Consumer Moral Leadership

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Abstract

Despite conceptualizations of moral leadership, the literature is silent on *consumer* moral leadership proposed herein as a new intellectual construct. This conceptual paper reframes consumers as marketplace leaders grounded in a moral imperative. An overview of the moral leadership construct is provided from which sprang a collection of genitor constructs integrated into a new understanding of moral leadership in the consumer context: moral intelligence, discipline, integrity, courage, self-transcendence, intensity, and authority. Reasoning and argumentation strove to convince readers of the conceptual merit of the consumer moral leadership construct, which is, as yet, abstract anticipating theoretical verification.

Keywords: consumer moral leadership, moral leadership, morality, moral efficacy, ethical and moral consumerism

Introduction

The problem addressed in this paper is the need for consumer leadership in the marketplace to augment the fallout of *consumerism* perpetuated by consumer management. This paper challenges the longstanding assumption that consumer's efficient management of resources is enough. It tenders a new construct called consumer moral leadership, which is predicated on people being self-efficacious moral leaders in their consumption practices.

Consumerism Ideology

"The role of consumption and the ideology of consumerism are key elements in modern global cultures and societies" (Hinkins, 2007, p. 44). Although consumerism can mean different things to different people (Gabriel & Lang, 1995), in this paper, consumerism connotes an ideology with an attendant belief system, and consumption refers to behaviour stemming from the ideology. In more detail, Sklair (2010, p. 136) described the ideology of consumerism as "a set of beliefs and values, integral but not exclusive to the system of capitalist globalization, intended to make people believe that human worth is best ensured and happiness is best achieved in terms of our consumption and possessions." The consumerism ideology (cultural blueprint) "shapes the very assumptions that consumers hold about power relationships, preferred market dynamics, presumed rights and responsibilities and how people make sense of their role as a consumer" (McGregor, 2013, p. 6).

Consumers as Efficient Managers

Hand in hand with this problematization of consumerism is the longstanding notion of efficient consumer managers instead of moral leaders in the marketplace. The notion of consumers as *efficient managers* arose from the home economics discipline at the turn of the twentieth century (Berger, 1984; Key & Firebaugh, 1989; McGregor, 2009). Founders of the profession reasoned that bringing scientific principles to the study of the home, at a time when consumerism was gaining ground, would empower individuals and families to fight back against the pitfalls of industrialization and capitalism. Efficient management of scarce resources to improve well-being and quality of life was the mantra of the day (Brown, 1993). She explained that home economists strove to improve economic and consumer well-being "through efficiency in management" (Brown, 1993, p. 49). This "efficiency is exercised by ... the management of economic resources" (p. 50) with management meaning handling things – Latin *manus*, 'hand' (Harper, 2020).

Consumers were to ensure efficiency in their behaviour (i.e., handlings resources to meet needs and wants with minimum waste) by privileging competitive self-interest, individualism, and consumer rights. Over time, it became evident that a focus on consumer efficiency when managing resources compromised social efficacy and caring for others and the planet (Brown, 1993). She maintained that consumers were distracted from the larger issue of whether the economic and political systems, which are dependent on consumerism (an ideology) and consumption (a behaviour), had threatened their ability to fulfill

human and societal needs beyond their own self-interest.

Brown thus argued that such a heavy focus on being efficient consumer managers had led to "a lack of moral responsibility within the family" (1993, p. 52). Home economics has since enhanced its approach to consumer and family well-being with global perspectives, sustainability and consumers as global citizens (see McGregor, 2002), but this initial awareness coincided with the ethical consumerism movement and its concern for ethics and morality in consumer decisions. The 1980s decade of the 'green consumer' lead to the ethical consumerism movement, which, "by the early 1990s, was starting to gain attention ... as an exciting innovation" (Anderson, 2015, p. 108). But despite its innovative nature, consumers were simply expected to shift from being efficient *managers* to sustainable, efficient managers, and always with the expectation that consuming is their major contribution to the economy and thus society (Brown, 1993).

Requisite Paradigm Shift

With ethical consumption, the "concern is primarily for others, distanced by geography, class, species or generality" (Newholm, Newholm, & Shaw, 2015, p. 301). But the concept of leadership was never explicit in the equation for transforming consumption to an ethical imperative (McGregor & Shaw, 2006). Not surprisingly, conceptualizing people as moving from efficient managers to moral leaders will require a paradigm shift, because despite there being an ongoing "consumption ethic" since Adam Smith's work in the 1750s (Newholm et al., 2015, p. 290), the uncritical assumption has been that consumers will be ethical and efficient *managers* of their own resources not *leaders* in the marketplace for the benefit of others and the Earth.

Peace Educators and Consumerism

Some people in the peace education field have acknowledged that consumerism is not peaceful, because it reinforces and depends on structural violence and hinges on people being efficient managers of scare resources, so they can meet their own self-interests when consuming (McGregor, 2010, 2016). Fellow peace educators also interested in non-violent, just, responsible and accountable consumption may be looking for alternative ways to reorient people to engage in consumer decisions that are moral, ethical and inflict nominal harm. This type of peace education would require teaching people how to be consumer moral leaders not just efficient managers.

Such an approach to peace education is necessary, because consumers often encounter moral situations and grapple with morally irresponsible and morally risky behaviour. Such behaviour can lead to exploitation, oppression, marginalization and disadvantaged scenarios for fellow humans (Neilsen & McGregor, 2013). In his seminal paper *Consuming Morality,* Wilk (2001) posited that "consumption is in essence a moral matter" (p. 269). Put simply, consumers are "subjects of moral obligation" (Cherrier, 2006, p. 515). Moral consumers are "motivated by desire to be better people" (Jelovac & Rihtaršič, 2014, p. 87) in the marketplace for the betterment of everything. To respect the moral imperative at play (with imperative meaning a strongly felt principle that compels people to act), this conceptual paper focuses on the *consumer moral leadership* construct.[1]

As noted, this new conceptualization is intended to augment the longstanding consumer management construct. To elaborate, unlike management, leadership has normative connotations of a higher moral purpose (Safty, 2003). Morality pertains to harm arising from actions (Rozycki, 1993). Normative pertains to 'What *should* be done or *ought to* be?' rather than 'What *is* being or *can* be done?' Normative statements express a value judgement (i.e., taking one's value system into account) about a situation (Wong, 1987). For clarification, this paper is not about *moral management*, which is a construct developed to study how well business managers apply the moral maximization principle when handling their workforce (Sikula, 1996). It concerns whether they went "against the grain, [took the] elevated ethical ground [and] walked the high road" while striving for profit (Sikula, 2009, pp. 253, 261).

Consumer Accountability Imperative
The premise of normatively focusing on consumers as moral *leaders* in the marketplace is deceptively complex. That said, if consumers are to assume accountability for the impact of their marketplace choices, they must move from viewing themselves as efficient managers to also being self-efficacious moral leaders. It is not unreasonable to ask consumers to assume this role, because they spend trillions of dollars annually on products that are not ethically sourced and produced (Assadourian & Mastny, 2017). Compared to businesses and governments, consumers spent two thirds (62.87%) of the global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018 (Global Economy, 2019). With this spending power comes undeniable responsibility whether desired or not (McGregor, 2017).

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1. An earlier version of this paper was published as a book chapter in McGregor (2010). Any overlapping material contained herein is used with copyright permission from Brill/Sense Publishing.

As a caveat, some take issue with this stance (e.g., John Broome, Slavoj Zizek), arguing instead that vulnerable consumers do not exert power through their shopping decisions, because they are powerless in the marketplace. Instead, the moral responsibility principle should be relegated to the nation state to make up for the lack of personal moral responsibility of the masses. It is governments, not consumers, that have the power to alter global hierarchies and structural inequalities that perpetuate unethical economies and markets (Peer Reviewer, personal communication, December 9, 2020). Albeit respectful of this counterpoint, the cumulative power of billions of consumers takes precedence in this paper.

Dearth of Consumer Moral Leadership Literature

As noted, implementing the new intellectual construct introduced in this paper will require an immense paradigm shift. To further explain, although *moral leadership* has received attention in the literature (Anello, 1992; Gini, 1996; Tamang, 2013; Vaduva, Alistar, Thomas, Lupiţu, & Neagoie, 2016), virtually nothing exists about *consumer* moral leadership proposed herein as an additional marketplace responsibility and opportunity. From a moral leadership perspective, people are paradigmatically being asked to rethink their consumer role by augmenting 'managing for efficiency' with 'leading for moral efficacy.' The latter is the ability to both "deal positively with ethical issues that arise . . . and overcome obstacles to developing and implementing ethical solutions" (May, Luth, & Schwoerer, 2014, p. 68). The moral imperative (i.e., guiding principle) is to mitigate harm thereby lessening the gravity or culpability of one's marketplace actions (Rozycki, 1993).

Conceptual Clarification

While appreciating that these aligned constructs are interrelated, the consumer moral leadership construct purposefully deals with (a) *leadership* not management, (b) *morality* not ethics and (c) *moral* consumerism not ethical consumerism. Each is differentiated.

Leader versus manager. Leaders work on changing the system, while managers work within it. Leaders proactively adapt and draw on *principles* to provide direction for transformation. Managers react to situations by gaining control of resources to efficiently maximize benefits (Covey, 1992). Consumer management pertains to people, in varying degrees, taking control of and regulating the use of their finances and other resources to meet needs (essential)

and wants (desirable) by using and disposing of goods and services procured from the marketplace. These management decisions represent varying degrees of ethical consumption. Asking people to make ethical consumption decisions in their management role is not the same thing as asking them to be moral leaders when confronting an ethically intense purchase situation with leadership intimating service (Anello, 2006; McGregor, 2010; Tamang, 2013).

Morals versus ethics. The consumer moral leadership construct deals more so with morality than ethics appreciating their philosophical connection and frequent conflation. Put simply, morals are what people consider to be normative (should and ought to – right and wrong) and affect their thought and reasoning process. Ethics are standards used to judge the goodness and badness of one's behaviour. Ethics are external codes (standards) that guide personal and collective behaviour, while morals are internal normative principles (i.e., a moral compass) that influence personal thoughts and decisions (e.g., "doing the right thing, living honourably, leading with high character") (Weinstein, 2018, para. 1). Ethics (codes and standards) are developed purposefully over time, while morals are something people feel intuitively. Ethics guide and map decisions, but morals are used to normatively judge decisions – What *should* be done? (Weinstein, 2011, 2018). In effect, morals exemplify the idiom – *think before you act*.

Moral versus ethical consumerism. Ethical consumerism was already introduced. "Moral consumerism has arisen [in conjunction with] the ethical consumerism trend [and involves taking] moral considerations into account [when purchasing]" (Tang et al., 2016, p. 152). Ethical consumerism is a type of external consumer activism (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014), while moral consumerism is internal and concerns whether purchase decisions are principled (i.e., morally correct) (Brinkman, 2004). Cain (2019) concurred that moral consumerism is principle based. Ethical consumerism is about freedom of choice, but moral consumerism is about actions and behaviour based on personal, principled integrity and thought processes (Jelovac & Rihtaršič, 2014).

Method: Conceptual Integration

The consumer moral leadership construct herein was developed through a research process called conceptual integration; that is, the intermixing of previously segregated, abstract ideas (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015; Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009). The result is the articulation of definitions of contributing constructs along with posited systematized relations among them and between the new construct and the phenomenon in question (McGregor, 2018; Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009). The construct of consumer moral leadership frames consumers

as *leaders* in the marketplace acting from a position of *morality*. Morality comes into play when there is a chance that harm will result from an action (Rozycki, 1993).

Conceptual papers such as this one report the results of integrative research (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015). As in this paper, most new ideas presented this way are abstract and not theoretically proven; yet, they are considered valuable contributions to the literature if well argued (McLean, 2011; Saunders, 2018). The abstraction is usually expressed through word models, pictorial models or both (O'Toole, 2013; Smyth, 2004). A word model is a clear statement and description of all elements and any processes that link them to the research phenomenon (Kimmins, Blanco, Seely, Welham, & Scoullar, 2010).

Also, conceptual papers are discursive in that they involve reasoning and argumentation to convince others of the conceptual merit (McGregor, 2018; McLean, 2011; Saunders, 2018). The discursive narrative shared in this paper includes an overview of the *moral leadership* construct from which sprung a collection of genitor constructs (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015) that were integrated into a new understanding of moral leadership in the consumer context – *consumer* moral leadership. This empirically untested abstraction and its supportive argument (developed using logic and rhetoric) are presented herein for scholarly consideration, debate and dialogue (Saunders, 2018). After explaining the *moral leadership* construct (including moral leaders in general), the discussion shifts to an elaboration of the new idea of *consumer* moral leadership.

Moral Leadership Construct

Although all leadership is irrevocably tied to morality (Safty, 2003), *moral* leadership is different from leadership in general (Sucher, 2007). Moral leaders strive to serve rather than be followed (Tamang, 2013). Lead is Old English *lædan*, 'go before as a guide; show the way' (Harper, 2020). Leadership in general is a process that enables people to achieve their goals by guiding and inspiring others. A leader brings a clear and compelling sense of the future as well as any actions needed to get there. The intent is to effect change (Covey, 1992).

Morality is Latin *moralite*, 'virtuous thought or conduct' (Harper, 2020) with virtuous meaning of high moral standard. Morality is a concern for creating and mitigating harm (Rozycki, 1993). Until relatively recently, little attention was paid to the moral dimension of leadership (Gini, 1996; Safty, 2003). Consequently, a universally accepted definition of moral leadership is still

evolving (Johnson, 2003). Although moral leadership is hard to define (Gini, 1996; Johnson, 2003), leading from a moral perspective is basically about service to others, society and the world. This service, in turn, leads to personal empowerment and agency that enable people to contribute to societal transformation (Anello, 2006; Tamang, 2013).

Moral Leaders

By serving the needs and well-being of others, moral leaders strive to preserve human honour and dignity, which leads to a more deeply caring civilization and less harm to each other. To that end, moral leaders aspire to release each person's potential and do so concurrently protecting the latter's rights and freedoms while safeguarding the whole community's welfare (Anello, 1992; Gini, 1996).

Moral leaders act from a deep sense of ethics (e.g., consciousness and integrity). They are driven by core, moral ideals (e.g., justice and a respect for humanity) and motivated by the pursuit of a higher purpose than self-interest (Safty, 2003; Tamang, 2013). They are deeply certain about their moral beliefs and scrupulous in their efforts to use morally justifiable means to pursue their moral goals (Colby & Damon, 1992). In effect, "moral leaders are the conscience (i.e., the moral compass) of an enterprise . . . and the glue that holds it together" (Tamang, 2013, para. 4). Grounded in this conscience or moral voice, moral leaders demand and exercise transparency, accountability, and they expect behaviour of the highest ideals (Goode, 2010).

They know how to temper their ego, manage themselves and act with morally correct behaviour (rectitude) to right or prevent moral wrongs. In the marketplace, they are expected to overcome selfishness, materialism and consumerism-driven ambition (Goode, 2010; Tamang, 2013). They can be effective in this role, because they "have the ability to see 'the end in the beginning'" (Tamang, 2013, para. 11). This means they tend to step back and ponder the consequences of their actions *before* acting, knowing that these actions "are tested against values and not [just] . . . results" (Tamang, 2013, para. 12). "Moral leaders are not heroes of morality, but individuals . . . that strive to do things ethically, trying not to have a negative impact on stakeholders and pushing others to behave the same" (Vaduva et al., 2016, p. 2).

In summary, people assuming a moral leadership role will have (a) a service orientation for the common good, (b) the intent to ensure personal and social transformation, (c) a moral responsibility to investigate and apply the truth, (d) a belief in the essential nobility of human nature, (e) personal transcendence

through vision (i.e., putting the welfare of others first) and (f) to develop moral capabilities (Anello & Hernandez, 1996).

Operating on ethical principles, moral leadership is inspirational, morally uplifting, and it mobilizes people (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Gini, 1996). Given the unjust and unpeaceful nature of the 21st century global marketplace, a concern for consumer moral leaders is well placed and needs to be mobilized. To that end, the next section introduces the consumer moral leadership construct scaffolded with supportive argumentation of its intellectual merit.

Consumer Moral Leadership Construct

As noted, a new construct can arise from the integration of existing constructs related to the phenomenon in question (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015). Part of this creation process involves the development and articulation of possible relations among these ideas as they pertain to the new construct (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009). To that end, this section identifies, explains and weaves together the relationships among seven moral leadership-related constructs as they pertain to consumers assuming the role of a moral leader in the marketplace: moral intelligence, discipline, integrity, courage, self-transcendence, intensity, and moral authority. In the consumer moral leadership construct, these seven elements are interrelated via a connecting logic (see Figure 1).
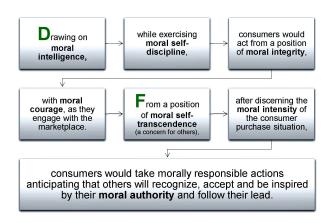

Figure 1

Genitors and connecting logic of the consumer moral leadership construct.

Logic is a method of reasoning used to build and substantiate arguments and draw conclusions (McGregor, 2018). The logic set out in Figure 1, which traces the connections and associations (not causation) among these seven ideas, supports the argument herein pursuant to consumers assuming the mantle of moral leader in the marketplace. This assertion is tempered with an acknowledgement that consumers will be in different stages of readiness and willingness to assume this responsibility. What matters is the rigour of the presentation herein of this new construct for scholarly consideration. As a caveat, Figure 1 represents a process model (as will become evident) rather than linear, causal relationships.

Moral Intelligence

Intelligence is Latin *intelligere*, 'capacity for understanding and comprehending general truths; ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills' (Harper, 2020). Any interest in others, and how one's actions impact them, involves *moral* intelligence (Jordan, 2005). Borba (2001) defined this as the capacity to understand right from wrong and comprehend when this understanding is required. It means having strong ethical convictions and acting on them so that one behaves in the right and honourable way.

Lennick and Kiel (2005) concurred, asserting that moral intelligence is both the possession of a strong moral compass and the ability and inclination to follow it; this disposition is tantamount to moral integrity (to be discussed). Also, people can draw on their moral intelligence to persuade *others* to behave in morally justifiable ways (Sama & Shoaf, 2008), which relates to moral authority (to be discussed).

Lennick and Kiel's (2005) conceptualization of moral intelligence comprises four competencies: (a) integrity (conscience and fairness), (b) responsibility (self-control and respect), (c) compassion (empathy and kindness) and (d) forgiveness (tolerance). A morally *un*intelligent person would lack the ability to vary their response when confronting morally bound situations; they would struggle with drawing on these four competencies. Their struggle makes sense in that "moral intelligence is grounded in emotion and reason. Mature moral functioning relies on [their] integration" (Narvaez, 2010, p. 77). Thus, when faced with a moral quandary in the marketplace, consumers must know how to bring both reason and emotion into equal participation.

Immature moral functioning manifests in not possessing adequate

measures of moral intelligence. Intelligence in general includes aspects of cognition (knowing and thinking), affection (valuing and emotions), and conation (ethics) (Clarken, 2009). *Moral* intelligence is no exception. Respectively, morally intelligent consumers would be informed, understand how they think when acting in the marketplace, bring their values to bear, be aware of their emotions, and apply a sense of right and wrong (ethics) to their consumer decisions.

Moral Discipline

Discipline is Latin *disciplina*, 'instruction (to train); to correct' (Harper, 2020). *Moral discipline* is the best check and balance against not fulfilling moral obligations to each other. It "means self-discipline based on moral standards" (Christofferson, 2009, p.1). Exercising moral discipline entails using social norms, rules, customs and laws to personally develop moral reasoning, self-control and a general respect for others (Denton, 1999). Moral discipline entails confronting moral and ethical choices by developing skills in moral reasoning, moral analysis and moral judgements (Sucher, 2007).

Self-discipline based on moral standards increases feelings of moral obligation and reinforces the need for moral leadership (Denton, 1999; Johnson, 2003). This self-discipline is "the consistent exercise of agency to choose the right thing because it is right, even when it is hard" (Christofferson, 2009, p. 1). In a consumer society especially, too many people lack internal control that is grounded in moral values. The attendant decline of self-regulated behaviour leads to unprincipled conduct (Anello, 2006).

But this unregulated behaviour can be ameliorated by anchoring oneself to an internal moral compass to support the exercise of moral discipline. In order to both self-discipline based on moral standards and exercise moral agency, people must have the truth of things as they really are, otherwise they cannot be expected to understand and evaluate their choices (Christofferson, 2009). This truth sentiment applies especially to consumer choices that are often riddled with moral implications, which are difficult to discern because the truth of production, manufacturing, marketing and retailing is often not readily accessible. This is one factor making it so unpeaceful.

Moral Integrity

Integrity is one of the primary principles of moral leadership (Quick & Normore, 2004). It is Latin *integritas*, 'intact, whole, complete' (Harper, 2020). Moral

integrity refers to the complex notion of moral wholeness or unit of the self (Ascension Health as cited in McGregor & Gentzler, 2009). Integrity as a character trait refers to the quality of being morally upright (Anderson, 2014). It is a consistency between values and beliefs and attendant actions: people 'walk their talk.' This idiom refers to standing for something, having a significant commitment to it and exemplifying this commitment in one's behaviour. People 'practice what they preach' (Lennick & Kiel, 2005; Quick & Normore, 2004). If people do not act from a position of integrity, their actions cannot be trusted (Laundauer & Rowlands, 2001).

Acting in accordance with one's beliefs (Quick & Normore, 2004) builds moral character, which is then reflected in a commitment to searching out moral excellence. This moral character is a key component of moral leadership (Gini, 1996). To act without integrity means others may become mistrustful, because one's actions are not predictable (Laundauer & Rowlands, 2001). Fortunately, moral character and integrity can reinforce the use of a moral compass that reads true. A moral life of integrity rests upon the foundations of virtuous individuals (i.e., being of morally sound character). Once people become virtuous *within* a community, they can become virtuous *for* the community. They can transform others and the social environment for the good of humanity (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). This sentiment resonates with a consumer society as well and contributes to more peaceful and inclusive consumption.

Moral Courage

Next to integrity, courage is the other primary principle of moral leadership (Quick & Normore, 2004). Courage stems from Latin *cor*, 'heart' (Harper, 2020). It is defined as digging deep and finding strength to act in the face of pain, grief or fear (Anderson, 2014). *Moral* courage (i.e., dealing with rightness and wrongness) manifests when people act in service of their values (Kidder, 2005). This act entails moral discernment and then taking responsibility for the consequences of any actions (Costa, 1998). It also means "stand[ing] up for what is right even in the face of adverse personal outcomes" (May et al., 2014, p. 68).

Moral courage involves acting with integrity in moments with moral consequence (i.e., harm might ensue). It requires "lifting values from the theoretical to the practical and carries us beyond ethical reasoning to principled action" (Kidder, 2005, p. 2). Moral courage does not always produce immediate benefits however, because it is one thing to have values and another to live by those values (Kidder, 2005). And, "a morally courageous person often goes against the grain, acting contrary to the accepted norm" (Kidder, 2005, p. 7). As

threatening as this is, with moral courage, consumers can buck the consumerism ideology and materialistic paradigm thereby shifting to a moral imperative.

This ideological and paradigmatic pushback is not easily done. Rhode (2006) identified three major obstacles to moving beyond the violent-inducing emotions of fear and guilt: self-interest, impaired judgement, and the psychology of power. Moral courage is the quality of mind and spirit that enables people to firmly and confidently face up to ethical dilemmas and moral wrongdoings. Without it, people cannot take persistent and firm actions while not flinching or retreating in the face of persuasion and resistance – holding their moral ground (Kidder & Bracy, 2001).

Finally, moral courage, a virtue that enables people to be effective when they face ethical challenges (including consumer decisions), is a necessary element in the ethics equation and involves overcoming fear, cowardice and weakness through practical (morally grounded) actions. Possessing a sense of core moral values means little without the *courage* to see things through (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Kidder & Bracy, 2001).

Moral Self-transcendence

Transcend is Latin *transcendere*, 'go beyond the range or limits to a new space; to surpass' (Harper, 2020). Only self-transcendence (i.e., movement to a new mental and perceptual space) can lead to moral leadership (Carey, 1992; Jordan, 2005; Sanders, Hopkins, & Geroy, 2003). When people transcend their self-interest, they become focused on *the other* rather than themselves (Cardona, 2000). Cardona (2000) called this transcendent motivation and defined it as a concern for others, an incentive to both do things for others and contribute. When people have self-transcended, they reach out to others and strive to meet the latter's needs and ensure their well-being and development. This other-directed behaviour is exactly what is called for to ensure consumer moral leadership.

People's genuine interest in the welfare of others creates a sense of responsibility, whereupon conscious choices emerge (Cardona, 2000) intimating a moral imperative to 'do no harm.' People who have achieved self-transcendence have deep integrity and the capacity to sacrifice some aspect of their lives for others. In a consumer world, this sacrifice would translate to ethical and moral consumer purchasing behaviour informed by justice, security, peace and equity. People who have achieved self-transcendence have learned to create habits of serving the needs of others, habits that ensure consistent behaviour (Cardona,

2000). People who have gained the habit of consuming with others' interests at heart are truly able to contribute to a more sustainable, just and peaceful world (McGregor, 2016; Sanders et al., 2003); they would be true consumer moral leaders.

Transcendent moral leaders are mindful having learned to move beyond their unexamined inner dialogue by creating an informed self-conversation based on compassion, hope and self-knowledge (Downing, 2008). Consumer moral leaders who have achieved self-transcendence can contribute richer and deeper understandings of the relationships and responsibilities to each other and the world – and shop accordingly.

Moral Intensity

Intensity is Latin *intensus*, 'extreme situations, strained, serious.' Intense refers to an extreme depth of feeling (Harper, 2020). Building on Jones' (1991) idea, marketplace transactions can be characterized as having high moral intensity (McGregor, 2008). Izzo (1997) clarified that moral intensity refers to the degree to which consumers *perceive* that a purchase demands the application of ethical principles. The moral intensity of a consumer issue, linked with the ethical intentions of a person, truly influences that person's moral judgements and ethical decision-making process.

Their perception of moral intensity affects their evaluation of the ethical content of a purchase situation and their subsequent choices. Jones (1991) proposed several factors that can come into play when consumers are assessing the moral intensity of a purchase situation including their beliefs about the (a) magnitude of the consequences and (b) the possibility of the latter happening (causing harm), (c) number of people affected and (d) time between their purchase and any consequences. Other factors include (e) any attachment to or closeness with those affected by their decision (e.g., cultural, social, psychological, physical); and (f) the level of societal agreement about the unethicalness of the specific purchase (see also McGregor, 2008). Jones (1991) theorized that an increase in any one factor will increase moral intensity, and they may have an interactive effect as well.

Given the magnitude of the consequences of moral lapses when consuming in the 21st century, it is imperative that people have a deeper understanding of what it means to be a moral consumer and how 'morally intense' most of their consumption decisions *really* are (Izzo, 1997). Consumer moral leaders have the option and obligation to live by moral principles. Once

learned, an appreciation of moral intensity can empower consumers to act with moral imperative. This principled action involves self-evaluation, self-reflection and self-discipline in conjunction with systems thinking, taking initiative, and perseverance (Mona Foundation, 2009; Sanders et al., 2003) especially in marketplace decisions.

Moral Authority

Finally, authority is Latin *auctor*, 'originator' (Harper, 2020). People with authority have the right to exercise power and make decisions, while appreciating that to be effective, others must recognize that authority – that it *originates* with them (Rozycki, 1993; Souza, 2018). Generic discussions of leadership are always intertwined with issues of power and authority (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). The quest for moral leadership is the quest of reconciling power with *moral* authority (Rozychi, 1993), which is understood to involve convincing others of how the world should be rather than *how* it is with the latter called *epistemic* authority (Labinger, 2009).

People derive moral authority from their connection to values, ideas and ideals shared by the larger community. This connection helps them feel an obligation and duty to each other and instills the imperative of being self-managed (i.e., morally self-disciplined). When exercising moral authority, people "place all others subordinate [to the aforementioned values and ideals and ask others] to respond morally by doing their duty, meeting their obligations, and accepting their responsibilities" (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 27). They do this through the exercise of moral persuasion using authority to protect rights and distribute the benefits and burdens of society. The greatest threat to people neglecting moral authority is internal not external. Society is only as good, decent and moral as its citizens (Denton, 1999, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2007).

Respecting the Latin meaning of authority - originator - consumers acting with moral authority are presenting behaviour that others can choose to model. Moral consumers are the source (origin) of preferred marketplace conduct. Their representations of moral authority and moral judgements can serve as inspiration for others to follow their *lead*. They serve as leadership examples of how people in their consumer role can effectively reconcile their power in the marketplace with moral obligations to those who can be harmed by unethical and immoral consumer decisions.

Discussion and Conclusions

Peace educators are encouraged to consider bringing this perspective to their practice. Pinker (2008) proposed that having a moral sense is such an innate part of being human, that people may actually have a *moral gene*. He reasoned that moralizing is a distinctive mindset that must be nurtured, so it can be accessed for moral deliberations. More compelling is his suggestion that this psychological state can be turned on and off like a light switch by using this moral gene, which distinguishes between right and wrong and rights and obligations. Pinker bolstered his argument that everyone holds this gene (i.e., the potential to be moral leaders) by referring to a proven collection of universal moral concepts and emotions held by all humans (see also the Mona Foundation, 2009).

Pinker (2008) further asserted that, for people to appreciate that moral judgements differ from other kinds of judgement, they need to realize how important moral values are in their consumer decisions. Moral judgements *are not* just opinions. They are decisions arrived at through judgments of what is right or wrong against some standard of *good*. Consumers cannot arrive at a moral judgement without calling on their morality – their internal system of values and moral principles. Operating from this moral compass, consumers can begin to move from being just a manager to a marketplace leader. They can *judge* each ethically contentious purchase situation and act accordingly. Upon witnessing this behaviour (i.e., recognizing another's moral authority), others can choose to switch on *their* moral gene and become leaders as well.

If there really *is* "a universal morality... a moral instinct" (Pinker, 2008, p. 5), it is not farfetched to propose that anyone can be a consumer moral leader, if we all have this gene. People *can* be socialized into these roles and responsibilities, just like they have learned how to be efficient consumer managers. In that spirit, this paper tendered a new intellectual construct (with supportive argumentation) that can better ensure this eventuality – consumer moral leadership. Its seven elements were woven together with their own connective logic and rhetoric (see Figure 1): moral intelligence, discipline, integrity, courage, self-transcendence, intensity, and authority.

This conceptual paper served to synthesize previous works on a particular topic into a new construct thereby providing a springboard to new research. As with any conceptual paper, this one served to "show how moving beyond the current norm will enhance knowledge" (Saunders, 2018, para. 2). Per any new construct, it is an abstraction that has not been theoretically tested (O'Toole, 2014; Smyth, 2004). But as required for conceptual papers, the pictorial model (see Figure 1) and word model herein were designed to sufficiently describe each element and convincingly, using logic and rhetoric, develop links (i.e., connecting

logic) among them relative to the consumer moral leader phenomenon (Kimmins et al., 2010; McLean, 2011).

In closing, this paper reported integrative, conceptual research that reframed consumers from managing for efficiency to leading for moral efficacy. Because this is a conceptual paper, readers are encouraged to judge "*how* the argument [supporting the construct] is built [and decide if the] argument is a valid contribution to the literature" and, by association, the construct itself (Saunders, 2018, para. 10; see also McGregor, 2018). Consumer moral leadership readily aligns with ethical, conscious and sustainable consumption thereby opening doors for complementary scholarship and theorization. The conceptual argument herein serves to encourage consumer and peace scholars, educators and policy analysts to engage with the idea and eventually animate the consumer moral leadership construct and use it in their research and practice.

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