majority of people who have a buying intention are to be found in the range between the floor

and ceiling reservation price, which makes them indecisive of what to do. Because of this, the majority only buys ethical products on occasion. It is found that these intermittent ethical consumers think benevolence values such as morality are important (Doran, 2009). According to Dost et al. (2014), indecisive buyers can become definite buyers when features or benefits from products are changed in positive light towards the consumer.

Researchers have yet to draw a connection between ethical consumerism and moral superiority, but since moral superiority offers a boost in self-esteem and prospects of positive feelings are known to increase consumption, it stands to reason that feelings of moral superiority could lead to more ethical consumerism. The following question derives: how profitable is appealing to a consumers' sense of moral superiority?

The current research

Although people often do not consume ethically because doing so is usually more expensive than non-ethical consumerism (Valor, 2008), I expect that the positive feelings associated with moral superiority can change this. By appealing to feelings of moral superiority over others, I expect that people would be willing to pay more for an ethical product than when the product would not provide them with a sense of moral superiority.

I will examine if people are willing to pay more for ethical products when their initial WTP for ethical products is compared to others and therefore appealed to the possible opportunities to gain moral superiority over these others. In this comparison, I will examine if people are willing to pay more for an ethical product when they are in a group which scores lower, the same, or higher on average of willingness to pay compared to others.

I expect that people who score lower will be willing to pay more because they feel threatened. Therefore they would like to pay more for ethical products to gain a sense of moral superiority (or at least escape moral inferiority). Because this threat is a strong motivator to change behavior, I expect that the willingness to pay after comparison with others for this particular condition will lead to the greatest relative gain in comparison with the other conditions. I expect that people who score the same on WTP for ethical products as others will also be willing to pay more for ethical products after comparison, because they have the opportunity to gain a sense of moral superiority. For the people who score high on average of WTP compared to others are expected to pay the same or pay more for ethical products to maintain moral superiority. Therefore the following hypotheses can be made.

H1: People who are threatened in their moral superiority are willing to pay more for ethical products to gain moral superiority.

H2: People who have the opportunity to gain moral superiority are willing to pay more for ethical products.

H3: People who feel morally superior are willing to pay the same or willing to pay more for ethical products to maintain moral superiority.

H4: People who are threatened in their moral superiority will have the greatest gain in willingness to pay for ethical products to gain moral superiority.

Method

Participants

A total of 201 participants were recruited for credit, monetary reward of €3.50 or on a voluntary basis. This has been done through personal network and an online recruitment platform where students of the Leiden University can sign up for participation. For a 1x4 design, a power analysis shows that at least 144 participants are needed to get a large effect size and moderate power. Of the 201 participants, I have filtered out a total of 13 participants from the data set for two reasons: six participants because they took more than one hour for completing the study and seven participants because they guessed the purpose of the experiment. The final sample size therefore consists of 188 participants, which is well over 144. The participants were 55 males (29.3%) and 133 females (70.7%) between the age of 18 and 60 years old. The approximate duration of the study was 15 to 20 minutes.

Design

The experiment had a 1x4 design. The independent variable was the condition of comparison with the other group. There were four conditions: lower, the same and higher WTP on average for ethical products compared to the average of others. The fourth condition was the control condition where participants were not compared with others during their estimation of WTP. The dependent variable was the difference between WTP for ethical products before and after comparison.

Procedure

When the participants entered the study, they were presented with a cover story which explained what the study was about and what the procedure looked like. After the introduction of the study, participants were shown an informed consent which they had to agree with. The next step was that participants had to fill in some personal information (age, gender, education, ideology, religion and monthly income).

After that the experiment truly began. Participants were presented with twelve product combinations (two products per combination). In each combination the participant saw a standard product with its average retail price. A second product was presented with an extra feature which could have been ethical (e.g. Fairtrade bananas), a brand (e.g. Coca Cola) or a fresh alternative (e.g. fresh orange juice). There were four product combinations for each category. Participants received an explanatory example and then they had to fill in how much they were willing to pay extra in euros for the products with the extra feature. They were able to communicate this by dragging a slider to the preferable amount of money. When the participants communicated their willingness to pay for the twelve products, they received a message that they were halfway through the products.

From this point the experiment split into four conditions. Participants in the ’lower’ condition got additional information which said that their average WTP for ethical products was 21.3% lower on average compared to others, while their average WTP for branded products (0.4% less) and fresh alternatives (1.1% more) were approximately the same on average compared to others. Participants in the ’higher’ condition got the same information but instead of 21.3% lower, it was 21.3% higher on average compared to others. Participants in the ’same’ condition received information that they also scored approximately the same (0.2% higher) as

others on WTP for ethical products. Participants in the control condition did not receive any extra information about the comparison with other people. Instead, they received information about the personal comparison in WTP for the different product categories.

After receiving this information, all participants had to communicate their WTP for twelve additional products which were categorized the same as in the first batch with the same numbers of product combinations. These two batches were counterbalanced, which means that one half of the participants saw product batch A first while the other half of the participants saw product batch B first.

When the participants were done with their WTP for the products, they answered a few questionnaires to see how they scored themselves and others on morality, how frequently they bought ethical products in the past and to measure the moral values of the participants. At the end, participants were asked if they had the idea that they knew the purpose of the experiment which was followed by a debriefing.

Measures

Participants were able to communicate their WTP for ethical products by dragging a slider to the preferable amount of money. For the three experimental groups, the interval scores on the dependent variable were measured by computing the difference in the average WTP for ethical products before and after the comparison with others. The same score was computed for the control condition. The only difference was that this did not include a comparison with others. Because product batch A and B were counterbalanced in the sample, two new variables were created. One variable with all the individual average WTP scores for ethical products for the batch of products that participants saw first, and one variable for the batch of products that

participants saw second. Henceforth, these two product batches will be called product batch 1 and product batch 2 respectively. Subsequently, difference scores in WTP were calculated by subtracting the WTP scores of product batch 1 from the WTP scores of product batch 2.

Using a 7-point Likert scale, participants rated themselves (but not the others with whom they are compared) on the dimensions of morality (*very immoral* to *very morally virtuous*), frugality (*very frugal* to *not frugal at all*), honesty (*not honest at all* to *very honest*) and gullibility (very gullible to not gullible at all). In addition to this, participants rated themselves on these same dimensions. Furthermore, participants indicated if they bought several types of products in the last month on a 5-point Likert scale. The products existed of categories such as (but were not restricted to): biologic, low-calorie, premium, house brand and animal welfare. Four of these categories were part of ethical consumerism ($\alpha = .81$). Answers could vary in frequency rating from *0-2* to *10 or more*. Lastly, the short version of the Moral Foundation Questionnaire (Zhang, Hook & Johnson, 2006) was conducted to measure the moral values of the participants ($\alpha = .77$). This questionnaire includes questions such as '*it is better to do good than to do bad*' and '*it can never be right to kill a human being*', and measures moral values.

Results

The assumptions for the statistical analysis were checked and have been met. As showed in Table 1, I identified no significant differences between the control condition and the 'same' condition on various dependent variables. Therefore, I have chosen to combine these two conditions. Henceforth, this combination of conditions will be referred to as the control condition. Mean scores for WTP in different product categories are shown per condition in Table 2, as well as difference scores between the two product batches.

Table 1. Descriptives and independent samples t-tests for differences between control and 'same' condition

Dependent Variable	Condition	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Difference in average WTP for ethical products	Control Same	-8.23 -11.56	27.65 22.77	0.64	93	.523
Average batch 1 for ethical products	Control Same	47.41 49.87	36.51 48.27	-0.28	93	.680
Average batch 2 for ethical products	Control Same	39.18 38.31	32.38 42.15	0.11	93	.910
How moral you are	Control Same	4.63 4.77	0.87 0.98	-0.74	93	.460
How moral others are	Control Same	4.38 4.34	0.53 0.87	0.39	76.51	.775

Table 2. Mean scores for WTP in different product categories per condition.

	Ethical products			Brand products			Fresh products		
Condition	WTP batch 1	WTP batch 2	Difference WTP scores	WTP batch 1	WTP batch 2	Difference WTP scores	WTP batch 1	WTP batch 2	Difference WTP scores
Control	48.62	38.75	-9.88	32.78	27.85	-4.93	68.73	56.28	-12.46
Lower	53.36	55.26	2.91	33.27	31.76	-1.52	63.77	61.79	-1.98
Higher	50.46	49.64	-0.82	32.46	28.92	-3.54	72.49	61.17	-11.32

Table 3. Correlations with average difference WTP scores for ethical products, and their corresponding ANCOVA test results.

Covariate	Correlation (*r*)	*F* test
Age	-.078	$F(2, 184) = 4.39$, $p = .014$
Gender	-.179*	$F(2, 184) = 5.98$, $p = .015$
Education	-.084	$F(2, 184) = 4.50$, $p = .012$
Political orientation/view:		
- left/right	-.079	$F(2, 184) = 4.28$, $p = .015$
- conservative/progressive	.004	$F(2, 184) = 4.40$, $p = .014$
- liberal/social	-.036	$F(2, 184) = 4.25$, $p = .016$
Religion	.000	$F(2, 184) = 4.36$, $p = .014$
Income	-.044	$F(2, 184) = 4.29$, $p = .015$
How moral you are	-.009	$F(2, 183) = 4.70$, $p = .010$
How moral others are	.049	$F(2, 184) = 4.83$, $p = .009$
How honest you are	-.016	$F(2, 183) = 4.73$, $p = .010$
How honest others are	.000	$F(2, 183) = 4.92$, $p = .008$
Consumption:		
- Biological products	.071	$F(2, 181) = 4.27$, $p = .015$
- Fairtrade products	.048	$F(2, 182) = 4.52$, $p = .012$
- Animal welfare products	.099	$F(2, 182) = 3.99$, $p = .020$
- Sustainable products	.065	$F(2, 184) = 4.22$, $p = .016$
- Ethical products average	.085	$F(2, 184) = 4.14$, $p = .017$
MFQ – Harm	.100	$F(2, 178) = 3.75$, $p = .025$
MFQ – Fairness	.117	$F(2, 178) = 3.58$, $p = .030$
MFQ – Ingroup	-.018	$F(2, 184) = 4.09$, $p = .018$
MFQ – Authority	-.076	$F(2, 178) = 4.08$, $p = .018$
MFQ – Purity	.068	$F(2, 178) = 4.02$, $p = .020$
MFQ – Progressivism	.097	$F(2, 178) = 3.81$, $p = .024$
MFQ – Total average	.090	$F(2, 178) = 3.75$, $p = .025$
Product batch order	-.197**	$F(2, 184) = 4.49$, $p = .012$

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the correlations between the difference on average WTP scores for ethical products and potential covariates in this study. Since the correlation with 'product batch order' is highly significant, I have decided to control for this variable. I have conducted an ANCOVA with the difference on average WTP for ethical products as dependent variable, the conditions as independent variable/factor and the batch order as covariate. As expected, I found a significant difference between the conditions on the difference on average WTP for ethical products, $F(2, 184) = 4.49$, $p = .012$. The total variance explained for the different conditions was 4.47%. These

findings are also significant when the product batch order is not being controlled for, $F(2, 185) = 4.37$, $p = .014$.

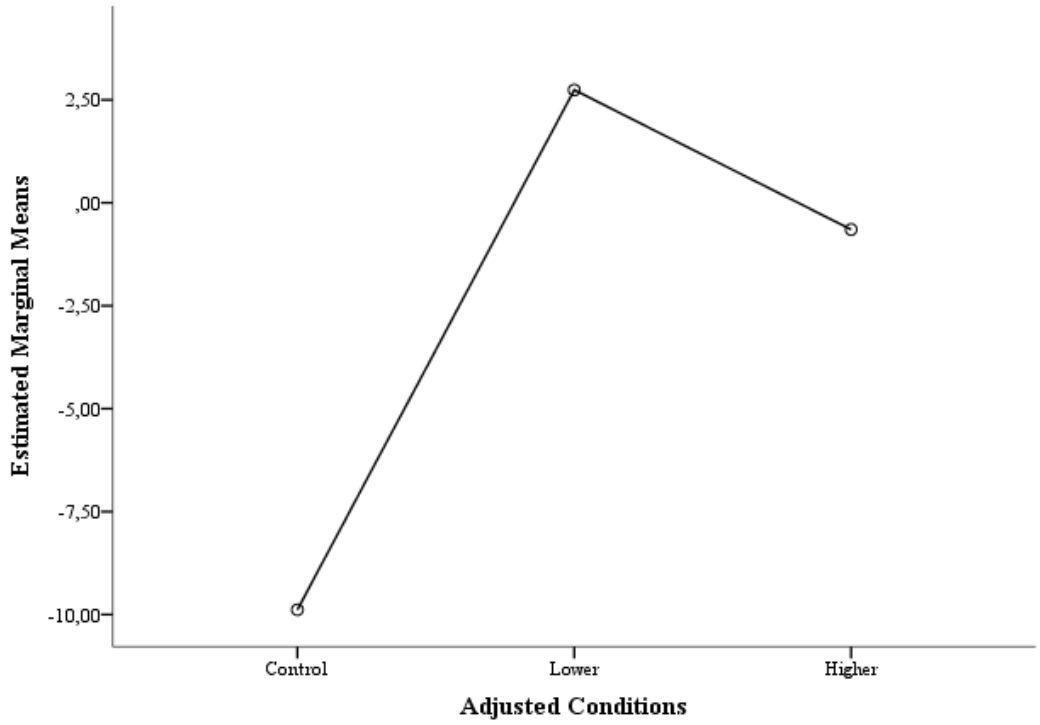

Figure 1. Estimated marginal means of difference WTP for ethical products per condition

As shown in Table 2 and Figure 1, the willingness to pay for ethical products after manipulation was more for the 'lower' condition and the 'higher' condition in comparison to the control condition. In a post hoc test I have found that there is a significant difference between the control condition and the 'lower' condition ($p = .018$), and a marginally significant difference between the control condition and the 'higher' condition ($p = .133$). There was not controlled for batch order in this post hoc test, because of the technical limitation that an ANCOVA analysis (in comparison to an ANOVA analysis) does not allow to conduct post hoc tests.

Because of these results, I can conclude that people who are threatened in their moral superiority are willing to pay more for ethical products to gain moral superiority, and that people who feel morally superior are willing to pay the same or willing to pay more for ethical products to maintain moral superiority. Since participants in the 'lower' condition score the highest on difference in the average willingness to pay for ethical products, as shown in Table 2, it can also be concluded that people who are threatened in their moral superiority will have the greatest gain in willingness to pay for ethical products to gain moral superiority. Since it is not possible to control for a variable in a post hoc test, it can be assumed that these differences would be more significant when there would be controlled for batch order.

Table 2 also shows the mean scores for other product categories, but there are no significant differences found between conditions in the 'brand' category, $F(2, 185) = 0.37$, $p = .690$, nor between conditions in the 'fresh products' category, $F(2, 185) = 1.48$, $p = .232$. Therefore it can be concluded that the effect only occurs for the ethical product category.

As mentioned before and as shown in Table 3, I have also looked at correlations between the difference on average WTP scores for ethical products and potential covariates in this study. Besides the product batch order, I decided to include gender as a covariate because of the significant correlation, and found that it does not distort the results of the main findings. Moreover, Table 3 also shows that the main findings are not dependent on any other potential covariates.

Interesting to notice is that there has not been found a main effect for moral superiority in the different conditions, with mean scores being $M = 0.32$ for the control condition, $M = 0.46$ for the lower condition and $M = 0.59$ for the higher condition. The experimental conditions do not

significantly differ from the control conditions in reported moral superiority, $F(2, 183) = 1.14$, $p = .323$. Possible explanations will be discussed in the discussion section of this study.

Discussion

In the current study I have tried to find evidence for the hypothesis that people who are threatened in their moral superiority are willing to pay more for ethical products to gain moral superiority. In addition to this I have tested if these people would have the greatest gain in WTP for ethical products to gain moral superiority compared to people in other conditions. Secondly, I tried to find evidence for the hypothesis that people who have the opportunity to gain moral superiority would be willing to pay more for ethical products. Thirdly, I have tested the hypothesis that people who feel morally superior are willing to pay the same or willing to pay more for ethical products to maintain moral superiority.

In comparison with other conditions, I have found that people who are threatened in their moral superiority are willing to pay the most for ethical products to gain moral superiority over others. This result is in line with the theory of Jordan and Monin (2008) which states that people who feel threatened in their sense of moral superiority want to reduce this feeling. By paying more for ethical products they can gain a sense of moral superiority (or at least escape moral inferiority).

I have also found small evidence that people who already had a sense of moral superiority over others were willing to pay the same or more for ethical products as they did before they were provided with information about the comparison with others. This is also in line with what was expected to be found and fits with the theory that people want to maintain or increase their moral superiority over others because moral superiority makes them feel good

(Parker & Janoff-Bulman, 2013) and they want to keep these positive feelings (Kemp & Kopp, 2011).

Additionally, I expected to find that people who had the opportunity to gain moral superiority over others would increase their WTP for ethical products after they received the information that they scored the same as others on WTP for ethical products, which would fit the theory of Parker and Janoff-Bulman (2013). In contrast to the expectations there was no significant effect found for this condition. In fact, the WTP for these people was very similar to the WTP for people in the control condition. An explanation for this unexpected finding could lie in the potential limitations of this study.

When looking at the overall results, I have found that participants are willing to pay less for ethical products in the second block of products in comparison to the first block of products that the participants saw. This result is shown in all conditions, except for the 'lower' condition. A possible explanation for this finding is that it could be a result of moral licensing which means that people who initially act in a moral way, are more likely to act immoral or unethical later on (Blanken, Van de Ven & Zeelenberg, 2015).

Implications

The results of this study provide a valuable contribution to the existing literature on moral superiority and consumer behavior. To my knowledge it is the first study that combines the literature on these subjects. By appealing to a sense of moral superiority, people can increase their willingness to pay for ethical products when the status quo is that they feel morally inferior or morally superior to others. Parker and Janoff-Bulman (2013) state that self-threat is a strong motivator to seek moral superiority. This study contributes to this finding by showing that people

are willing to pay more for products which can lead to moral superiority and therefore provide the possibility to escape self-threat.

Furthermore, moral superiority can boost self-esteem which gives people the desired outcome of feeling good about themselves (Leach, Ellemers & Barreto, 2007), and people consume with the prospect that it will make them feel good or to keep their positive feelings (Kemp & Kopp, 2011). This study contributes to these findings because it shows that people are willing to pay more for products related to moral superiority when they already feel morally superior and which allows them to maintain their positive feelings.

There is an intention-behavior gap in ethical consumerism (De Pelsmacker, Driesen & Rayp, 2005; Hassan, Shiui & Shaw, 2016; Nicholls & Lee, 2006), and to my knowledge this is the first study that tries to fill this gap by addressing people to their feelings of moral superiority. This study contributes to this literature by showing that people are willing to pay more for ethical products when they feel morally inferior or morally superior towards others, and thus contributes in narrowing the intention-behavior gap in ethical consumerism.

Specifically, when marketers of ethical products want to increase their sales, they could induce feelings of moral inferiority and moral superiority in their marketing campaign which increases the WTP of consumers. These induced feelings could turn consumers from being indecisive of buying to definite buyers (Dost, Wilken, Eisenbeiss & Skiera, 2014).

Possible limitations and future research

In the result section I stated that no main effect for moral superiority in the different conditions was found. The experimental conditions do not significantly differ from the control condition in reported moral superiority. A possible explanation for this is that moral superiority

has not been measured in the right way. The approach for measuring moral superiority in this study was to extract the personal scores of ratings about the morality of others from the personal scores of ratings about the moral self. When this score was higher than 0, it would mean that these people feel morally superior in comparison to others. Since this method for measuring moral superiority was created specifically for this study, it could be that it does not accurately measure moral superiority. Another possible explanation is that participants in the control condition had to hypothetically score others on their morality, because there were no others in the actual WTP task. This could have added noise to the data which could explain that the moral superiority scores in the control condition did not significantly differ from the other conditions.

One of the other potential limitations of this study is that the results could be affected by the regression towards the mean effect (Kahneman, 2011). In this research this would mean that participants would alter their WTP for ethical products after they saw the information about the comparison to the WTP of others. They would do this in such a way that their WTP would become more in line with the WTP of others. For instance, participants are provided with information that their WTP for ethical products is lower than the WTP for ethical product of others. Consequently, they would increase their WTP so that it matches with the WTP of others.

The results show that the WTP goes up after participants were provided with information that they were willing to pay less than others. For a WTP which would be in line with the WTP of others, participants would have to increase their initial WTP with approximately 21.3%, because they were provided with the information that others were willing to pay 21.3% more for ethical products. Instead of a 21.3% gain, participants show an average gain of 5.7% in their WTP for ethical products in comparison to their initial WTP. It can be said that the actual gain in percentage is moving towards the percentage which would be more in line with the WTP of

others and could therefore be explained by the regression towards the mean effect. However, since the actual gain is still substantially less than what would be in line with the WTP of others, and since the regression to the mean effect does not occur in the other conditions of our experiment at all, it is rather unlikely that this effect has a significant impact on the present study.

An additional potential limitation for this study is the use of WTP itself. The WTP is the amount that a person is willing to pay for a consumer good or service (Breidert, Hahsler & Reutterer, 2006). The amount that a person is willing to pay says something about the perceived value of that particular consumer good or service. This creates a scenario where people will have to make a decision that is supposed to be consistent with a real-life situation (Breidert, Hahsler & Reutterer, 2006). The potential downside of this method is that participants are aware that they are participating in a study. This consciousness of the experimental setting could influence their spending behavior and therefore lead to a lower external validity (Breidert, Hahsler & Reutterer, 2006). Although scientists generally agree on the reliability and effectiveness of a scenario setting to interpret behavior in comparison to a real setting (Eastwick, Hunt & Neff, 2013; Kang et al., 2011; Kühberger, Schulte-Mecklenbeck & Perner, 2002; FeldmanHall et al., 2012), it could be that participants did not show the same results in this scenario as what they would do in real life. For instance, participants had to provide information about their hypothetical WTP instead of spending real money, which does not have any real consequences on their financial state.

There are several other aspects in the research design which could potentially threaten the external validity. The first is that the majority of the participants in this study are recruited in the Netherlands. Because of this it cannot be concluded that the results will also be valid for people

in other countries and cultures. This limitation goes hand in hand with the fact that I used products in this study that are common in the Netherlands, but might not be as common in other countries and cultures. A second potential danger for the external validity is that the used products were limited to food and drinks. This was done to reduce potential noise in the results, but the downside of this is that it cannot be concluded that these results will also be valid for other consumer goods. These mentioned potential limitations to the external validity could be a focus of future research to expand the external validity.

The results in this study show that people are willing to pay more for ethical products when they are threatened in their moral superiority and when they already have a sense of moral superiority. The focus of this study was to see if people are willing to pay more for ethical products when they desire a sense of moral superiority under certain conditions. Since this effect has been found, future research could focus on how much more people are willing to pay for ethical products when they desire a sense of moral superiority. With the current results I can conclude that providing people with a sense of moral superiority under certain conditions plays a role in filling the intention-behavior gap of ethical consumerism. Future research would have to investigate to what extent this gap could be filled by the desire for a sense of moral superiority.

Conclusion

To conclude, the present study has found evidence that people who are threatened in their moral superiority show a gain in WTP for ethical products after comparison with others, while people with a sense of moral superiority want to keep this feeling and therefore are willing to pay the same or more after comparison with others. These results are a valuable addition to the literature on moral superiority and ethical consumerism and I am optimistic that moral

superiority could provide substantial progress in the efforts to fill the intention-behavior gap in ethical consumerism.

References

Blanken, I., van de Ven, N., & Zeelenberg, M. (2015). A meta-analytic review of moral licensing. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *41*(4), 540-558.

Breidert, C., Hahsler, M., & Reutterer, T. (2006). A review of methods for measuring willingness-to-pay. *Innovative Marketing*, *2*(4), 8-32.

De Pelsmacker, P., Driesen, L., & Rayp, G. (2005). Do consumers care about ethics? Willingness to pay for fair-trade coffee. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, *39*(2), 363-385.

De Pelsmacker, P., Janssens, W., Sterckx, E., & Mielants, C. (2005). Consumer preferences for the marketing of ethically labelled coffee. *International Marketing Review*, *22*(5), 512-530.

Doane, D. (2001). *Taking flight: The rapid growth of ethical consumerism*. London: New Economics Foundation.

Doran, C. J. (2009). The role of personal values in fair trade consumption. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *84*(4), 549-563.

Dost, F., Wilken, R., Eisenbeiss, M., & Skiera, B. (2014). On the edge of buying: A targeting approach for indecisive buyers based on willingness-to-pay ranges. *Journal of Retailing*, *90*(3), 393-407.

Eastwick, P. W., Hunt, L. L., & Neff, L. A. (2013). External validity, why art thou externally valid? Recent studies of attraction provide three theoretical answers. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *7*(5), 275-288.

FeldmanHall, O., Mobbs, D., Evans, D., Hiscox, L., Navrady, L., & Dalgleish, T. (2012). What we say and what we do: the relationship between real and hypothetical moral choices. *Cognition*, *123*(3), 434-441.

Hassan, L. M., Shiu, E., & Shaw, D. (2016). Who says there is an intention–behaviour gap? Assessing the empirical evidence of an intention–behaviour gap in ethical consumption. *Journal of Business Ethics, 136*(2), 219-236.

Hustvedt, G., & Bernard, J. C. (2008). Consumer willingness to pay for sustainable apparel: The influence of labelling for fibre origin and production methods. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 32*(5), 491-498.

Hyllegard, K. H., Yan, R. N., Ogle, J. P., & Lee, K. H. (2012). Socially responsible labeling: The impact of hang tags on consumers' attitudes and patronage intentions toward an apparel brand. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 30*(1), 51-66.

Jordan, A. H., & Monin, B. (2008). From sucker to saint: Moralization in response to self-threat. *Psychological Science, 19*(8), 809-815.

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Macmillan.

Kang, M. J., Rangel, A., Camus, M., & Camerer, C. F. (2011). Hypothetical and real choice differentially activate common valuation areas. *Journal of neuroscience, 31*(2), 461-468.

Kemp, E., & Kopp, S. W. (2011). Emotion regulation consumption: When feeling better is the aim. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 10*(1), 1-7.

Kühberger, A., Schulte-Mecklenbeck, M., & Perner, J. (2002). Framing decisions: Hypothetical and real. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 89*(2), 1162-1175.

Leach, C. W., Ellemers, N., & Barreto, M. (2007). Group virtue: the importance of morality (vs. competence and sociability) in the positive evaluation of in-groups.

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *93*(2), 234.

Nicholls, A., & Lee, N. (2006). Purchase decision-making in fair trade and the ethical purchase 'gap':'is there a fair trade twix?'. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, *14*(4), 369-386.

Parker, M. T., & Janoff-Bulman, R. (2013). Lessons from morality-based social identity: The power of outgroup "hate," not just ingroup "love". *Social Justice Research*, *26*(1), 81-96.

Rosenberg, S., Nelson, C., & Vivekananthan, P. S. (1968). A multidimensional approach to the structure of personality impressions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *9*(4), 283.

Valor, C. (2008). Can consumers buy responsibly? Analysis and solutions for market failures. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, *31*(3), 315-326.

Van der Pligt, J., & Vliek, M. L. W. (2016). *The psychology of Influence: Theory, research and application.* London: Psychology Press (Routledge).

Zhang, H., Hook, J. N., & Johnson, K. A. (2016). Moral Foundations Questionnaire. In *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences* (pp. 1-3). Springer International Publishing.