

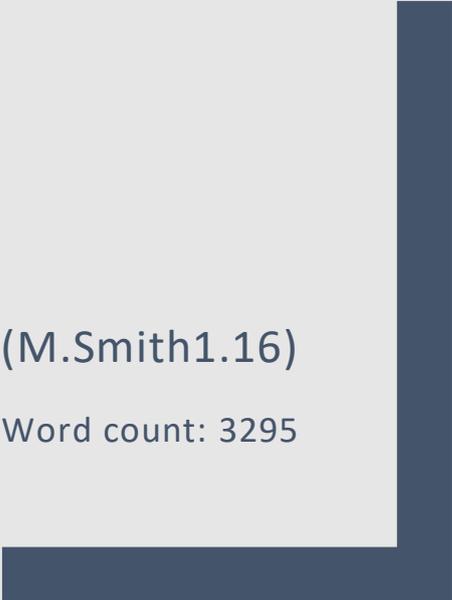


BS7981 Consumer Analysis, Insight & Creativity

# ECO-CONSUMPTION: MORALS OR AESTHETICS

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## Introduction

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This project will examine consumer's purchase behaviour towards ethical consumption choices, exploring whether eco-friendly purchases are made for genuinely moral reasons or for aesthetic reasons, such as to make oneself appear honourable to others. The aim of the study is to investigate whether consumers' ethical purchases are a true indicator of their attitudes and values and level of genuine environmental concern. This will include exploring ethical brands and products and the reasons or motivators for purchasing sustainable products.

It is important to first clarify that an 'ethical/sustainable purchase' is not limited to the product or service itself being ethical, but also includes the consumer's perception of the brand being a sustainable one. This flexible definition is to allow the participants of the study to genuinely reflect on their personal attitudes towards their perception of sustainability. A Norwegian study alludes to this being an important aspect of research in understanding consumers' decision processes and their motivations as it allows a conceptualisation of sustainable consumption based upon the participants' perspective which is more meaningful for the purpose of this study (Hanss and Bohm, 2011:686).

Furthermore, this is important from a marketing perspective because companies are not entirely sure what their consumers want and understand from the term 'sustainability.' Evidence for this comes from a study investigating consumers' understanding and motivation towards the sustainability labels on food products found that a potential lack of use can be due to lack of understanding as sustainability is an intangible term that consumers may find difficult to resonate with (Grunert *et al.*, 2013:187).

Thus, through a qualitative approach, this study will provide valuable insights into how consumers perceive sustainable consumption in their purchase decision process in order to answer the research question on whether consumers make ethical purchases for moral or aesthetic reasons.

This project presents a social-psychological perspective of sustainable consumption, encompassing the concept of the self and pro-environmental self-identity as motives behind consumers' ethical purchase decisions, which may be motivated by the intention to perform such ethical behaviour for moral or aesthetic reasons. The assumption is that consumers who are seeking self-enhancement and social acceptance would use their purchase decisions as an expression of the self, since ethical consumption is deemed honourable and desirable.

## Empirical Context

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Consumer purchase behaviour towards sustainable consumption is a widely debated topic with conflicting research. It is difficult for marketers to discover and understand exactly what consumers want within ethical consumption. This section will examine some of the crucial research in the area.

Sustainable consumption is difficult to define because it involves several different aspects that cover multiple industries, which can often overlap. Green consumerism has been conceptualised as a set of personal values and attitudes that align with ecological ideals of socially conscious decision making (Moisander and Pesonen, 2002:329). In 1994, the Oslo Symposium defined sustainable consumption as products and services that ‘bring a better quality of life, while minimising the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardise the needs of future generations’ (as cited in *Sustainable Development Goals*, 2021 [online]). In addition to this definition, sustainable consumption also entails ‘consumption reduction, curtailment and anti-consumption practices’ (Moisander, 2007:1473).

For consumers, sustainable consumption involves differing intensities of consumer commitment, where consumers with a lower commitment level continue their current levels of consumption by consuming products they consider to be produced responsibly and ethically or demonstrating low commitment behaviours such as recycling (Dermody *et al.*, 2015:1473). These varying levels of commitment towards sustainable consumption suggest that it is not as simple as being a sustainable consumer or not, likewise it may not be as simple as one reason over the other – morals or aesthetics.

Within sustainable consumption of fashion, a study by Niinimäki (2010:161) concluded that quality and aesthetics are important for all consumers, and that consumers do not change their habits due to feelings of guilt but rather to fulfil their desires. This aligns with other research that established that while consumers may think more ethically, they do not always act ethically due to consumer issues revolving around product value, price and quality (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001:574). Future generations may begin to perceive respectable ethics as equally as important as these current high-priority consumer issues. Furthermore, there is a sense that ‘consumer choices are somewhat irrational and not always well connected to values’ (Niinimäki, 2010:151). This indicates that consumers are aware of the environmental concerns caused by production and patterns of irresponsible consumption, but this is not always motivating enough to change behaviour dramatically. This makes it difficult for researchers to conclude consumer’s clear reasons for making eco-friendly purchases.

Moisander (2007) discusses the motivational complexity of pro-environmental consumer behaviour where green consumers are willing to spend time, money and effort in making sustainable choices to care for the environment. However, the perplexity of environmental information in ethically demanding contexts results in demotivating green consumption and acts as a way to justify their environmentally unreliable purchase decisions (Moisander, 2007:407). Such restraints can act as demotivators in individuals’ willingness to consume sustainably as environmental information can be confusing and requires a higher level of effort to understand for purchase behaviour to reflect moral concerns.

The concept of consumer sophistication has contributed to increased interest in sustainable consumption. Even though consumers have become better informed and more educated in matters of consumer rights and ethical products, there is no certainty that consumers will actually make ethical purchases (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001:563). Furthermore, Titus and Bradford (1996) recognised a difference between ‘sophisticated consumer characteristics and sophisticated consumer behaviour’ (as cited by Carrigan and Attalla, 2001:563). This suggests that possessing the values and ability to make wise consumer decisions is just the starting point, but this knowledge does not always translate into efficient ethical purchases, so it is implied that there is not a direct cause and effect between moral characteristics and subsequent ethical behaviour.

With regard to consumer’s response to ethical and unethical marketing behaviour, a study by Boulstridge and Carrigan (2000) was conducted, where most respondents said that ‘social responsibility’ was not a vital factor when contemplating a purchase and would even buy from a company they knew was unethical (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001:565). The vital point to draw from this study is that the level of interest that the participants showed in firms was determined by if they would be personally positively or negatively affected by the behaviour, which suggests that ethics are only important to consumers if they have a committed personal interest in them (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001).

Exploring sustainability as a moral ideal, Meijboom and Brom (2012:118) discussed that possessing moral ideals can encourage actions, positioned as a source of critical reflection, and helps understanding of sustainable development and related sustainability concerns. This suggests that moral ideals offering even a limited understanding of sustainable practices is enough for a low commitment level toward sustainable consumption.

## Conceptual Overview

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For this project, self-concept literature in consumer behaviour will be positioned as the overarching theoretical lens. A particular focus stems from the work of Russell W. Belk who provided rich theory regarding the self and how our possessions act as a reflection of our identities (Belk, 1988:139). Belk (1988) suggests that our possessions are used as a symbol, to signal to ourselves and to others about who we want to be. Furthermore, Belk's theory of the extended self refers to the ways in which possessions are of symbolic importance of consumers' consumption habits, whereby possessions hold different meanings at different stages of life (Belk, 1988:160). For the purpose of this project, the theory of the extended self can be applied to sustainable consumption, where eco-friendly possessions are self-expressive of an individual's identity. For example, "I shop sustainably" becomes "I am a sustainable shopper," where sustainable product use becomes identity based (Oyserman, 2009:276). Consumption is the reflection of self-identity and what consumers choose to purchase mirror how they identify or even how they wish to be identified (the desired self).

This sense of desired self or 'ideal self' had been examined by Sirgy (1982) who highlighted the significance of two components of the self – the actual self and the ideal self, referring to the idealised image of how oneself wishes to be (Sirgy, 1982:288). This notion underpins this project's area of exploration regarding consumers' perception of themselves by which their purchase decisions reflect their attempt to meet their ideal self – in this sense, their ideal self being ethically and morally conscious. Furthermore, Damon and Hart (1992) stated that "People whose self-concept is organized around their moral beliefs are highly likely to translate those beliefs into action consistently throughout their lives" (cited by Legere and Kang, 2020, 3). This suggests that sustainable purchase decisions are reflective of one's moral self-concept, but this does not consider other motives for making sustainable purchases, such as to present one's ideal self, or for aesthetic reasons.

Following on from Belk, there is a great wealth of literature regarding pro-environmental self-identity which has been defined as a sense of self that holds values and performs acts associated with environmentally friendly causes (Van der Werff, Steg & Keizer, 2013:56). Hence, pro-environmental self-identity is important in understanding consumers' desire to consume sustainably or not. Furthermore, this contributes to the phenomenon at hand whereby sustainable possessions are a reflection of consumer's identity(s) and, as Belk argued, an extension of the self. This also aligns with the aim of the study in which sustainable consumption choices can be a product of either moral concerns or meeting aesthetically pleasing customs.

Additional contribution to the theoretical lens comes from Oyserman (2009) who proposed the identity-based motivation (IBM) model which sees situational cues as triggering identities to the forefront as well as constructing an identity (Oyserman, 2009:276). Linking with Belk's (1988) extended self construct, the IBM model can be used to explore why consumers make sustainable purchases to maintain their chosen identity. In relation to a possible aesthetic motivator behind sustainable purchases, Oyserman's (2009) idea of situational cues that influence behaviour would include, for example, following peers in sustainable consumption in order to fit in and be associated with a particular identity. This is since consumption is interpreted as a way to express the self and fulfil consumers' aspiration to enrich their self-identity through the products and services that they choose to consume (Dermody *et al.*, 2015:1478; Thorbjørnsen *et al.*, 2007:765).

Belk's (1988) concept of the self is a fitting theoretical lens for this study in the way that it has been applied to the construction of the self as a green consumer. The tension of morals versus aesthetics adds a deeper scope to how consumers' sustainable consumption habits are influenced.

## Research Method

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### Qualitative research

For this study, a qualitative research approach was conducted. This was to ensure that the data would present the richness and fullness of consumer's attitudes and opinions that a quantitative method, such as a survey, would not generate as effectively.

### Focus group

The aim of using a focus group for this study was to collect in-depth, rich insights from a small sample of participants, ensuring that each individual would get a chance to voice their opinions without making the session too lengthy. The purpose of using a focus group for this study over other methods is to gather participants' feelings, attitudes and experiences, which will generate a varying assortment of views and beliefs through the social context of a focus group (Gibbs, 1997, [online]). The qualitative component of focus groups is important in order to achieve this as this process is based on words rather than numbers, aimed at producing significant insights about consumers and their attitudes towards sustainable consumption.

A set of questions as a discussion guide were devised in advance as base prompts to ask within the session to generate stimulating discussion on the topic. However, the flexibility and nature of focus groups would allow the session to naturally involve other areas within the topic that participants may bring up. See Appendix 2 for the focus group discussion guide.

The focus group session was held on the 10<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and it lasted about an hour. Due to the climate of COVID-19, a face-to-face session was not appropriate, so it took place online on Microsoft Teams. For the study, five participants were recruited for the focus group, aged between 21-23, as research has found that younger generations have a greater interest in sustainability (Gazzola *et al.*, 2020).

## Consumer Insights

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To evaluate the data, it was sufficient to conduct a less formal analysis focusing on the themes generated from the focus group. These were most significant from the questions asked towards the end of the session. See Appendix 3 for the full review.

Findings from Q13 of the focus group show that participants agreed that brands should take responsibility in having sustainable products available to audiences. This aligns with earlier empirical context from Carrigan and Attalla (2001:574) who argued that consumers need more information about ethics and sustainability in order for them to make more informed and better ethical decisions, and this responsibility lies with companies to be better communicators to their audiences.

The research conducted suggests that consumers do not pay a great amount of attention to ethical considerations in their purchase decision behaviour. Price emerged as a dominant concern throughout the session (particularly in Q10, Q11, Q12) when discussing consumption habits as most participants associated high price points with sustainable products. Therefore, current consumer issues hold greater significance, as research from Carrigan and Attalla (2001) stated earlier in this paper that consumers' concerns revolve around price and quality, which were regarded higher priority over ethical contemplations.

Furthermore, the general consensus is that consumers feel sustainability is important, but this is not enough to drive them to shop sustainably. The study found that 3 out of the 5 participants do not research sustainable alternatives beforehand as they do not view it as a priority during the purchase decision process, with it being suggested that other factors are considered to be of more importance, such as price and quality as mentioned previously. This finding from the study aligns with Moisander (2007:1474) who argued that consumers feel reluctant to consume more sustainably despite being conscious of environmental issues, which is certainly the sense from this study.

Q14 teased out this sense of sustainable products relating to the perception this creates to others, whereby it is seen as doing good to others with emphasis on the way it looks. This alludes to the aesthetics component of this project as there is a strong sense that the desire to look good overpowers genuine morals. This links to Belk's (1988) extended self, since sustainable possessions are reflective of one's identity or ideal self.

As this was a small sample of one group, the data collected cannot be generalised to entire segments. However, these findings provide a useful starting point into the phenomenon, from which it would be beneficial to conduct further focus groups with different participants to gain a wider insight. Marketers can use these insights to create products and services that appeal to their target audience as they provide deeper understanding into how consumers perceive sustainability during the purchase decision process.

Furthermore, these insights may help marketers in devising an effective strategy of communication campaigns designed at increasing consumer engagement in sustainable purchase behaviour. Since the findings from Q2 found that the term "sustainability" can be difficult to understand, this suggests that there is a sense of confusion and perplexity about what sustainability means. It would be valuable for marketers to reposition their communication

campaigns to make it easier for consumers to understand sustainability in a way that requires low commitment and little inconvenience.

## Conclusion

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To conclude, moral ideals are not fixed, but rather they act as an outlook that steers one to make particular purchase decisions. In response to the tension of morals versus aesthetics, the study's findings and relevant empirical literature concludes that it is not as simple as behaving towards one or the other. However, referring to the idea of the self, consumers who identify moral ideals would be more inclined to act and make decisions accordingly with that ideal.

In the age of daily social media exposure, it is valuable to reposition Belk's (and others) theories of the self in terms of what drives consumers to make sustainable purchases, with an inclination from the study toward the aesthetics of sustainable products.

Research in this area is useful for companies to gain understanding regarding consumers' true values and intentions during the sustainable decision-making process. Further contribution as a follow-up to this study would be valuable to generate a wider range of insights from different groups, such as incorporating a quantitative component alongside focus groups.

## Reflective Insight

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The idea for the topic for this project derived from my personal interest in sustainable choices when shopping, as demonstrated by the types of purchases recorded in my personal consumption log. From this, I desired to explore why we buy particular products and particularly what influences consumers to make eco-friendly purchases.

The focus group itself went well as discussion flowed and there were no issues encountered during the session. My organisation and leadership skills aided me in being a focussed researcher.

### Difficulties

The current COVID-19 restrictions of meeting face-to-face meant that the focus group needed to take place online, so there was a concern regarding the risk of possible technical difficulties that are out of my, as the researcher, control. Furthermore, conducting the focus group online created a challenge regarding the loss of non-verbal signals that act as cues of encouragement and add meaning to discussion.

During the study, no ethical issues were encountered as participants were fully briefed on the aims of the study before they signed their consent to take part. A potential ethical issue for focus groups is the revocability of consent as withdrawing is a fairly obvious and possibly disrupting act that may cause an individual anxiety. However, since the focus group took place online, this concern would not become an issue as any individual was able to leave the session without disrupting the discussion.

A potential challenge was analysing qualitative data as the session generated rich discussion with participation from all. When listening back to the recording and reading my notes, key themes stood out from each question with some overlaps. The table in the appendix is a clear way to see these themes.

There is a risk of ambiguous data, which may be possible as participants may not understand the topic entirely and may unintentionally give inconsistent comments as opinions change during the course of the focus group as participants share their thoughts and experiences.

### Personal consumption log

Throughout the semester, a personal consumption log was used to record my own consumption behaviour (see Appendix 4 for the full review). The most notable purchases are all considered to be sustainable, from the brand's values to the platform it was purchased on. However, with the first entry, price is a motivator with this purchase rather than choosing a sustainable product as they were second-hand so reduced in price. A significant purchase from my consumption log was a razor subscription service to the vegan and cruelty-free brand, Estrid, after seeing a social media influencer speak highly of the product and the brand. This shows the influence of others during the purchase decision process, which was an aspect that I anticipated would be mentioned during the focus group as I found myself purchasing due to a social media influencer. Completing this log before conducting the focus group gave me a sense of my personal consumption influences, which helped me to design the discussion guide to generate valuable insights into this area.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Ethics forms



### RESEARCH ETHICS FORM 1

#### WHAT LEVEL OF REVIEW DO I NEED?

##### GUIDELINES

**This form is for staff and students. It will help you identify the level of review needed for your project. Before completing it, you need to:**

1. Read *The University Research Ethics Policy*.
2. If you are a student, discuss the ethical aspects of your project with your supervisor.

It is your responsibility to follow the University's Policy on the ethical conduct of research and to follow any relevant academic guidelines or professional codes of practice pertaining to your study when answering these questions.

The questions and checklist in this proforma are intended to guide your reflection on the ethical implications of your research. Explanatory notes and further details can be found in the Policy document.

## SECTION 1

### DETERMINING WHETHER YOU REQUIRE ETHICS REVIEW

1.	<b>Is the proposed activity classified as Research or Audit /Service Evaluation or similar?</b>	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Research	<input type="checkbox"/> Audit or Service Evaluation
	<p><i>Use the Policy to help you answer this question. If the proposed activity meets the definition of <b>research</b> (see the policy), CONTINUE.</i></p> <p><i>If the activity is an <b>audit</b> or a <b>service evaluation</b>, STOP. You do not need to seek ethics approval, but you do need to formally register your project with UREC, along with a project outline. To do this complete Form 2.</i></p> <p><i>If you are unclear what type of activity you are undertaking, please refer to the Policy for additional types.</i></p>	
2.	<b>Does the research involve living human participants, human samples or data derived from individuals who may be identifiable through that data?</b>	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	<p><i>Use the Policy to help you answer this question.</i></p> <p><i>If you answer <b>NO</b>, SKIP to QUESTION 6 and CONTINUE.</i></p> <p><i>If you answer <b>YES</b>, CONTINUE.</i></p>	
3.	<b>Is the research being conducted for a medicinal purpose?</b>	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
	<p><i>Use the Policy to help you answer this question. See Appendix 2 - FAQs and definitions.</i></p> <p><i>If you answer <b>YES</b>, and think your research comes under the definition of 'for a medicinal purpose,' it will need to be scrutinised by the Committee. Please email the Committee Chair (ethics1@winchester.ac.uk) for further guidance on what to do.</i></p> <p><i>If you answer <b>NO</b>, CONTINUE.</i></p>	
4.	<b>Does your research require external ethics approval or review?</b>	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
	<p><i>For example, from the NHS or another overseeing body. Use the Policy to help you answer this question.</i></p> <p><i>If you answer <b>NO</b>, CONTINUE.</i></p> <p><i>If you answer <b>YES</b>, you need to formally register your project with UREC, along with the relevant external ethics approval. To do this complete Form 2.</i></p>	
5.	<b>Is the project underway and, the researcher or PI, has moved institution to Winchester?</b>	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
	<p><i>If you answer <b>YES</b>, please read the following:</i></p>	

	<p><i>If the research began when the PI was employed at another institution but has subsequently moved to Winchester, and the project has previously been subjected to ethics scrutiny at that institution, then it need not go through ethics review again. The outcome of ethics review by that institution should be communicated to UREC for formal recording. To do this complete Form 2 and include evidence of the previous ethics approval.</i></p> <p><i>HOWEVER, if there have been significant changes to the original research design which have ethical implications or recruitment of a cohort of participants will be undertaken through Winchester, then the project will require ethics review and you should apply for approval, CONTINUE.</i></p> <p><i>If you answer <b>NO</b>, CONTINUE.</i></p>	
6.	<b>Is the research collaborative?</b>	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
	<p><i>If you answer <b>YES</b>:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>where the Principal Investigator (PI) of the research is located at another institution, it is their responsibility to seek ethics approval, including partner research sites. The outcome of ethics review by that institution should be communicated to UREC for formal recording. To do this complete Form 2 and include evidence of the previous ethics approval.</i></li> <li>• <i>where the PI is located at Winchester, then the project will undergo scrutiny as per Winchester's Ethics Policy, CONTINUE.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>If you answer <b>NO</b>, CONTINUE.</i></p>	
7.	<b>Is the research being conducted in another country?</b>	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
	<p><i>If you answer <b>YES</b>, please read the following:</i></p> <p><i>Where a project is conducted in another country, the researcher should consider if it is possible to obtain ethics review by a local research ethics committee or other relevant body. The outcome of such a review by that institution should be communicated to UREC for formal recording, along with a project outline. To do this complete Form 2.</i></p> <p><i>If this is not possible, the project should be reviewed by the University of Winchester, either at Faculty level or Committee depending on the nature of the proposed work, so CONTINUE.</i></p>	
8.	<b>Does the research involve the use of documentary material, papers, literary works or archive documents <u>in the public domain</u>?</b>	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
	<p><i>Use the Policy to help you answer this question.</i></p> <p><i>If you answer <b>NO</b> because the works are in a private archive or closed collection, do the following: complete Form 2, including details of the nature of the private /closed collection and provide evidence of the permission to use this material for research purposes.</i></p>	

	<i>If you answer <b>YES</b>, you need to formally register your project with UREC, along with a project description. To do this complete Form 2.</i>	
9.	<b>Does the research involve the animals?</b>	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
	<i>If you answer <b>NO</b>, CONTINUE.</i> <i>If you answer <b>YES</b>, you need to formally register your project with UREC, along with a copy of the relevant licence (if required). To do this complete Form 5.</i>	
10.	<b>Does the research involve environmental interventions?</b>	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
	<i>If you answer <b>NO</b>, CONTINUE.</i> <i>If you answer <b>YES</b>, you need to formally register your project with UREC, along with a copy of the relevant licence (if appropriate). To do this complete Form 2</i>	
11.	<b>Does the data you will collect contain <i>any</i> information that could be linked back to participants or that might identify them (e.g. name, address, photo, email)?</b>	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	<i>If you answer <b>NO</b>, you need to formally register your project with UREC. To do this complete Form 2.</i> <i>If you answer <b>YES</b>, CONTINUE.</i>	

 Reaching the end of these questions, **either** you will have been directed to complete a specific additional form **or** you should continue to section 2.

If you are still unsure whether you need ethics review or not, please re-read The Policy and email your query to [ethics1@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:ethics1@winchester.ac.uk) with details of your project.

## SECTION 2

### DETERMINING THE LEVEL OF ETHICS REVIEW REQUIRED

Please mark with an <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> as appropriate	YES	NO
<p>Does the research involve individuals who are vulnerable?</p> <p><i>For example: vulnerable children, over-researched groups, people with learning difficulties, people with mental health problems, young offenders, people in care facilities, including prisons. For a note on research with children, see Appendix 2 of the Policy.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Does the research involve individuals in unequal relationships e.g. your own students?</p> <p><i>Please note:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>students recruited via SONA are not considered 'your own students.' If you intend to recruit widely across the University or your Faculty (e.g. through snowball sampling or a mail shot) you do not need to consider such students as your own, even if some participants may be students you are directly involved with. Only tick "yes" if you are targeting your own students specifically.</i></li> <li>2. <i>if you are an undergraduate or postgraduate student carrying out research with children in either a school or early years setting, these DO NOT come under the category of your 'own students.'</i></li> </ol>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time?</p> <p><i>For example: covert observation of people in non-public places, use of deception. See Appendix 2 of the Policy.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Will the study involve discussion of sensitive or personal topics?</p> <p><i>For example: (but not limited to) participants' relationships, emotions, sexual behaviour, experience of violence, mental health, gender, race / ethnicity status or experience, political or religious affiliations. Please refer to the Policy.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Is there a risk that the highly sensitive nature of the research topic might lead to disclosures from the participant concerning their own involvement in illegal activities or other activities that represent a threat to themselves or others which may need onward reporting?</p> <p><i>For example: sexual activity, drug use, illegal activities or professional misconduct.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Might the research involve the sharing data or confidential information beyond the initial consent given?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Might participant anonymity be compromised at any time during or after the study?</p> <p><i>For example: will the research involve respondents using the internet, social media, or other visual /vocal methods where respondents may be identified?</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Is the study likely to induce severe physical harm or psychological distress?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Does your research involve tissue samples covered by the Human Tissue Act (2004)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is there a possibility that the safety of the researcher may be in question? <i>For example: research in high risk locations or with high risk groups.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the research involve creating, downloading, storing or transmitting material that may be considered to be unlawful, indecent, offensive, defamatory, threatening, discriminatory or extremist? <i>If you answer YES to this question, you must also contact the Director of IT Services, who must provide approval for the use of such data.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Answering **NO** to **all** these questions means your project is eligible for Faculty level ethics review. You now need to complete Form 3.

Answering **YES** to **any** of these questions means your project will require Committee ethics review. You now need to complete Form 4.

## RESEARCH ETHICS FORM 3

### FACULTY REVIEW

#### GUIDELINES

**This form is for staff and students. It will help you set out the ethical aspects of your project that need to be reviewed. Before completing it, you need to:**

3. Read *The University Research Ethics Policy*.
4. If you are a student, discuss the ethical aspects of your project with your supervisor.

It is your responsibility to follow the University's Policy on the ethical conduct of research and to follow any relevant academic guidelines or professional codes of practice pertaining to your study when answering these questions. This includes providing appropriate information sheets and consent forms and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data.

The questions in this proforma are intended to guide your reflection on the ethical implications of your research. Explanatory notes and further details can be found in the Policy document.

**If any aspect of your project changes during the course of the research, you must notify the Chair of UREC.**

## SECTION 1

YOUR DETAILS	
1.1.	Your name: <b>Megan Smith</b>
1.2.	Your department: <b>Marketing</b>
1.3.	Your Faculty: <b>Business, Law and Digital Technologies</b>
1.4.	Your status:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Student <input type="checkbox"/> Staff (Professional Services)
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Taught Master <input type="checkbox"/> Staff (Academic)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research Degree Student <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify below)
1.5.	Your university email address: <b>m.smith1.16@unimail.winchester.ac.uk</b>
1.6.	Your telephone number: <b>07957937827</b>
	<b><u>For students only:</u></b>
1.7.	Your degree programme: <b>MSc Digital Marketing and Analytics</b>
1.8.	Your supervisor's name: <b>Martina Hutton</b>
1.9.	Your supervisor's department: <b>Marketing</b>
1.10.	Your supervisor's email: <b>martina.hutton@winchester.ac.uk</b>



## SECTION 2

YOUR RESEARCH	
2.1.	Project title: Green consumption: moral or aesthetic?
2.2.	Start date: 11/12/2020
2.3.	Expected completion date: 18/01/2020
2.4.	Expected location of data collection: Online (e.g. school, workplace, public place, University premises etc.)
2.5.	Has funding been sought for this research?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
2.6.	If so, where have you applied for funding?
2.7.	Has the funding been granted?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Pending
2.8.	Is the research collaborative? (e.g. co-investigators from another institution, at or with another organisation or colleagues in another department)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
	If yes, which?
2.9.	Is Disclosure and Barring Service clearance required for your study?  It is your responsibility to contact the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to confirm whether or not clearance is needed prior to commencing recruitment or data collection. More information <a href="#">here</a>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
2.10.	Will your research be informed by guidelines from a professional association or specific, agreed standards of practice?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
	If yes, which?

## SECTION 3

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

*Please provide a brief description of your project in non-technical language (between 500-1000 words). This should include details of the research rationale, aim(s), research question(s), context (linking to some relevant literature), and methods (including details of participants, data collection (including examples /descriptions of any audio or visual stimuli to be presented to participants), data analysis) to be used. You should state any ethical issues that you have identified and how these will be dealt with. This overview should contain sufficient information to acquaint the reader with the principal features of the proposal. A copy of the full proposal may be requested if further information is deemed necessary.*

*Please use this section to list documentation that may be relevant to your application and append it to the submission (e.g. consent forms, information sheets, questionnaires etc.).*

This research will examine consumer's purchase behaviour in making eco-friendly purchases and whether these purchases are made for genuine, moral reasons to benefit the environment or for aesthetic reasons in making oneself look better/to fit in. Consumer purchase behaviour in ethical consumption is a widely debated topic with conflicting research, but this research aims to investigate what motivates consumers to shop sustainably: morals or aesthetics. An 'ethical purchase' is not limited to the item or product itself being ethical, but also includes making a purchase from a brand that is considered ethical (by the consumer). Empirical context on this topic comes from Carrigan and Attalla (2001), Moisander and Pesonen (2002), Soron (2010) to name a few. These align with the overall conceptual lens of the topic regarding the self and how a consumer constructs one's self with purchases as external symbols (and my research will investigate whether these purchases truly align with consumer's ethical attitudes and values). So, the conceptual lens of the self comes from work from Belk (1988) with his original scope, followed by his later work on the extended self in 2014.

Data will be collected through an online focus group, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, to generate qualitative data and to understand how and why participants may make a sustainable purchase. Topic questions will include discussing participants' purchase behaviour in regard to eco-friendly options and brands, and motivations behind why an individual may make an ethical purchase (see below for a section of the exemplar focus group topics of discussion/questions). Using a focus group will give the flexibility and opportunity to dive deeper into issues that arise during the discussion that are of particular importance or relevance. Participants will be recruited using snowballing sampling to recruit extra participants outside of existing ones. They will be Gen Z participants as this demographic are interested in sustainable consumption the most, so would give more relevant data for my research in order to generate useful insights on the topic. Data analysis will involve using the qualitative data generated by the online focus group to discover what values, interests, (if any) drive an individual to purchasing sustainably.

One ethical issue is the extent to which disclosure is possible as, since insights will rely on qualitative data from the focus group, the nature of the discussion generated depends upon other participants who may raise topics not necessarily intended or anticipated by the researcher. To deal with this, I will have a set of questions/topics for discussion planned in advance to keep discussion on topic and so we do not run out of time to cover each question. Another ethical issue is consent being revocable. In a 'normal' focus group, withdrawing from one is a fairly obvious, public and possibly disrupting matter that may cause an individual concern or anxiety doing. This situation does not apply to an online focus group as the online context means

an individual can leave the group call without disrupting anyone else, so the restrictions of the pandemic work in my favour in this scenario so this ethical issue is easily resolved. Another ethical issue surrounds the topic of confidentiality of participants as thoughts and opinions are shared within a group. Although the nature of my topic is not intended to be sensitive, full disclosure of how the data will be handled must be disclosed in the participation information sheet before participants agree to give their consent to take part. Participants' contributions will be shared within the group which will be encouraged to be kept confidential and data will be anonymised.

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

**Project Title:** Eco-consumption: moral or aesthetic?

#### **Please read through all the information on this sheet before signing**

My name is Megan Smith, a postgraduate student at the University of Winchester, and you are being asked to take part in my research study. The aim of the study is to investigate consumer purchase behaviour in making eco-friendly purchases.

If you agree to take part, I will ask you to attend an online focus group on Microsoft Teams. It will be a single session, lasting between sixty and ninety minutes. It will consist of a series of questions and topics to stimulate discussion within the group about ethical purchases.

Your participation in this research is voluntary; you do not have to take part. If at any point during the study you wish to no longer take part, you have the right to withdraw and leave the online focus group session without explanation. You have the right to ask that any data you have given to that point to be withdrawn and not included in the study. You have the right to refuse to answer any question that is asked during the focus group.

All the information and contributions you give will be anonymised and kept confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this study.

The focus group discussions will be recorded on Microsoft Teams and will be destroyed once they have been transcribed and anonymised. The information will be used in a way that will not allow you to be identified individually.

If you are unsure about any of the above or anything about the research study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This will be not be used to identify you.

Thank you for your time.

Megan Smith

## CONSENT FORM

- I confirm that I have been given, have read and understood the participation information sheet for the study.
- I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation.
- I understand that my information will be held and collected securely and that I will not be made identifiable as an individual in the study and I give permission for my data to be used in this study.
- I confirm that I am aware that my participation in this research involves me taking part in an online focus group and that this discussion will be recorded, that this recording will be used only for the purpose of the study and then destroyed suitably once the research has been transcribed and completed.

**I agree to take part in the study.**

Participant Name:

Participant Signature:

Date:

Researcher Name:

Researcher Signature:

Date:

## **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/TOPICS**

Framework of planned questions and topics. As it is a focus group, this will not be a rigid structure as other topics may emerge as part of stimulating discussion, leading to more valuable information and insights. These areas will be of main focus:

- How would you describe your consumption habits today? Do you want to change them – why/why not?
- Terms such as ‘sustainability’ and ‘ethical consumption’ – do you think these are easy to understand? What do these terms mean to you?
- What will make you buy sustainable products/alternatives?
- What will deter you from buying sustainable products?
- What type of sustainable products are most important to you?
- Is there anything in particular that inspires you to make eco-friendly choices? What makes you engage with sustainable choices?
- Have you made an ethical purchase in the past year? (“Ethical purchase” involving the product/service itself being eco-friendly, and also purchasing from a brand that is ethical)
- If you learned that a brand/company you usually buy from was not ethically responsible, how likely would you be to stop engaging with this brand and why? To what extent?
- Could you name an ethically responsible brand?
- When you are looking to make a purchase, do you research sustainable versions/alternatives beforehand? Why/why not?

## SECTION 4

### REFINING THE LEVEL OF ETHICS REVIEW REQUIRED

<i>Please mark with an <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> as appropriate</i>		YES	NO
1	Does the research involve members of the public in a research capacity as co-researchers? (I.e. as in participant research where involvement extends beyond data collection)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2	Is there a risk of over-disclosure that may put the participants at risk or cause them any anxiety?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3	Will tissue samples (including blood) be obtained from participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4	Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to participants? (E.g. to students at school, to members of self-help group.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5	Is the right to withdraw from the study withheld at any time, or not made explicit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6	Is there any reason participants may feel obliged to participate in the study against their will?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8	Will the research involve administrative or secure data that requires permission from the appropriate authorities before use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11	Are there payments to researchers /participants that may have an impact on the objectivity of the research?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12	Is there any cause for uncertainty as to whether the research will fully comply with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (2018)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
13	Does any part of the project breach any codes of practice for ethics in place within the organisation in which the research is taking place?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
14	Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants? Please note: for fast track review, it is expected that the study will not involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
15	Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
16	Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life? (E.g. involve prolonged or repetitive testing.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**If you answer YES to *any* of these questions, please use the next section to indicate which question you have said yes to, describe the ethical issue in the context of your study and how you will address it. If you have answered NO to all questions, complete section 6.**

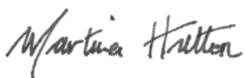


## SECTION 5

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND AMENDMENTS**

*Use this space to address ethical issues highlighted by the checklist in section 4, or to amend an original submission.*

## SECTION 6

DECLARATION	
<p>I have read and understood the University of Winchester Research Ethics Policy and confirm that adequate safeguards in relation to the ethical issues raised by this research can and will be put in place. I am aware of and understand University procedures regarding Health and Safety. I understand that the ethical aspects of this project may be monitored by the University Research Ethics Committee.</p> <p>I understand my responsibilities as a researcher as described in the University of Winchester Research Ethics Policy.</p> <p>I declare that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed and that a new application will be submitted should the research design change in a way which would alter any responses given in Form 1 or here.</p>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I confirm that if a Risk Assessment is required I will complete it and have it co-signed by my Supervisor or Head of Department before data collection takes place.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I confirm that, if DBS clearance is required for my project, then I will seek it before the start of my project.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I confirm that my research does not include risks that might cause it to be excluded from coverage by the University's insurers.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I confirm that I have appropriate insurance for this research.	
Researcher's signature:	Megan Smith
Date:	03/12/2020
<p>In addition, for <b>students</b> (undergraduates, masters, postgraduate, research):</p> <p>The student has the skills to carry out the proposed research. I undertake to monitor the student's adherence to the relevant research guidelines and codes of practice.</p>	
Supervisor's signature:	
Date:	11-12-20

**Please submit this form along with Form 1 to your Faculty Head of RKE or nominee (staff /PGR) or your supervisor (taught postgraduate students).**

*Please remember to append any forms or documents that may be relevant to your application (e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire(s) etc.). Your form cannot be considered unless it is submitted with the required supporting documentation. Omitting to do so will delay the ethics review process.*

## Appendix 2 – Discussion guide and key themes

This is the framework of planned questions and the purpose of these questions being asked, as well as the key themes derived from each question. As it is a focus group, this will not be a rigid structure as other topics may emerge as part of stimulating discussion, leading to more valuable insights.

Question	Purpose	Key themes
Q1. How would you describe your consumption habits today? Do you want to change them – why/why not?	The first two questions ease into the topic without risk of overthinking. The aims of these questions are to gain understanding of how individuals consume and what they understand about sustainability.	COVID-19 impact – buying more, materialistic. Pandemic means it is hard to buy things, particularly sustainable products. All mentioned sense of chaotic buying behaviour during lockdown (increase in spend). Emotions – to make them feel good. One was specific on buying fast fashion.
Q2. Terms such as ‘sustainability’ and ‘ethical consumption’ – do you think these are easy to understand? What do these terms mean to you?		Not easy to understand. Mixed messages from brands who take part in Black Friday. Sustainability as a “scam”. Hard to change ways when it can be difficult to understand. Hard to know if you are being truly sustainable all the time. Not just about buying it, but about before and after.
Q3. What will make you buy sustainable products/alternatives?	These three questions focus on discussing what aspects are important in regard to sustainability and what would affect individuals’ purchase decision making.	Initiative from the government to encourage sustainability. Longevity makes it a more worthwhile purchase. Knowing you are helping the environment is an influence. To show awareness. Individual sustainable businesses make item more unique which is an attractive aspect – more special. Social pressure to do this.
Q4. What will deter you from buying sustainable products?		Price as a huge factor mentioned by all – cheaper alternative is preferred even if it is less sustainable. One mentioned quality of product

		– more of an investment that is more durable than food products.
Q5. What type of sustainable products are most important to you?		Durable products (feminine products, everyday products). Reusable tote bags and bottles as everyday objects. More likely to be sustainable with everyday objects. Easy switches become part of daily routine.
Q6. Is there anything in particular that inspires you to make eco-friendly choices? What makes you engage with sustainable choices?	This question is more focused and specific to help generate insights about how consumers perceive sustainability.	Trends online and more people online doing it as an influence. Celebrities. Adverts. Word of mouth (e.g., Chilly’s bottle) introducing new brands to others.
Q7. Have you made an ethical purchase in the past year?	General question to get participants to think about their personal contribution to sustainable consumption and what they consider to be sustainable – focus on how they act rather than their thoughts about sustainability	One said they had not as buying sustainably does not come to mind. 3 mentioned pandemic and face masks – buying reusable ones. But someone bought them from ASOS which is not a sustainable brand. Small businesses. Outlet store. Etsy. Independent brands for personalised gifts.
Q8. If you learned that a brand/company you usually buy from was not ethically responsible, how likely would you be to stop engaging with this brand and why? To what extent?	This question aims to tease out participants’ values, directed at the morals side of the tension of morals versus aesthetics.	Depends on brand and how easy the switches are. Clothes are harder switches as the price plays a role. Depends on range of other options. Supermarket switches are easier than fashion brands. Ease. Convenience and time when searching for a product.
Q9. Could you name an ethically responsible brand? Or how many could you name?	This is to get participants to think about their personal contribution to sustainable consumption and what they consider to be sustainable or responsible brand.	Not many. Most could only name a two or three. Maybe do not realise some brands are actually ethical. Focus on cruelty free and use of plastic.
Q10. When you are looking to make a purchase, do you research sustainable alternatives beforehand? Why/why not?	This is to investigate the extent to which individuals are willing to put effort and time into finding a sustainable product as a	One said no – sustainability is a bonus. Usually search for the product itself that is needed. Cruelty free aspect, but not sustainable

	potential alternative, or whether this was not a concern. Describing the buying process.	packaging. Not for non-food items – cheaper option or suitability of product is more important. Depends what it is, not usually at front of mind.
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## Appendix 3 – Key themes

Questions that were not in discussion guide but were asked during the discussion.

Question	Key themes derived
Q11. Thinking about sustainability as a broad term, how important is it to you?	One said it is important to them, but their behaviour may not always reflect that. One said they do not think about it that much, does not go out of their way to be sustainable. Recycling mentioned twice. Effort. One tries to be as sustainable as they can. It can be overwhelming
Q12. Drawing back to the first question asked, what would make you want to change your consumption habits? Or do you think you do not need to change them?	Choice as a factor in motivation to be sustainable – most agreed and referred to government intervention and responsibility which would make people more likely to change. Cost as a factor. Also, one participant made reference to seeing sustainable products on Instagram that made them want to buy them
Q13. Do you think consumers should be responsible for making sustainable purchases? Or whether brands and companies should take responsibility?	Most said brand to take responsibility in producing sustainable products. One said it is also down to individual choice and willingness to want to change. Cannot always be put on individuals because it is a privilege to be able to shop sustainably
Q14. Thinking about sustainable products you may own or have seen online, what does that product mean to you? What does it say about someone or the product itself?	The way it looks, perception to others (indication to sense of aesthetics) want to be seen as doing good to others. Make use of current items already owned, but the purchased sustainable product is the indicator of sustainability. Willpower.
Q15. Do you think that being sustainable is a part of you, or is it something that you can just take part in when you like? Or is it something you can completely take on?	One said that it is possible to take part when you like, but people have “engulfed the sustainable vegan lifestyle” but this is hard to do when money is an object and no choice to buy non sustainable things which are cheaper. Another said you can jump in and out of it when you want to. But another said it becomes part of day-to-day life, from starting small. One mentioned the culture of judging, and not doing it for the right reasons (to look good to online audience). This led to this sense of performative – excessive online media sharing questions whether behaviour is genuine. But one argued that you can share online morally to show awareness which is good. There is an assumption that people who are genuine would not share online as “it’s within them”

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## Appendix 4 – Personal consumption log

### Reflective Consumption log – WHY / INFLUENCES –

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**Date and time:** Sunday 4/10/2020 @ 10pm

**Price:** £56.00

**Name of business:** eBay purchase (seller: alfpro2013)

**Location:** From St Just, Cornwall.

**Item purchased:** Lululemon gym leggings (American brand)

**Bought for:** Myself. I bid for them and I won. They are second-hand, so got them for cheaper than what they are sold for from lululemon direct. They retail at £88.00, but the high price point reflects the quality. I like to buy things pre-loved and second-hand as long as they are in decent condition as it means I save money and am playing my part in helping the environment from the impact of textile production.

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**Date and time:** 27/10/2020 @ 22:08

**Price:** £7.95

**Name of business:** Estrid

**Item purchased:** razor subscription

**Bought for:** Myself. It is a subscription service for razors. The company is vegan and cruelty-free, as well as their products being made and shipped with less plastic. I found the brand through an online social media influencer I follow on Instagram who spoke highly of the product and the brand. At the time, I did need a new razor, but seeing an influencer I trust positively talk about this brand definitely influenced me to buy one from Estrid, rather than from my usual brand (as well as it being sustainably made, unlike my usual).

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**Date and time:** 21/11/2020 @ 12:02

**Price:** £75.00 + £4.99 delivery

**Name of business:** TALA

**Item purchased:** Borg jacket

**Bought for:** Myself. Bought from a sustainable fashion brand, higher price point for eco-friendly fashion. I liked the jacket itself, and the sustainability aspect is a bonus. The brand is generating a lot of conversation on Instagram, and I followed their account because I like their clothes and the brand's values.